

NEOLIBERALISM AND URBAN EDUCATION: EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS  
OF COMPETITION ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE AND CHARTER SCHOOLS  
IN AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Neoliberalism and Urban Education: Exploring Perceptions of Competition

About School Choice and Charter Schools in an Urban School District

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School choice and charter schools have been presented as ways to induce competition in public school systems to improve student outcomes in underperforming urban school districts. This approach continues a trend in Western Europe and the United States to make public institutions operate more like the private sector and is indicative of Neoliberalism and New Public Management. The rationale relies on the theory that public sector actors are motivated by self-interested economic incentives. An alternative argument uses a public service perspective, that public employees are motivated by noneconomic factors. For competition to have an effect on student outcomes, charter schools have to be perceived as a threat to local school districts and district responses must be predicated on economic incentives.

This study was conducted in two stages using an exploratory mixed-methods approach. To develop an alternative discourse from the state's policies, a discursive analysis was conducted on archival documents that established school choice, charters schools, and education reform in New Jersey. Interpretation of the documents was used to design a questionnaire to measure perceptions of charter schools and education reform in New Jersey among urban school district personnel in one urban district in New Jersey.

The interpretation of the documents established an alternative discourse of the public education reform that showed a bias toward urban and poor school districts. Survey findings showed a high level of opposition to neoliberal and neoconservative education reform initiatives. Respondents agreed that public education reform causes more harm than good in the district.

This perspective that neoliberal public education reform adversely affects urban school districts focuses on policies to produce better student outcomes. Reform initiatives did not factor in societal conditions that affect student learning. Neoliberal and neoconservative solutions for correcting underperforming school districts are based on institutional changes such as school governance, teacher competency, and organizational management. Multiple research studies have shown that social conditions based on race, poverty, and employment have a significant impact on students' ability to learn. This study shows that, despite state preferences for neoliberal education reform, public school personnel in this urban district overwhelmingly disagreed with these reforms.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Katrina Davis,  
and to Ms. Emma Williams and Dr. Thelma Napoleon-Smith,  
my first- and fifth-grade teachers.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

There has been a proliferation of charter schools in the United States since Minnesota established the first charter program in 1990. This proliferation has made charter schools the central mechanism of public education reform. According the Center for Education Reform (2015), 43 states and the District of Columbia have charter programs. Central in the implementation of charter schools are detachment from the local school authority and the ability to compete for students and public funds.

One of the purposes of charter schools is to create a competitive education market. In theory, the competition between public and charter schools serves as a catalyst to increase public school performance. Not only do charter schools provide better education opportunities; they also increase performance by public schools. Critics of school choice and competition argue that the ways in which competition will improve student outcomes have yet to be clearly defined. For competition to cause an effective change in public school performance depends on perceived threats of charter schools and how public school administrators respond to the threats.

As states continue to expand their charter school programs, shifting education dollars away from traditional public schools, it is important to qualify competition. What does it mean for schools to compete for students? Do charter schools have the capacity to compete significantly for students? What are the political and/or regulatory barriers affecting charters schools' ability to compete? The answers to these questions will affect school administrators' perceptions of competition and, ultimately, their response to competition. This study examines the perception of school choice and charter schools in an urban school district and its effect on school administrators' behavior.



The discourse of education reform and school choice in the United States and internationally is part of the larger discourse of new public management (NPM; Lauen, 2008). NPM theory has its origins in public choice theory and the work done by Tiebout (1956) advocating that citizens shop for the best services provided by government, which he defined as “voting with their feet” (Engel, 2000; Hoxby, 2002; Tiebout, 1956). Herbert Kaufman (1956) argued that what U.S. citizens want from government constantly shifts among three political core values: representativeness, neutral competency, and executive leadership. These shifts occur because concepts of governance change as citizens become dissatisfied with government, demand more or less of government, or grow critical of how government provides goods and services (Kaufman, 1956). Kaufman argued that no single political or ideological view is capable of delivering all demands that citizens put on a representative democracy. Within this scrutiny, public education is a microcosm of government and governance (Apple, 2007). Public choice theory gives preference to consumers’ (citizens’) choices and advocates that government give deference to those choices. Friedman (1955) argued that government, by its very nature, is inefficient. Ideas of government and governance are laden with values, beliefs, and antecedents—what Bourdieu (1977) called *habitus*—and are at the core of the education reform debate.

Central in the discourse of education reform are concepts of democracy, equity, and equality—in essence, how government resources are distributed. This perspective shifts the discourse of education reform to conflicts over resources: who gets what, when, and where (Lasswell, 1950).

Public education reform over the past 3 decades has been led by neoconservatism and neoliberalism. The neoconservative education agenda asserts a return to a traditional education agenda, arguing that public education should return to its core mission of educating instead of trying to fix social problems (Semel, 1999). Neoconservative aspects of the education reform movement are articulated in a national curriculum, teacher competency, and greater regulatory control. These ideas were prominent in the Reagan administration and continue to some aspects in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RT3), programs that asserted more federal control over public education.

The aftermath of the Vietnam War gave rise to a conservative agenda that served as the backlash to the progressive movement, including social changes and public education (Semel, 1999). Semel (1999) reported that conservative educational critics concluded that the liberal educational reforms of the 1960s and 1970s had eroded school authority, educational standards, and curriculum.

The neoconservative approach to government gives deference to meritocracy and technocracy. Within the educational agenda, the focus is on traditional curriculum and professionalism. A bulwark moment in the neoconservative education movement came with the release of the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) report. The report offered a critique of U.S. public education, putting public education on the national agenda, and provided a platform for the rollback of progressive-era educational tenets (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The report declared that U.S. public education was in crisis. Economist Anthony Downs (1972) noted that the label *crisis* does not bring any real change to solving the issue but brings

the issue to public attention and “reflects the operation of a systematic cycle of heightening public interest” (p. 39)

The neoliberal education agenda focuses on a smaller governmental role in public education. Neoliberal education ideas are manifested in school vouchers and charter schools. For the greater part of the past 2 decades, neoliberal principles have dominated the reform debate to the exclusiveness of competition and choice. The debate now centers on the level of competition and government’s role as a funder (not a supplier) of public education. Neoliberals advocate a market-style public education system. The rationale is that policy makers are self-serving and that decisions are made for self-interest and not in the interest of the public. This self-interest inherently causes inefficiency in the system. The market, determined by consumer choice, takes away the policy maker’s ability to shape public policy to his or her self-interest. Neoliberal school choice policy argues that the market is not only the best way to provide public education but also the best way to improve public school performance. Framing public education as a market relies on competition to induce better student performance, leading to more equity for low-income students (Henig, Holyoke, Lacireno-Paquet, & Moser, 2003; C. Lubienski, 2003a).

Important in the neoliberal education agenda is the position of parents who are dissatisfied with public education, especially in urban school districts, and who are needed as consumers in a public education market. Parental support for charter schools is more likely to be found in underperforming urban districts. These districts have experienced continued underperformance and an educational achievement gap that has not been significantly reduced, even after implementation of numerous education reform

policies and programs. For many of these parents, charter schools represent an opportunity to escape chronic underperforming schools in underperforming districts. Underperforming urban school districts and parents are important to the charter school reform ideology.

Because charter schools represent a drastic departure from the traditional provision of public education, underperforming urban districts are held up as an example of government failure that warrants such a drastic change. Underperforming districts strengthen the argument for charter schools. Parents in these districts serve two purposes. First, they provide legitimacy to the charter school ideology. Charter schools are not just seen as a neoliberal education policy but are supported by minority parents in liberal leaning areas. Second, parents are the targeted population for charter school programs. It is the parent who will decide to send the child to a charter school; in other words, parents make competition possible. The success of charter schools as a catalyst to increase public school performance depends on convincing enough parents in urban districts to enroll their children in charter schools. Suburban and/or affluent districts would not have the same effect because affluent districts tend not to be underperforming, and a part of the narrative is the ineffectiveness of government.

Competency, competition, and student achievement have merged into a singular wedge to demand changes in public education and the impetus for a coalition of neoliberals, neoconservatives, and minority parents. Objectively, the education reform advocated by proponents of school choice seeks to change the governance of public education, to force organizational change and decentralization (Fuller, 2000a; C. Lubienski, 2006b; Wells, 1993; Wohlstetter, Malloy, Chau, & Polhemus, 2003).

The debate over public education considers two questions: first, how to increase student performance, and second, the best way to provide public education. The first question has been difficult to answer, which has energized debate about the second question. Chronic underachieving school districts have provided fodder for the argument of the inefficiencies of government as an education provider. These underachieving districts are usually located in urban centers where there are high concentrations of poor people. The discourse concerning student achievement is really a discourse about government as an education provider. School choice advocates argue that what is inherently wrong with public education is its incentive structure, that public education cannot fix itself until it is properly incentivized to do so, and that the only way that can happen is through competition (C. Lubienski, 2006b; Ravitch, 2010). Once public schools have to compete for students, they will make corrective changes to increase student performance.

This study was designed to understand and measure perceptions of competition in an urban public school district. The research focused on an urban school district in New Jersey to test an aspect of NPM and public choice theories: that the presence of competing education providers will trigger competition between charter and public schools. The target school district was selected because the district contained a sufficient number of charter school placements, which experts argue is needed for competition to take place (Hoxby, 2003).

New Jersey's school choice policy heavily favors charter schools and is mainly focused on underperforming urban school districts, if not in the letter of the law, then in the spirit and in its implementation. This study considers the school choice discourse in

urban school districts and the effects of perceived competition. This study is not an attempt to establish a causal relationship between school choice and school performance. The study considers perceived competition and public school policy and asks whether choice affects the behavior of public schools to compete for students.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The rest of Chapter 1 presents a discussion of the importance and significance of this study, its research statement, research questions, and the theoretical concept that guided the research. In Chapter 2 the relevant literature is reviewed and Chapter 3 discusses the methodology use to conduct the study. Chapter 4 discusses neoconservative and neoliberal educational policies. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the relevant issues of New Jersey education reform initiatives. In Chapter 6, the findings and interpretation of the qualitative data and the survey findings are discussed. In Chapter 7, quantitative data are presented and discussed. The conclusion of the study is presented in Chapter 8.

### **Importance of the Study**

There is insufficient research on the perception of competition. Studies that have been completed considered perceived competition through proximity (Agasisti & Murtinu, 2012; Kasman & Loeb, 2013; Levačić, 2004). Competition is assumed if a charter school is placed in close proximity to a public school. Also, each of these studies measured perceived competition from the perspective of the headmaster or principal. Because the current study was designed to understand the perceptions held by public school administrators and faculty, it was assumed that completion does not begin until charter schools are perceived as a threat to public schools. The central theory to explain

why charter schools have a positive effect on public schools is based on the idea that competition increases performance. Since competition has been argued as the means to induce education reform and student improvement, it behooves policy makers and education reformers to understand the perceived competition and competition behaviors in the public school system. Beyond the rhetoric and arguments for and against school choice and competition, competition has been offered as the panacea for troubled urban school districts with no “Plan B.” As Milner and Williams (2008) asserted, it is important that we get it right.

The nature, outcomes, and implications of educational policy and reform debates are central to the education of students in public school classrooms across the nation. The ways in which policies are designed: the motives and intentions behind policies; the students, teachers, schools, and districts for whom the policies are written; and the outcomes of policies may have the potential to enable or repress learning experiences and opportunities for students in P-12 classrooms and, consequently, in their adult lives. (p. 33)

### **Research Statement**

New Jersey, like many states, has implemented a school choice program. As New Jersey moves forward in expanding school choice, how do public school districts respond to the presence of charter schools? Supporters argue that school choice will trigger competition in local school districts and that competition will increase performance. How this will be accomplished has yet to be fully articulated (C. Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009). It is even less clear at what level of competition (if market-based theory of competition is correct) improvement will happen. In other words, how does one know that competition is taking place and that it is having the intended effect? Currently, there is no recognized measure of competition. Some researchers have used the Herfindahl Index (Himmler, 2009) to approximate competition. The Herfindahl Index assumes that

competition is taking place if a significant number of students attend an alternative school that is in close proximity to the public school. Hoxby (2003) contended that competition is effective at the 6% level: When 6% of a school district's student population opts to attend charter schools, there is a positive effect on student performance in the school district. The target district in this study has a segment of its student population who attend a charter school equal to or exceeding Hoxby's required level. Himmeler's study considered private schools, but there are many reasons why competition will not reach levels of significance, cost being chief among them.

For this study, the level of competition was defined as the amount of pressure that school districts *perceive* to be a threat to the school district exerted by charter schools. The argument is that competition leads to innovation and innovation leads to student improvement. Competition is therefore the crucial element to the school choice debate. The success of competition as a catalyst for education reform and student improvement is dependent on parents' ability to select the right school for their children. In order to make the right choice, parents need access to school information, which may not be available to many parents in underperforming districts (Rosenbloom, 2010). If charter schools' ability to attract students is affected by parental access to information, this may affect competition in charter districts; if competition is suppressed by a lack of parental information, the effect of competition as claimed by supporters may not materialize. In New Jersey, 53% of the charter schools are located in four low-performing urban school districts.

As there is no agreement on the definition of competition, there is even less agreement regarding its effect. National research studies have shown both negative and



positive effects of school choice and charter schools (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005; Center for Education Research Outcomes [CREDO], 2009; C. Lubienski, Weitzel, & Lubienski, 2009; S. T. Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006). Proponents and opponents of school choice have emphasized research that supports their ideological position while negating other research studies. There is no agreed research that shows a relationship between school choice and student achievement.

The discourse of school choice is laced with subjective values and beliefs in the market. Market metaphors are used to simplify the rationalization of school choice. The argument on the effects of competition is based on true markets. True markets occur naturally with minimal government involvement. The establishment of a public education market does not meet the standard of a true market and may not yield the same effects of competition. An overarching question of market-based education is, how will market actors behave in nonmarket environments? Can public education be summed up as a transaction between sellers and buyers, as is in true markets?

Competition from charter schools may not be the only perceived threat to urban school districts in New Jersey. Underperforming schools and districts are under great pressure to increase student achievement or face sanctions that could include school closure and/or district takeover by the state. NCLB and RT3 are supportive of this type of action. Schools are measured by student performance on high-stakes statewide tests and repeated underperformance can trigger sanctions. Sanctions may prove to be more of an incentive than competition. The New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) evaluates school districts in five categories: instruction and program, personnel, fiscal management, operations, and governance. According to the

New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC), failing to meet 80% of the objectives in any category may trigger state action (New Jersey Office of Administrative Law, 2015, 6A:30). Currently, the target district in this study is under some degree of state oversight.

### **Research Questions**

The research was designed to address two research questions:

RQ1. How does the state of New Jersey view school choice, especially charter schools?

RQ2. How do public school personnel's perceptions of school choice and charter schools affect acceptance of charter schools in public school districts?

### **Research Scope**

To understand the perception of school choice and charter schools in local public school districts, this study was conducted using a modified exploratory mixed-methods approach. Data were collected via document analysis and survey questionnaire. The baseline of the research was established by conducting an analysis of state documents in the establishment of school choice and charter schools. The analysis of the state documents was used to develop the survey questionnaire. The sequence of collecting data was qualitative data collection and analysis followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. The objectives of the survey questionnaire were to identify perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of public school personnel toward charter schools and to test the findings against interpretation of the documents.

### **Theoretical Concepts**

In this study of school choice and competition in urban school systems, three theoretical frameworks were used to understand the phenomenon: NPM, discourse

theory, and advocacy coalition framework. It is believed that these perspectives offer insight from different vantage points. NPM theory offers an analysis to understand the theoretical framework in support of school choice, discourse theory offers an understanding of the conflict between groups beyond the scope of rhetoric, and advocacy coalition framework offers a working model of school choice policies.

### **New Public Management**

The primary premise of this study is based on NPM theory and its application to public education reform. The implementation of school choice and charter schools emphasizes smaller government, competition, and measurements, as advocated by NPM principles. The neoliberal theory stresses applying business approaches to government organization and services. NPM orientations vary (Walker, Brewer, Boyne, & Avellaneda, 2011), but those that are important to the application and study of school choice and charter schools are choice orientation, market orientation, and organization orientation. The three orientations are interconnected in their application and behavior in that they establish alternative providers of government services. Each of these orientations is prevalent in school choice and charter school discourse that seeks to separate schools from the larger system, create an education market, and establish new school governance. According to Maxcy (2009), the objective of application of NPM in public education is to serve an economic need instead of educating.

NPM argues that bureaucracies have become too large and unmanageable, ineffective and inefficient, and unresponsive and unaccountable. NPM calls for a divestment of deliberative bureaucracy, which it sees as inefficient. It is argued that application of NPM principles will increase government efficiency, hold managers

accountable, and deliver effective services that citizens want and need (Van de Walle, 2010).

The NPM movement was a shift from Keynesian theory that sought to create more “egalitarian” economic policies (Box, Marshall, Reed, & Reed, 2001). Keynesian theory expanded the bureaucratic government as the provider of social service as citizens demanded a more direct government role in the economy (Alonso, Clifton, & Díaz-Fuentes, 2015; Levy, 2010). NPM rose to prominence in Europe and the United States in the 1980s and 1990s (Hood & Peters, 2004) as local and state governments faced fiscal crises and citizens grew dissatisfied with government. It was argued that accountability and fiscal management, which include public-private partnership, would decrease the cost of government (Warner & Hefetz, 2008). Actually, the objectives of NPM are to decentralize government, provide government services through competitive contracts, and establish performance measures (Hood, 1991).

**Choice orientation.** NPM has its origins in public choice theory (Barberis, 1998). Public choice theory was introduced into the public sector lexicon in the mid-20th century (Buchanan, 1984); it was developed to provide insight to political decision making (Mueller, 1984), policy recommendations (Quiggin, 1987), and a new perception of public administration (Ostrom & Ostrom, 1971). The theory centered on political decision making. The premise of political decision making is that all political actors are utility maximizers; that is to say, political decision making is based on the theory that public officials act in their own self-interest, which creates inefficiency in government. This self-interest in government is the same self-interest that is seen in the market (Dearlove, 1989). From the vantage point of political maximizer, political failure is

caused by self-interested political actors. Consumer choice takes the decision making away from the self-interest of bureaucrats. Consumer choice organizes government agencies and services by citizen preference.

The choice orientation is used to rationalize charter schools. A part of the rationalization is to articulate the failure of public schools. Van de Waller argued that, for NPM policies to take hold, there must first be mistrust in government. It is a way to delegitimize government and its policies (Van de Walle, 2010). Van de Walle contended that the consistent theme of government failure has eroded citizen confidence in government to solve big problems, even when empirical evidence states otherwise. Critics have argued that NPM is the antithesis of bureaucracy and seeks to decentralize public service (Levy, 2010) and continue the devolution of state responsibility by decreasing the size of government (Alonso et al., 2015).

**Market orientation.** For government to achieve the level of efficiency of a modern global society, it must be organized through a competitive market environment. Market orientation argues that competition increases performance. NPM contends that the supply of public goods can be best organized by consumer choice. For this to take place, multiple suppliers must enter the nonmarket sector. NPM maintains that the market is best served through consumer choice to provide efficient delivery of goods and services. Walker et al. (2011) contended that NPM is focused mainly on market orientation.

Market orientation argues the need for competition. In its application, education reform centers on allowing more providers of education to enter an “education market” beyond and separated from local school authority. The current reform is based on the

idea that competition will lead to innovation to improve public schools. This approach was offered by Friedman (1955), who argued that public education should be organized through a voucher program. The rejection of Friedman's approach created space for charter schools. Charter schools were championed to create an education market where parents could choose among multiple suppliers (Belfield & Levin, 2002). The market orientation holds the manager accountable for performance. This fits the theme that public officials are unresponsive and unaccountable. Market theory enforces (competition and consumer choice) accountability and responsiveness through consumers' preferences.

**Organization orientation.** Organization orientation decentralizes government into small units (Walker et al., 2011). The argument that bureaucracies have become too large to manage effectively has led to the idea of smaller and decentralized government. An aspect of charter schools is that they are decentralized from the larger public school system and operate as stand-alone schools. It has been argued that this approach decreases the size of government. According to Alonso et al. (2015), an aspect of NPM is the devolution of state responsibilities. NPM organizational style is less centralized, with less bureaucracy and red tape, and is more adaptive to consumers' needs and preferences. This aspect has been applied to charter schools. They are smaller, less bureaucratic, and more adaptive to the various learning needs of students.

### **Discourse Theory**

Discourse analysis is an important aspect of this research study; it helps to dissect the arguments for and against school choice and charter schools. The arguments have more to do with values, beliefs, and conflict than with empirical evaluation. Discourse

theory calls for an analysis of language, symbols, and actions that form the impetus of the dialogue. Bell (2011) argued that discourse analysis does not aptly capture the function being carried out and suggested that discourse interpretation better articulates the interaction between the analyst and the discourse. Fischer (2003) noted that discourse theory assumes “that all action, object, and practices are socially meaningful” (p. 73). In other words, discourse is a social construct. Researcher van Dijk (2011) asserted that the understanding of language and text is rooted in what he described as *episodic memory*. That is to say, understanding is framed through access to past experiences shaped by position, ideology, antecedents, symbols, idioms, and other factors that construct knowledge and reality. He argued that context is subjectively defined as centering on a shared social knowledge (van Dijk, 2011).

According to Fischer (2003), Howarth described discourse as a historical system of meaning. Relevant to this study is critical discourse theory espoused by both Foucault (2010) and Fairclough (1992). Critical discourse analysis sees discourse as a form of power and control. Foucault argued that discourse is not only power but also the instrument of power. Within the critical approach, the analysis focuses on ideology and its relationship to shared beliefs (van Dijk, 2011). For an analysis of school choice discourse, one must consider the ideology (free market) and its associative beliefs and how the narrative is constructed around social, political, and cultural meaning (Hastings, 1998).

Foucault (2010) maintained that discourse should be the base unit of analysis and its connection to the meaning of words, practices, symbols, and other uses of commutative interaction that gives truth to situations. Truth is centered on who controls

interpretation of the problem (Fischer, 2003). Author van Dijk (2011) argued that context or situation allows for “production and comprehension of discourse” (p. 616). Fairclough (1992) argued that discourse is rooted in ideology.

Gee (2005) provided a working model of discourse analysis and interpretation. Using the same nuances of situation and meaning of language, Gee argued that any analysis of discourse requires tools of language and communication (Gee, 2005). In the school choice discourse that is predominately focused on urban education in majority minority districts or schools, the evaluative discourse between advantaged and disadvantaged communities is segmented with different social cues (James et al., 2010). Fischer (2003) argued that the key to understanding policy through a discursive approach is to take into consideration the “viewpoint and position” of the actor and “the institutions and processes” use to circulate and control the message (p. 70). Using Foucault’s approach, the purpose of discourse analysis is to establish a difference in the perspectives of the policy makers and the perspectives of those whom the policy is most likely to affect. Within this perspective, it is a battle not only over resources but also over knowledge and narrative.

### **Advocacy Coalition Framework**

Olsson (2009) argued that the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) is a departure from the traditional understanding of policy process. He noted that analyzing the policy process is a “social construct of meaning” and stressed the importance of paying attention to “language and deliberation” of policy shifts (p. 170). ACF, developed by Sabatier and later expanded by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith in the late 1980s, considers public policy through the lens of advocacy coalitions and provides a foundation for policy process



analysis (Fenger & Klok, 2001; Olsson, 2009; Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009). It is a useful analytical tool to understand school choice policies. ACF is counterintuitive to the principles of NPM in that it promotes collective action and is value laden and satisficing, whereas NPM advocates utility maximization and rationality, absent of ethical or moral concerns. ACF serves as an important analytical tool in the school choice debate because of the diverse actors from various political leanings, beliefs, and value groups who have coalesced around particular school choice policies.

Sabatier argued that ACF is useful for understand policy change. Sabatier stated that ACF is organized around three premises of public policy: (a) change happens over time (a decade or more), (b) change should be viewed through policies subsystems, and (c) policy should be viewed as belief systems (Sabatier, 1988). Sabatier and ACF theorists contend that policy is static and that incremental change happens over time. The stability of policy is fermented within advocacy coalitions. Advocacy coalitions are made up of persons who share a particular core value within a policy.

The first premise infers that public policy should be viewed over a long period of time. The rationale for studying policy over a span of a decade or more is derived from earlier policy research by Weiss, who argued that studying policy through short-term decision making tends to undervalue particular policy decisions in the long term (Sabatier, 1988). The policy subsystem is the main premise of advocacy coalition theory. This premise argues that public policy is controlled not by one government institution but by a subsystem of actors within multiple public and private organizations. Shared value is the glue that holds the coalition of diverse stakeholders together in a shared policy belief (Olsson, 2009). The coalition's goal is to translate their belief into public policy.

The relevancy of ACF is especially useful in the rationalization of policy and core beliefs that may be inconsistent with empirical evidence. Sabatier supposed that the actions of actors on a policy issue can be aggregated into advocacy coalitions and held together through shared core beliefs. Although Sabatier stated that dynamic change in a policy issue is usually caused by external events, Mintrom and Vergari (1996) noted that Sabatier did not offer an explanation of how ACF incorporates dynamic change. They argued that ACF does not completely explain dynamic policy change. They contended that the use of the policy entrepreneur model coupled with ACF incorporates static and dynamic change (Mintrom & Vergari, 1996). For this study, the policy entrepreneur is considered an actor within ACF.

Fenger and Klok (2001) argued that Sabatier failed to account for how actors overcome the problem of collective action. They contended that a cost-benefits analysis would account for actors' behavior in a coalition. Olson, in *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (1971), asserted that the purpose of all groups is to advance the interests of their members. Sabatier and other ACF theorists would argue against rationality but contend that actors satisfice to advance their goals.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are limited studies focused on perceived competition in public school districts (Agasisti & Murtinu, 2012; Kasman & Loeb, 2013; Levačić, 2004). The use of perception as a variable in quasi-experimental designs by Levačić (2004) and Agasisti and Murtinu (2012) lacks an in-depth analysis of social externalities that influence the provision of schooling and student outcomes that are usually associated with public education in urban communities. That is to say, their findings may not be applicable to the public-charter school dichotomy in the United States. Levačić's (2004) study of English schools found a relationship between perceptions and test scores. The findings noted that perceptions of competition (that competition is taking place) resulted in higher scores on standardized tests. Agasisti and Murtinu's (2012) study of Italian schools found that competition had a positive effect on test scores. In both studies, perception was based on the headmasters' perceptions and a positive effect was based on test scores. That is to say, if the headmaster perceived a threat from competing educational providers and test scores improved, that increase in student outcomes was attributed to competition.

Education and schooling are intertwined with cultural, social, and political factors that affect education that cannot be fully explained by quantitative measures such as test scores and funding levels without qualitative analysis. Kasman and Loeb (2013) found that principals' perceptions of competition were not related to proximity but how well the other schools did on standardized test and whether their students were transferring to other schools. The studies conducted by Levačić and Agasisti and Murtinu were done in more homogeneous societies without levels of historical racial segregation in their public school systems. Race and social status have had persistent effects on student outcomes

(Lipman, 2011; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). The Kasman and Loeb study of Milwaukee public school principals measured perceived competition from the school perspective; this study measured perception of competition from the district level.

The literature on school choice centers on two essential themes: (a) the ideology of markets versus government, and (b) the empirical evidence supporting charter school effectiveness.

### **Markets and Government**

The ideology of NPM is central to understanding school choice movement. In theory, choice represents freedom and liberty, the curtailing of government in individuals' lives. From the neoliberal perspective, the exercise of government power infringes on the rights of the individual. The power of government is measured in its ability to tax and to regulate. Neoliberal discourse defines freedom in terms of economic freedom. The market is viewed as a superior means of providing goods and services that have been traditionally provided by government (West & Ylonen, 2010). NPM emphasizes the operation of government from a private business perspective (Alonso et al., 2015; Box et al., 2001; Levy, 2010). School choice is an outgrowth of this business conceptualization of government and challenges long-held beliefs about public education. School choice and charter schools fundamentally challenge public education as a public good.

The debate regarding how to deliver public education has continued since the emergence of the progressive education movement. Prior to this period, schools were hybrids of public and private funding, available mainly to the children of elites (Bode, 1927). Horace Mann and John Dewey, leaders in the progressive movement, saw schools

as the primary institution of democratization. They argued that education is a necessary tool for full participation in a democratic society (Engel, 2000). From this philosophy rose the concept of education as a public good that should be provided by the government (Henig, 1994; C. Lubienski, 2003b).

Chubb and Moe (1990) contended that the problem with public education resides solely in the democratic control (bureaucracy) of the schools. Alternatively, May (2006) asserted that the premise of equating school choice to competition is false because all providers are not competing on a “level playing field.” The existence of charter schools is due to a high level of political support from governors and state chief education officers, many of whom are antagonistic to public schools (Cookson, 1994; C. Lubienski, 2001).

The consistent refrain supporting school choice is the idea that government is inefficient (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1955) and that democracy itself is inefficient. Inefficiencies are argued to exist because government agencies serve the self-interest of political officials (Moe, 1989) and regulations stemming from these agencies reflect this self-interest (Buchanan, 1984). Buchanan (1984) and Moe (1989) claimed that democratic principles do nothing more than to assert more bureaucratic control over individuals’ lives. Competition alleviates the need for bureaucracy because competition forces producers to behave in a manner that curtails self-interest (C. Lubienski, 2005a). This is achievable because competition sorts out citizen preferences (Tiebout, 1956). Friedman (1955) argued that by giving parents freedom, choice is a more democratic way of providing public education by not forcing parents to send their child to a particular school. This perspective fits Kaufman’s theory of representativeness

Milton Friedman first proposed separating public education from government control in the 1950s. Friedman (1955) initially asserted that public education should be provided through a voucher system and that, outside of funding, the government should have no involvement in schools. Friedman advocated equal funding for each child, regardless of income. Parents who could afford to do so could use a voucher to purchase a more expensive education. According to Friedman, a consumer preference approach to schooling was a more equitable and efficient way to provide public education.

Chubb and Moe (1990) reignited Friedman's voucher movement with their book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, in which they argued that government cannot provide efficient service because of the self-interest of political officials and contended that public education cannot be fixed until it is disconnected from government. Chubb and Moe's approach was a direct challenge to the education reform initiative that had begun in response to *A Nation at Risk*. Looking retrospectively, *A Nation at Risk* provided a policy window for neoconservatives to introduce education reform by tightening standards and an attempt to nationalize public education curriculum. The failure to reach consensus on a standardized curriculum created another policy window for neoliberals (Ravitch, 2010).

Chubb and Moe (1990) maintained that these initiatives failed to produce the desired results and often relied on high-stakes testing to measure school success. Ironically, according to Ravitch (2010), the failure to achieve a national curriculum increased reliance on testing. Chubb and Moe (1990) argued that schooling is too complex to be captured by testing alone and posited that, although the intentions of *A Nation at Risk* were good, good intentions alone will not solve the public education

problem. They argued that true reform will not occur because too many constituencies are a part of the reform process. These constituencies consist of teachers' unions, principals' associations, district superintendents, test producers, and other officials acting in their own self-interest. Chubb and Moe, like Friedman before them, called for total separation of public schools from government and for vouchers to be available to all parents, regardless of income.

The reluctance to turn over public education to the private market through a voucher system gave rise to the charter school movement. The charter movement has been criticized as a way of softening public perception of a market-based public education system. Supporters suggest that charter schools will allow the public to rethink how public education is provided and serve as an incremental step to a market-based system. In order to shift public education from democratic control to a market-based system, the definition of public schools had to be blurred (C. Lubienski, 2001). Charter school advocates wanted to redefine public education as any education supported by public funds. This expanded definition of public education is broad enough to include private (nonsecular and religious) schools and voucher programs, as well as charter schools. To change the definition of public education, metaphors, symbols, and images were used to establish a discourse in support of market-based schooling. Cookson (1994) implied that the market metaphor belies a belief in the "primacy" of the market. Schooling is viewed and argued from the individual's point of view (Cookson, 1994). Education from the individual's point of view makes it a consumable service that should be provided through the market. The group's position is that education is a public good, a benefit to all of society. The concept of a public good depends on a concept of market

failure—that the market could not or would not supply education to the masses. A way of viewing charter schools is to consider them as hybrid between public and private schools, capturing elements of the public good and individual needs.

To legitimize the argument for choice, competition, and charter schools, advocates described successful private schools as superior to public schools. They held that there are inherent differences between private and public schools that make private schools more successful: (a) an independent governing body, (b) the ability to select students, and (c) the presence of parents who are willing to pay. Students who attend private schools have on average better student outcomes than public school students. According to Coleman et al. (1966) and Finn, Manno, and Vanourek (2000), the majority of the student achievement gap is related to family socioeconomic status. Research has consistently shown that, controlling for income, private schools are not significantly better than public schools at educating (Wells, 1993).

The expansion of charter schools has arguably allowed more choice in urban districts. School choice is not new; it has been offered for the past 40 years. What is unique about charter schools is that they are separated from the local school authority (C. Lubienski, 2006b; Powers, 2009). There are more than 4,700 charter schools in the United States (CREDO, 2009). The rise in acceptance of charter schools has been led by a coalition of neoliberals, neoconservatives, and minority families (and their supporters such as religious and community-based organizations) in low-performing school districts (Apple, 2001). These three groups make up the base of charter school ACF.

Advocates hold that charter schools foster a spirit of competition and enhance performance of public education, with universal implications for public schooling. Like



the voucher programs, charter schools have mainly been implemented in failing urban districts that advocates hold as symbolic of the systemic problems of government-controlled schools (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002; Kenny, 2005; Lipman, 2011). The argument for this radical change required school districts to address the need for radical improvement in student outcomes (Lipman, 2011).

The charter school movement introduced the element of innovation along with competition. This approach argues for dual systems in direct competition, spurring innovation in public schooling. Changing vouchers to charter schools drew support from Democrats and liberals. Henig (1994) argued that there is wide support for school choice but not for a market-based public education system.

Part of the appeal and staying power of school choice and charter schools is the inability to increase student outcomes in low-performing school districts (Lipman, 2011). Connecting school choice and competition with failing districts moved school choice from a theoretical pursuit to a practical solution. Charter schools presented a way to institute school governance reforms while retaining public institutions.

There are three essential arguments in support of charter schools: (a) They are more accountable (C. Lubienski, 2003a; C. Lubienski & Lubienski, 2007), (b) they are more efficient (C. Lubienski, 2006b; Wells, 1993), and (c) they are more focused on students (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002; C. Lubienski, 2003a; Powers & Cookson, 1999). These three essential arguments stand in contrast to the negative portrayal of urban school districts. By removing barriers (i.e., school zoning, tenure, regulations, unions), schools are free to adapt to challenges to meet the needs of students.

**Accountability**

Public schools were accused of being unaccountable, based on claims that no one was held responsible for poor performance or student outcomes. Segments of NCLB and RT3 sought to bring more accountability to public school systems. Advocates for school choice and charter schools argued that teachers, principals, and superintendents are protected through contractual agreements, regardless of student outcomes. Charter schools' accountability is based on two suppositions: parental accountability and contract accountability. Parents hold charter schools accountable through their ability to choose (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003). If parents are dissatisfied with the school, they are free to send their child to another school. This type of accountability is a base of competition theory. The second form of accountability is contractual. Charter schools are responsible to meeting the obligations of their charters. In theory, if a charter school does not meet the expectations of the contract, the contract may be discontinued by the authorizer. In this trade-off, charter schools are granted autonomy in running their schools in exchange for better student outcomes (S. T. Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006) but this autonomy may also make it easier to close the school.

**Efficiency**

Efficiency, like accountability, is used to point out differences between government and the private sector. Charter schools are argued to be more efficient because of competition (Boyne, 1996; Osborne, 2005). Market theory argues that the true cost of goods or services can be determined only by the market (what consumers are willing to pay for). Price inflation occurs when a true market does not exist, as in a monopoly. It is believed that, because charter schools are free from many regulations and

union contracts that artificially inflate the cost of education, they can provide education at a lower cost, making them more efficient.

### **Student Centered**

One rationale supporting school choice and charter schools is to fit the school to the learning needs of the students. Public schools are designed to educate masses of students (economy of scale), and individual learning needs are often missed.

### **Progressive Education**

Opponents of market-based public education and charter schools are portrayed as self-serving individuals and interest groups who are willing to maintain the status quo for reasons of self-interest. Teachers, principals, superintendents, and their unions are depicted as obstructionists, resisting improvements to public education (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002; Sarason, 1983). Opponents of school choice argue that resistance to market-based public education goes beyond the idea of self-interest and is fostered in the progressive era of public education in which public education is a transformative institution in society and in individual lives. Schools have been used to transform society to make it more equitable, equal, and fair and to prepare individuals to participate in democracy (Bode, 1927). Opposition is based on ideology of democratic principles and oversimplification of the problems facing public education. The opposition rejects the superiority of the market and holds that government is more effective in solving social problems (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Semel, 1999). This opposition will be based on values, beliefs, and ideology and will coalesce into an advocacy coalition in opposition to school choice and charter schools.

According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), market-based public education devalues schools as “democratizing institutions,” favoring the individual over the group. The position holds that the solution poses a greater threat than the problem that it seeks to solve. Engel (2000) argued that public schools are worth defending because of their democratizing effect, even if the process is somewhat inefficient.

Equity, equality, and fairness are continued themes in opposition to market-based public education; it is argued that simplistic education reform does not adequately address these concerns but is likely to create more social inequality. Anyon (1995) and Lipman (2011) argued that the distribution of resources favors middle-class communities over poor communities. Apple (2001) argued that middle-class families have the resources to access information to take advantage of school choice, noting that, as schools are decentralized, even more information is required to navigate the system.

Lauen (2008) contended that equality was a constant goal of public education throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, seeking to expand access and opportunity. This is evident in the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that declared public school segregation unconstitutional, as well as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its reauthorizations that expanded access and educational opportunities for disadvantaged students, the disabled, special education students, and bilingual students. Opponents to school choice argue that these achievements were made possible because government played a central role. They fear that separating public education from government would decrease access and opportunity for vulnerable students.

Fairness in public education, in theory, sought to give every child the same opportunities, regardless of income, family, or social status. Fairness was at the heart of ending legal public school segregation (Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009; Godwin & Kemerer, 2002). Researchers have suggested that charter schools will create more segregation in schooling, which will increase the achievement gap. Cookson (1994) noted that charter schools have a higher percentage of minorities than their neighborhood schools and Willie, Edwards, and Alves (2002) concluded that schools that are diversified are more effective learning communities.

Opponents to school choice argue that the problem stems from oversimplification. Simplifying the problem allows for simplified solutions, but critics of school choice and charter schools argue that the solution disavows the multitude of problems facing public education, especially in urban areas. This simplistic approach differs from the *Nation at Risk* report that emphasized the complexity of public education and sought to address multiple education issues (Ravitch, 2010).

According to Anyon (2005), multiple public policy decisions affect urban education, directly or indirectly. For example, housing policies help to shape urban school districts. Redlining, a real estate practice that excludes certain groups from moving into particular neighborhoods, helps to perpetuate racially and economically segregated neighborhoods. This practice was a part of federal housing guidelines into the 1940s in an attempt to keep neighborhoods and community homogeneous (Lake, 1981). According to Hughes and Vandoren (1990), land use and zoning policies help to keep the poor out of certain communities. The segregation of neighborhood in essence segregates

schools, denying equal access and equal opportunity (Kirp, Dwyer, & Rosenthal, 1995; Squires, Friedman, & Saidat, 2002).

As federal and state policies shifted economic power from urban centers to suburbia, a concentration of the poor remained without economic or political power (Anyon, 2005; Lake, 1981). High concentrations of low-income and minority students have faced difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified teachers (Bifulco et al., 2009; Lauen, 2009; Young, 1990). Critics argue that these substandard learning environments were created through housing and economic policies that favored and supported advantaged areas. Lipman (2011) emphasized that these external factors of education have little to do with school competition. Lipman argued that school choice is an attack on urban communities in their attempts to remove decision-making powers. Opponents of market-based public education point out that these issues are ignored by school choice policies. Simplifying the issue negates the complexity of providing public education (Andre-Bechely, 2007).

### **Alternative Perspective**

There is an alternative perspective of school choice that differs from the market-based competitive model. Historically, school choice and alternative education were a part of discourse by liberal and progressive educators who were disenchanted with the slow pace of change for disadvantaged students and children of color (Fuller, 2000a). The concept of choice espoused by liberals was seen as a way to address inadequate educational opportunities in minority neighborhoods. The historical narrative of school choice did not promote competition but provided options for parents and education activists who were dissatisfied with the quality of public education in these communities.

The conventional view of charter schools is that they provide competition to public schools, but the alternative perspective view is that of a collaborative or complementary relationship (Medler, 2004). According to Medler, charter schools were developed in progressive education philosophy to work in collaboration with public school districts. In this model, charter schools serve to meet the learning needs of students who do not fit into the traditional school setting. In the collaborative/complementary model, public and charter schools co-exist to create an educational environment that meets the needs of the highest possible portions of students.

The image of public education as a monolithic organization does not exist. Choice in education exists in many forms and is provided in public school districts. Public schools are organized around the school's mission, as with theme, magnet, and alterative behavior schools; some public schools operate under a different governance structure, such as school-based management schools; and public school choice happens through inter- and intradistrict transfers. According to Wells (1993), public school choice is found in public school districts across the county, especially in large unionized urban districts. A survey conducted in 1975 among National School Board Association members found that 25% of the school districts offered some type of choice education. In a follow-up study of members of the National School Public Relations Association, 69% cited meeting individual interests and needs as the main reason for instituting a choice program (Wells, 1993).

The difference in the neoliberal offering of school choice is separation from the local school authority. Opponents contend that separating the pubic school from local authority is a divestment in public education and democratic principles. Their objections

are not necessarily limited to school choice but also apply to marketization of public schooling. The diversity of choice in public school districts counters the argument that public education is monolithic.

### **Charter School Resistance**

The resistance to charter schools has been framed as self-interest, but this ignores the philosophical and operational concerns raised about school choice and charter schools. The charter school movement argued that public schools are failed government monopolies, but there are many excellent public schools. Educators have questioned the use of crisis to describe public education in the United States (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Henig, 1994; C. Lubienski, 2001). Compared to a century ago (Willie & Miller, 1988), a Carnegie Foundation study found that 75% of parents chose to send their children to public schools when offered a choice (Cookson, 1994; Ravitch, 2010). Suburban communities have started initiatives to make it difficult to establish charter schools within their school districts (Hu, 2011). Essentially, charter schools have had a hard time establishing themselves outside of urban school districts. The farther from urban districts, the less likely there will be a charter school (C. Lubienski, 2005b). These suburban and affluent school districts are highly regulated but produce successful schools. Opponents offer successful public schools as evidence of their belief in a hidden agenda to privatize public education.

According to Ravitch (2010), market-based public education is an unproven theory that has not worked well for urban school districts. The rationale for school choice has been shrouded in metaphors of the free market, what Fairclough described as the commodification of public good (Fischer, 2003). Commodification is the reshaping



of society in market terms and view goods and services provided by government as commodities that should be traded on the open market. The cited studies do not address the issue of resistance that is the perception of school choice that will make school personnel act in a competitive manner.

Noted in the literature is the changing justification of charter schools. The original rationale for charter schools and school choice was to create competition and innovation in the public school system. Ravitch (2010) noted that competition has now become the sole rationale.

### **Empirical Evidence**

Criticism of market-based public education system alludes to the use of market metaphors in place of empirical evidence (Henig, 1994; Ravitch, 2010). The literature is replete with research on the effects of school choice and competition in public education. The problem with the research findings is that the findings are retained or rejected depending on one's advocacy of choice (C. Lubienski, Gulsino, et al., 2009; Willie & Miller, 1988). National studies have shown mixed results regarding the effect of school choice (CREDO, 2009; C. Lubienski, Weitzel, et al., 2009; S. T. Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006). Researchers who support school choice have found a positive effect on student outcomes, while researchers who oppose school choice have found little or no positive effect of choice. C. Lubienski, Weitzel, et al. (2009) argued that there is a type of research advocacy that uses research to support the researchers' views. The danger of research advocacy is that it may present particular issues of validity and reliability of research studies. An explanation of why research advocacy occurs is found in advocacy coalition framework theory that argues that individuals and groups will not abandon core

beliefs even when faced with empirical evidence (Sabatier, 1988). Raywid (1994) and Hoxby, Murarka, and Kang (2009) found that school choice and charter schools had a significant effect on student outcomes. Figlio and Stone (1997) found that school choice had a harmful effect on student outcomes. According to C. Lubienski, Weitzel, et al. (2009), research that found a significant positive effect of charter schools was based on small samples using randomized field trials (RFTs).

Empirical data on the effect of school choice at best should be described as mixed (Nechyba, 2003). Complicating the understanding of school choice effect is that student outcomes are difficult to define and measure (Arum, 1996). Education happens formally and informally, in school and out of school. At issue is the effect caused by the school and the effect caused by unobserved variables, such as family, peers, and community. As Coleman et al. (1966) noted, family has a significant effect on student learning.

The question is not only *what* to measure but *how* to measure. There has been no agreement on how to measure student performance in charter schools. For example, when the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) released its report analyzing the 2003 Nation Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores and making comparisons between charter schools and public schools, their conclusion was widely criticized by school choice advocates (Carnoy et al., 2005; S. T. Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006). AFT found no significant difference in test scores between charter schools and public schools; in some cases, public schools outperformed charter schools (Carnoy et al., 2005). Hoxby criticized the methodology that AFT had used to draw their conclusion (Carnoy et al., 2005). When the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released its analysis of the 2003 NAEP scores in late 2004, their conclusion supported AFT findings. Follow-up

state-level testing data supported the findings of both AFT and NCES (Carnoy et al., 2005). School choice advocates argued that the test results were skewed in favor of public schools because charters schools have high percentages of disadvantaged students and that the NAEP data was a cross-sectional analysis. According to Carnoy et al. (2005), the methodology was challenged because the results differed from their position in a market-based education system. It is noted that the criticism of NAEP was not present before the release of the findings. Charter school advocates had helped to design the testing procedures that they then criticized (Carnoy et al., 2005).

Hoxby and the Public Education Policy Governance (PEPG) analyses concluded that there was a positive effect of school choice and achievement and that the results were significant. Their analyses used what they defined as the gold standard in measuring the effect of choice on student achievement. RFTs compared lottery-in students (experiment) to lottery-out students (control group). Lottery students are students who applied to a charter school and received entrance. Hoxby argued that this is the best way to measure the effectiveness of charter schools in comparison to public schools. The premise of the RFT is that it controls for family influence on student achievement in that parents who participate in the lottery are more likely to have a greater involvement in their child's education. Even if this rationale is true, it does not measure the effect of not being accepted to a charter school on the students (C. Lubienski, Weitzel, et al., 2009). RFT is theorized to remove family influence from student outcomes, with the remaining effect attributed to the school. Controlling for family influence considers the notion that the difference in test scores is due to a charter school effect.

Hoxby's analysis of New York City's charter school program using RFT found that, if students attended a charter school from kindergarten to eighth grade, this closed the achievement gaps by 86% in mathematics and 66% in reading. C. Lubienski, Weitzel, et al. (2009) argued that RFT raises serious methodological concerns, noting the small sample size and the limited ability to make generalizations about the findings. Critics have argued that the positive effect offered by choice advocates involves only a small subset of a much larger dataset, arguing that too many students were excluded from the analysis because they were lottery-in but chose not to attend or left the charter school, or data were not available on some students.

The Boston Foundation (2009) found similar results to those reported by Hoxby, using RFT. For most of the findings, when there was a positive effect, the effect seemed to be identified in African American and Hispanic students. This mirrors the effect found by Coleman et al. that African American students were affected by formal education more than were White students. The research also showed that, when there was a significant effect of charter schools, there was a low student-to-teacher ratio. This finding is not new to public school teachers, who have traditionally advocated for smaller class sizes. Ironically, choice programs have led to larger class sizes in some districts (Powers & Cookson, 1999; Wells, 1993). This seems to negate the argument that choice will make public schools better by increasing the number of students per class, which seems to lower the effectiveness of teaching.

A report by CREDO (2009) disagreed with PEPG's findings. CREDO concluded that 17% of charter schools provided superior education opportunities, 50% provided education opportunities equal to those of public schools, and 37% were significantly

worse than public schools. The report found that students who lived in poverty and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners fared better in charter schools. CREDO's 2010 analysis of New York City charter schools in comparison to its public schools found that charter school students on average outperformed their public school counterparts (CREDO, 2010). On the school level, 51% of the charter schools performed better in statewide testing than did public schools, 33% performed the same, and 16% performed worse. In comparison to their national study, New York City charter schools were performing better than the national average for charter schools.

The findings from AFT, Hoxby, and CREDO took a comparison approach to measure a charter school effect. All of the reports looked at student performance on standardized tests. Success was defined by how well students scored on a particular test; however, according to Ravitch (2010), this type of testing does not measure learning nor prepare students to be critical thinkers. Chubb and Moe (1990) argued against an overreliance on this type of measurement, arguing that standardized testing does not capture the complexity of schooling; they considered it a poor measure for school success. Opponents have disagreed with these conclusions. They have argued that better test scores do not necessarily show a charter school effect but rather show the effects of other variables, particularly how charter schools select their students. Ravitch was critical of the high-stakes testing approach that focuses on reading and mathematics for accountability, especially in elementary and middle schools. According to Ravitch, this is a "dumbing down" of the American public education system as districts expend resources to prepare for tests.

The argument that charter schools selectively recruit students has been a constant refrain throughout the charter school debate (Jennings, 2010; C. Lubienski, 2003b; Powers & Cookson, 1999). Opponents have argued that charter schools recruit the best students and their parents. Students whose parents are more active in their children's education are more likely to attend a charter school (C. Lubienski, 2005b; C. Lubienski, Gulosino, et al., 2009; Ravitch, 2010). The validity of this claim would call into question any research that supports a positive effect of charter schools and school choice. Although a biased selection process is prohibited by most states, charter schools have been found to recruit good students while discouraging underperforming students from applying (C. Lubienski, 2003b).

The success of private school students on standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT is held as evidence of the benefits of supplying a market-based public school system. Even Coleman in his later work supported the idea that private schools are better at educating students (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). Coleman et al. (1982) found in research on Catholic schools positive effects on student outcomes. Coleman ascribed this effect to Catholic schools' mission and organizational structure. The research conducted by Coleman and PEPG are the main studies usually cited to support school choice but, as Lubienski noted, these studies constitute a very small segment of the research on school choice and charter schools. Wells (1993) argued that private schools are so different from each other that it is difficult to make generalizations about them. Arum (1996) suggested that the only generalization that one could make about private schools is that their success has more to do with greater resources.

## **Innovation**

The overreliance on school choice and charter schools as the bases for school reform is based on the belief that competition will bring innovation and new curriculum into classrooms (C. Lubienski, 2009). Competition is justified by innovation that provides the catalyst that leads to better student performance (Harrison, 2005; May, 2006; Witte, Schlomer, & Shober, 2007). The literature shows that most classroom innovation has been developed and/or sponsored by governmental agencies (C. Lubienski, 2006b). C. Lubienski (2004) found very little research and development that would lead to innovation through school choice. Proponents have rationalized that innovation would be shared through educational networking (Wohlstetter et al., 2003).

C. Lubienski (2004) argued that charter schools are risk averse, which is counterintuitive to innovation. Charter school innovation is mainly relegated to school governance. (C. Lubienski, 2006b). Charter schools' risk aversion is affected by two factors and ironically driven by the accountability measure of the charter school model. First, charter schools are said to be easier to close than public schools. Charter schools are unwilling to put their charters at risk through untested innovative techniques and miss meeting required performance measures. Performance measures applied as accountability tools inhibit innovation. Second, parents are less likely to choose a charter school whose curriculum strays too far from the mainstream. In order to be competitive in the theoretical education market, the charter school must seek to meet the needs of parents who are opposed to radical changes to the curriculum. Charter schools perceive that an innovative curriculum would make them less competitive

It has been argued that competition leads to innovation; however, competition also leads to standardization. Organizations use standardization to control risk. It is suggested that, as charter schools attempt to increase their market share (gaining students), they tend to increase standardization (C. Lubienski, 2006b). The literature reveals that charter school curriculum is much in line with that of local public schools (C. Lubienski, 2003a). Risk aversion and gaining market share have caused charter schools to duplicate the public school system through standardization.



### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes how the research study was conducted, including the techniques used to collect and analyze the data. Important in the discussion of any research study is the reliability and validity of the study. This study does not directly measure students' or schools' performance; however, an analysis of perceptions of charter school and education reform held by public school personnel may show a particular bias against certain types of school reforms or that the reform initiatives may be ineffective in certain educational environments.

The nature of public schooling and the social implications of providing public education lend themselves to a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The mixed-methods approach was chosen for this study because the issues of school choice and, to a greater extent, public choice are both subjective (preference) and objective (performance). The subjective rationale for public education reform is based on the belief that the market is a superior system by which to deliver public goods and services. This belief in the market identifies a preference of government and governance. Success is dependent on schools gaining market shares through their ability to attract and retain students. The objective rationale for public school reform is concerned with quantifiable measures of improved student performance through standardized curriculum and testing. Success is dependent on student and school performance as measured by mandated goals and outcomes.

The use of the mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to explore the meaning within the social context of human behavior. It should be understood that all

human behavior takes place in some type of social context and that social context often drives human behavior.

Competition is the catalyst perception will also determine the response within the district. The research project was carried out using a modified exploratory sequential design. The study includes an analysis of archival documents and responses to a survey.

The modified sequential model allowed for initial analysis to begin with a review of government documents detailing the establishment and support of school choice in New Jersey and using the analysis to build a narrative of the discourse supporting, implementing, and administering school choice. Included in archival document analysis were documents pertaining to other education reform initiatives that may affect participants' perceptions of charter schools and education reform. These documents pertain to curricula, performance standards, evaluations, and monitoring. The survey questionnaire served two objectives: First, it allowed the researcher to build a districtwide perspective of school choice and charter schools; second, it allowed for comparison with the interpretation of the archival documents. An additional analysis of the survey responses focused on comments on the survey. The comments were treated like responses to interview questions and the analysis utilized Kvale's (1996) theory on interviews.

The participants in this study were district and school personnel from an urban school district. The objective of the document analysis was to draw a statewide narrative of school choice, charter schools, and education reform. The statewide narrative was defined as the discourse that supported, adopted, and implemented policies of education reform. This approach is indicative of qualitative research techniques (i.e., ground

theory), where theory rises from the research. The interpretation of the document analysis is then applied to discourse theory, which argues that resistance to these education reform policies will come from local level (school district). Perceptions of the stated intent of these policies from the local level should differ from the statewide narrative. To test the theory of perceptions of competition, the survey questions were developed based on interpretation of the document analysis.

### **Mixed-Methods Design Types**

There are many types of mixed-methods research designs; it is important to choose the right tool to investigate the phenomenon under study. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) noted that selection of the research design type may reflect the researcher's bias. They recommended that the researcher recognize his or her biases and use them to sharpen the research design. They synthesized numerous mixed-methods designs into four design types: triangulation, embedded, explanatory, and exploratory. Each of these designs utilizes qualitative and quantitative data. With the triangulation and embedded designs, qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously. The explanatory and exploratory designs are similar in that data collection is carried out in two separate stages. The difference between the explanatory and exploratory designs is the sequence of data collection and the rationale of the study.

In the explanatory design, quantitative data are collected and analyzed first. Qualitative data are then collected and analyzed to contextualize or explain the quantitative results. In the explanatory design, the researcher forms hypotheses to be tested. In the exploratory design, qualitative data are collected first. Unlike explanatory design, hypotheses are not formed, but a series of questions is formulated to guide the

investigation. The researcher uses the qualitative results to develop a tool to test the findings or to create a taxonomy to understand the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

### **Research Design**

Because results of research on the effect of school choice and competition continue to show mixed effects and the issue of research advocacy, it was decided to utilize an exploratory design approach. The strength of the research and its conclusions is based on the relationship and correlation between the qualitative and quantitative findings.

The sequence for data collection followed the qualitative-quantitative pattern. The analysis of the qualitative data utilized a discourse model. Discursive analyses consider the use of language and action within the situation or context. This meets De Vaus's (2001) criteria of contextual meaning. Foucault argued that individuals have been programmed through socialization, valuing, and norming to behave in a certain manner in certain situations and that behavior is reinforced through symbols, belonging, and status (Fischer, 2003, p. 38). In other words, one's action has meaning within context. A discursive analysis should reveal meaning behind the policies of the designers and implementers of school choice. Fischer argued that the words selected within policy advocacy and policy formation are also situated. To investigate the discourse of school and education reform thoroughly, a discursive analysis was conducted on archival materials that document the debates, decisions, and implementation of school choice and education reform in New Jersey. The majority of these documents were mined from the state's legislative, court, and executive branch websites.

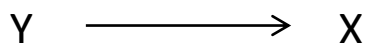
Collection of data included governmental documents that describe, legislate, regulate, implement, and investigate school choice and urban education policies and programs. The analysis of these materials helped to establish a baseline of legislative and regulatory policy and the use of language and actions by policy makers. Indicative of this approach is that school choice policies and programs are disproportionately directed at and located in minority communities.

Hook (2001) argued that a discourse analysis is a critical method to uncover resistance. He asserted, as did Foucault, that discourse is an expression of power and power resistance (Hook, 2001). Fischer (2003) argued that policies formulated by those who serve the advantaged group cannot or will not effectively represent disadvantaged groups.

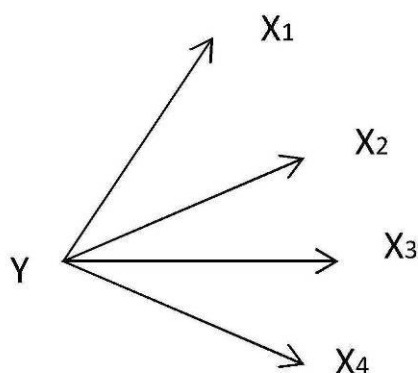
The discourse analyses of the archived documents and the perceptions of the school district personnel were presumed to represent the dichotomy of power and power resistance. Assumptions were made that the discourse within the selected school district would differ from that of state policy makers and that one could therefore assume that the language, symbols, and values within the district would offer a resistance to state policy discourse. These assumptions were made in consideration of Foucault's theory of discourse (Fischer, 2003).

To collect the quantitative data, a survey was administered to district and school personnel. District administrators, principals, vice principals, teachers, and counselors were asked to respond to the survey. The purpose of the survey was to measure perceptions of charter schools and competition in the selected districts. The survey was used to test the validity of the qualitative data.

Because perception and attitude are latent variables, they cannot be measured directly (DeVellis, 1991). DeVellis (1991) explained that an assumption has to be made that there is a relationship between the latent variable and the scale items. A scale item is a statement on the survey that registers the degree to which the respondent agrees with the statement, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. This relationship was established because the scale items or questions were derived from analysis of archived documents. It was reasonable to assume that the responses to the scale items would be related to the latent variables. DeVellis reasoned that “the score obtained on the item is reflective of the strength or quantity of the latent variable” (1991, p. 13). That is to say, the degree to which the respondent agrees with the item is dependent on how strongly the respondent feels about the issue at the time. The survey items were reflective of perceptions and attitudes within the district toward school choice and education reform. Perceptions consider the perceived level of competition that school personnel feel from charter schools. Attitude is concerned with the school district personnel’s school choice discourse. From this position, the participants’ behavior is affected by their perceived levels of competition and their discourse of school competition, so that action is determined by perception and discourse. Using relationship modeling, the strength of the respondents’ position about an issue was reflected in the score recorded for that item on the survey. Correlation of the item score was assumed to reflect the respondents’ perceptions and attitudes toward school choice. Figure 1 shows the relationship between perceptions and attitudes toward school choice (Y) and item score (X) such that Y has some effect on X. To advance this concept of relationship modeling is to show a correlation between items. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between perceptions and



*Figure 1.* Relationship between perceptions and attitudes toward school choice (Y) and an item score on the survey (X).



*Figure 2.* Relationship between perceptions and attitudes toward school choice (Y) and multiple item scores on the survey (X1 through X4).

attitudes toward school choice (Y) and multiple item scores (X1, X2, X3, X4). Again, the assumption was made that the Xs are a reflection of Y. Establishing a correlation among Xs increases the reliability of the assumption.

The unit of analysis for this study was an urban school district in New Jersey. The district is a “majority minority” district, in that more than 90% of its students are Black and/or Latino. Four charter schools in the district serve 11% of the student population. The charter schools are dissimilar to the district schools in that the percentage of special needs and ESL students (9.7% and 0.4%, respectively) are disproportionate to the percentages in the host district (20.3% and 9.7%, respectively; NCES, 2014; New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2012b).

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Archival Documents**

The first stage of data collection consisted of identifying archival documents pertaining to public school reform in New Jersey. The documents selected for the study conformed to the dual nature of education reform in New Jersey that contains elements of neoconservative and neoliberal ideas. The documents included New Jersey's statute establishing school choice and charter school programs, New Jersey's administrative codes, the Governor's education reform agenda, the 2011 charter school report, the New Jersey State Legislature's Joint Committee on Charter School, the NJQSAC, the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS; a forerunner to Common Core State Standards [CCSS]), and press releases by the NJDOE. All of the documents are accessible through official state websites or by request to the New Jersey State Library. The State Library has digitized all legislative documents from 2005 forward; any document prior to 2005 may be obtained in printed form. Each document was imported into NVivo™ for coding, analysis, and interpretation. The documents were coded for keywords and themes. The interpretation of the coded transcripts was used to reveal emerging themes. The documents were divided into two categories: policies and press releases. The press releases were then subcategorized by subject matter. The press releases were included in the analysis because they captured the state's ongoing discourse on education reform that strongly emphasized charter schools. The policy documents consisted of state statutes that regulated education reform.

The utilization of the Internet to access government documents and information emphasized the growing importance of the Internet as a public space for public policy



formation and articulation. Governor Chris Christie's Education Reform Agenda and the NJDOE utilize electronic notification to release policy notifications and link interested persons to their websites for information.

### **Survey**

The survey used a Likert-type response scale, a device shown to be useful when measuring respondents' attitudes, feelings, and preferences (Rea, 2005). The survey contained three sections. The first section asked questions soliciting respondents' attitudes concerning school choice and charter schools, the second section solicited demographical information, and the third section asked respondents to offer a comment on school choice and education reform. The demographic information was used to test differences within and between groups (race/ethnicity, gender, job titles). The use of a Likert-type scale helped to determine what quantitative analysis to employ for interpreting the data and drawing conclusions. The analysis of the data utilized central tendencies and goodness of fit. The strength of the survey instrument was dependent on showing correlations among scale items.

The purpose of the survey was to measure perceptions of charter schools among district and school personnel in the selected urban school districts. Supporters of school choice and charter schools argue that competition triggers a competitive response from public schools, and this assumption was tested in the survey.

The survey was administered using a modified mixed-modes approach. The survey protocol called for web-based and paper-based components. The advantages of using a web-based survey include lower cost (designing, editing, and administering), shorter response time, and the ability to generate a database (Cobanoglu, Warde, &

Moreo, 2001; Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Daley, McDermott, McCormack Brown, & Kittleson, 2003; Dillman, Tortora, & Bowker, 1998; Duffy, 2002; Kroth et al., 2009).

The disadvantages are high rates of undeliverables due to changing e-mail addresses, lower responses rates in comparison to mailed surveys, and digital access and compatibility (Dillman et al., 1998; Duffy, 2002; Kroth et al., 2009; Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, & Vehovar, 2008). Because the schools use e-mails to interact with parents, it was presumed that all e-mail addresses were current.

The mixed-modes approach was expected to increase response rates (Cobanoglu et al., 2001; Duffy, 2002). Giving participants the option to mail the survey or complete it online was expected to have a positive effect on response rate. An initial offer was made to respond to the survey through web-based means to capitalize on shorter response times (Kroth et al., 2009) and the self-generating database (Daley et al., 2003). It was concluded that the benefits of the web-based surveys would outweigh disadvantages and that, through enhanced research design, the disadvantages could be minimized (Cobanoglu et al., 2001). The main disadvantage was that access to the Internet is not universal, but this disadvantage was expected to be minimal due to the nature of the targeted population. A review of the district and school websites showed that school personnel could be contacted via e-mail and that the schools used interactive web-based services to communicate with parents and the community at large.

There was a concern that the e-mails might not reach intended respondents. An assumption was made that, since this system was used for correspondence with parents, the system was monitored and that e-mails are forwarded to appropriate individuals. The ability to send email to school personnel is available only to those who register through

individual schools' websites. A request was made through the central office for the email address of the selected personnel. The use of the Internet and emails as a tool to gather data from schools took advantage of interaction between schools and parents via the Internet. An assumption was made that the potential respondents possessed the necessary skills to understand and respond to a web-based survey. The only concern regarded compatibility of the survey display with the participants' computers. Display issues are a leading cause of incomplete web-based surveys (Dillman et al., 1998). To offset this issue, the survey's digital design was very basic.

Participants were given the option of responding to the survey via the web or email. The mode was modified to offer the mail version of the survey only to participants who failed to respond to the initial web survey. The objective in this approach was to get as many of participants to respond using the web portal to decrease potential input errors. Also, educators are more likely to complete a web-based survey (Daley et al., 2003).

The web-based survey was designed using Qualtrics™ provided through Rutgers University. There were two ways to grant access to the web-based survey. The respondent could access the survey anonymously by clicking on the general access link; this access link did not track who responded. By providing anonymous access, there was no way to link responses to an individual respondent or to determine whether the participant had already responded. Knowledge of this condition may have increased the response rate. The second way to access the web-based survey was to send individualized access to each participant's e-mail. The second way was preferred because it would allow the researcher to track who had already responded to the survey

and who had not. Those who had not responded could be invited to complete the survey via mail. However, due to restrictions placed by the school district in conducting the research, it was decided to use the anonymous option.

The potential participants were sent a preliminary notice to participate in the survey in an attempt to increase the response rate. An advance notice can increase the web-based response rate to levels of mail-based response rates (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). The notice contained an explanation of the research study and assurances that that all information would be kept confidential. A 1-week period was allowed for online response. A reminder to complete the survey was sent later. The literature suggests not to send too many reminders, since this does not increase the response rate (Cook et al., 2000).

### **Comment Section**

The survey had a comment section for respondents to offer their perspectives on urban education and public education reform. The comments were treated like responses to interview questions. The qualitative research interview is the best known qualitative research method (King, 1994). Kvale stated that the purpose of the research interview is to know the “life-world” of the interviewee (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

Kvale’s “life-world” perspective gives meaning to the action of a person, given the environment, values, and status of the person. In other words, action is contextual and it is the purpose of the researcher to discover meaning behind action (De Vaus, 2001).

Cohen et al. (2000) suggested that the research interview serves three purposes: (a) as the principal method for gathering data, (b) as a way to test hypotheses, or (c) in conjunction with other research methods. According to King (1994), the research interview is ideal

for understanding meaning, understanding situations within organizations, when a historical account is required, as an exploratory step before conducting a quantitative study, and to explain quantitative findings.

### **Design Bias**

The selection of a web-based survey may have instilled bias into the research. Design bias may result when certain segments of the population exclude themselves from a survey because of the tool used to collect the data. Members of the population who are uncomfortable with or lack the skills to navigate a web-based survey may choose not to participate, and this refusal to participate is predicated by the tool design. The findings of the survey may be skewed if the responses of those who selected not to participate because of the design would have been different from those who participated. In choosing a web-based survey, some assumptions were made about the population. Because members of the targeted population were degree-holding education professionals, an assumption was made about digital access and skills in navigating a web-based survey.

### **Response Bias**

It was expected that there would be some response bias, considering who completed the survey. It was presumed that those with strong feelings for or against school choice and charter schools would be more likely to complete the survey. This was not considered to be a problem, considering that public education unions have been identified as strongly opposed to school choice and competition. The assumption was that public school personnel would be strongly against charter schools and school choice because their discourse concerning school choice would differ from the discourse of the

state school choice policy, considering the symbols and environment that make up their discourse. This assumption was based on Foucault's theory of discourse that resistance to state policy occurs at the local level.

### **Survey Data Analysis**

Analysis of the quantitative data utilized a general analytical approach, consisting of descriptive analysis and chi-square analysis. The descriptive analysis considered what percentage of respondents responded in a particular way to a scale item. The chi-square analysis measured goodness of fit for within-group and between-group differences. Additional analyses were conducted to measure the strength of the relationship between scale items and the latent variable, as well as the correlations among scale items. The correlation analyses are discussed in the Reliability and Validity section because they reflect more on the strength of the research design.

The overall analysis considered how well the quantitative data from the survey aligned with the interpretation of the qualitative data. An agreement in data findings is significant for two reasons: (a) The agreement validates the qualitative interpretation of the phenomenon, and (b) the agreement helps to establish the survey as an instrument to measure perceptions of competition with predictive values.

### **Reliability and Validity**

To add to the body of knowledge and inquiry, every research study must address the reliability and validity of the study. O'Sullivan and Russell (1995) defined *reliability* as "the degree of random error associated with a measurement" (p. 91). Do the results of the study happen by chance or are the results caused by the effect of the phenomenon? If there is an effect, the results should be consistently reproduced by other researchers.

*Validity* refers to the test of whether the study measures what it claims to measure (Stangor, 2010). Reliability is concerned with reproduction and validity is concerned with the truthfulness of the measure. Although the terms *reliability* and *validity* are used in qualitative and quantitative research methods, they have somewhat different meanings in their application. Reliability and validity cannot be applied to qualitative research in the same way that they are applied to quantitative research (King, 1994). Qualitative research is subjective, it is interpretive; the researcher seeks to understand and define the phenomenon. Peräkylä (1997) suggested that it is an attempt to describe the situation. Quantitative research is objective; it produces a quantifiable measure.

Because this study used a mixed-methods design, it is import to discuss the nuances of reliability and validity as they relate to qualitative and quantitative research. In considering this research study in its entirety, reliability and validity of the study are achieved by the interrelationship between the qualitative and quantitative measures. In this modified sequential design model, the quantitative measure is predicated on analysis of the qualitative data; that is to say, the research study folds back upon itself. The survey, constructed based on interpretation of analysis of the documents, should correlate with the measure of the latent variable, showing a relationship between the latent variable and the scale items to meet the threshold of validity in that it measures what it purports to measure. The strength of the relationship between the latent variable and the scale item increases the reliability of the measure.

### **Qualitative Reliability and Validity**

The question of reliability and validity of interview and text are the same. The analysis of the interview begins with the transcript. The transcript is the creation of the

written text of the interview. Both transcript and text are static, where the spoken word and thought are dynamic. In this study the rationale for reliability and validity for the interview was applied to the archival documents. The reliability and validity of the interpretation of the archival documents is measured by the truthfulness of the interpretation. To measure truthfulness, one can apply construct validity. Construct validity is the path that the researcher lays out by which the documents are to be analyzed. For this research study, qualitative analytical techniques suggested by Kvale (1992, 1996) and Gee (2005) were used to construct the interpretation.

Oppenheim argued that qualitative research is less scientifically rigorous than quantitative research, calling into question the reliability and validity of such research (Cohen et al., 2000). The best way to address the topic of reliability and validity in qualitative research is to refer to Kvale's (1992) article "Ten Standard Responses to Qualitative Research Interview." Kvale argued in Responses 2, 3, and 4 that there is value in the interpersonal interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. According to Kvale, the argument against qualitative research is that it is not subjective, trustworthy, or reliable. These arguments dispute the scientific merit of qualitative research. In his second response, regarding the lack of scientific merit of qualitative research, Kvale maintained that subjectivity invites other interpretations that expand understanding, not limit it. In other words, it allows for other perspectives of the phenomenon. Kvale countered the scientific merit argument by arguing that science is the pursuit of knowledge. According to Peräkylä (1997), qualitative research reliability is achieved by "assuring the quality of the field notes and guaranteeing the public access to the process of their production" (p. 203). The trustworthiness of the research confronts



the validity of the study. The question to be asked, is the analysis a true representation? Truth in qualitative research is based in the reality of the interpretation. Truth is defined as an accurate portrayal of reality, which gets to the heart of validity. Trustworthiness of the analysis is achievable through the coding process. As the researcher allows themes and categories to develop, influence of bias from the researcher is minimized. Kvale noted that bias connotes “unprofessional work,” which suggests unethical behavior by the researcher.

The design of this research study faced greater threat to validity from the qualitative phase than from the quantitative phase. This occurred because the quantitative phase was based on the qualitative data and any threat to reliability or validity in the qualitative phase could affect the quantitative phase. Due diligence was given to address threats in the qualitative phase; however, because the quantitative phase was based on the qualitative phase, reliability and validity were taken at face value so the researcher could show that the quantitative design aligned with the qualitative analysis. In other words, showing that the quantitative design is a direct product of the qualitative analysis implies that, if the qualitative design met the reliability and validity threshold, then the thresholds will hold true for the quantitative design.

According to Stangor (2010), face validity is the extent to which the instrument measures its intended variables. Does the quantitative design align with the qualitative analysis? The reliability of the interpretation can be affected by the researcher’s biases (Cohen et al., 2000). This affects the reliability of the study because it affects the ability of future researchers to replicate the study. In working through the design of this study, the researcher considered two threats to validity, the first from the content of the design

and the second from the interpretation and analyses of the archival documents. With content validity, the researcher must ask whether the survey items help to address the research questions. To address the threat of content, each of the items, except for the demographic questions, was designed to elicit a response that would help to address the research questions. To overcome the issue of adequate interpretation of the interviews and archival documents, the researcher followed Gee's theory for coding transcripts. The quality of the effort of honest interpretation of the data using discursive analysis to suggest multiple interpretations to expand knowledge instead of limiting it (Gee, 2005; Kvale, 1996).

### **Quantitative Reliability and Validity**

Issues of reliability and validity in quantitative research concern the ability of the study to show relationships among variables and to demonstrate that the independent and dependent variables are strongly correlated ( DeVellis, 1991). To address the issue of reliability and validity for the survey instrument, a parallel test was conducted to measure the strength of the latent variable effect on the item score. This test addressed the issue of reliability. To address the issue of validity, it is important to refer back to the research design. As noted, the survey instrument was constructed based on interpretation of the archived documents. Validity is dependent on the capability of the scale items to measure the latent variable. The ultimate question: Do the scale items or survey questions measure the attitudes and perceptions of charter schools held by district and school personnel?

## **CHAPTER 4: NEOCONSERVATISM, NEOLIBERALISM, AND EDUCATION REFORM**

The current offering of public education reform is based on two ideological views: neoconservatism and neoliberalism. These two ideologies, while working in tandem, offer different education reform trajectories and are contradictory in their application. Yet, the neoconservative and neoliberal education reform movements needed each other to advance their education agendas. This chapter presents a discussion of neoconservative and neoliberal education policies and how they worked together to help shape the public education agenda over the past two and a half decades. The neoconservative approach focuses on a stronger government role in shaping curriculum, the teaching profession, and assessment, seeking to standardize the production of schooling. Neoliberal principles focus on deregulation, devolution, and market principles—a decentralized approach to schooling.

### **Neoconservative Educational Agenda**

Neoconservative education reform is based on functionalism. Education and other social institutions are used to promote societal stability. Functionalism, embodied in the work of Émile Durkheim (2007), sees schools as necessity to teach succeeding generation how to fit into society. Social institutions are used to continue the cohesiveness of society by transferring values, norms, and beliefs (Durkheim, 2007). Implicit in this transference of social norming is the idea of knowledge content and who controls it. Knowledge content is the information, values, and beliefs that are deemed necessary for continuance of social cohesion. Knowledge content is conceptualized through school curriculum. Neoconservatives argue that school curriculum has become

fragmented and watered down, lacking specific content (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1987).

The argument about school curriculum is an argument about what knowledge is important to be transmitted.

Critics of functionalism argue that social institutions are also used to reproduce social inequalities (Bode, 1927). Functionalism considers itself to be merit based, in that those who possess the capacity to achieve higher knowledge will ascend to positions of power and control society. Yet, to achieve this higher knowledge, the learner must master the knowledge content that the power elite deems important; other knowledge is deemed irrelevant, thus perpetuating social inequalities.

Thomas (1988) pointed out that early “American education emphasized social cohesion, conformity, and authority” (p. 138), arguing that the intent of public education was socialization and conformity, the transference and acceptance of culture. W. C. Parker (1996) maintained that “school curriculum is a mechanism through which knowledge is socially distributed” (p. 187), while Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) argued that “school knowledge is noted in class terms” (p. 12).

### **Neoconservative Countermovement**

The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s sought to expand access to education and educational opportunities, especially for Blacks and marginalized groups (Semel, 1999). The social unrest exposed the importance of education as a strong factor in breaking the cycle of poverty, mitigating social inequality, and improving upward mobility. The cultural and political movement sought to set new norms in public education and other public institutions.

Neoconservatives contended that the social movement of the 1960s had failed to produce social change (Wirt, 1980), arguing that public education had become more focused on social engineering than on educating (C. Lubienski, 2003b; Semel, 1999) and that liberal education had weakened education standards and the quality of public education.

The social unrest of the 1960s polarized public education politically and culturally (Cookson, 1994; Finn, 1991) and was viewed as a counterculture movement, undermining authority, resisting the rule of law, and usurping Western cultural principles (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991).

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) asserted that the rise of the neoconservative education movement was intended to contain progressive education reform that challenged conventional scientific wisdom and argued for multicultural knowledge content. The progressive education movement of the 1960s called for curriculum and pedagogy to be reflective of a diverse student body (Goodman, 1999). In so, there was a need to create a curriculum (what is taught) that incorporates multiple cultures and knowledge bases, which decreases the preeminence of a Western culture knowledge base. It also sought to establish a pedagogy (how content is taught) that incorporates multiple techniques to reach diverse learners. This critical evaluation of ongoing curriculum and pedagogy led to expansion of access to education (Semel, 1999). The neoconservative movement viewed the expansion of education pluralism as weakening American public education values. Andre-Bechely (2007) critically noted that the reliance on Western culture provides White people with greater education opportunities and privileges. A pivotal moment in the neoconservative education agenda was the release of the *A Nation*

*at Risk* report. Neoconservative education agenda focused on regulating and controlling curriculum, teachers' competency, and assessment.

### **A Nation at Risk**

The release of *A Nation at Risk* was the beginning of the current education reform movement (Noddings, 2007) and served as the catalyst for neoconservative education reform policies. As with all education reform movements, it started by declaring a crisis in education (Noddings, 2007). Hirsch et al. (1987) noted that the report was a “counter-reform” effort to return to a more traditional curriculum. The report by NCEE called for a re-evaluation of the nation’s education priorities, arguing that there had been a “steady erosion of the content of the curriculum” (as cited in Ravitch, 2010, p. 25). *A Nation at Risk* sought to elevate the issue of public education on the national agenda. As the report noted, there are national objectives of schooling but, to achieve these objectives, school curricula needed a national focus. The agenda set forth in the report was intended to interject a national presence in public school curriculum, educational standards, leadership, and teachers’ competency (Ginsberg & Wimpelberg, 1988). The liberal education agenda that expanded the rights of individuals came at the expense of a shared national culture (Finn, 1991). The report argued that public school curriculum is too fragmented, with each state establishing its own curriculum, to have a national focus and, as Finn (1991) argued, made them unsuitable to transfer a shared knowledge. *A Nation at Risk* argued that this crisis in public education had eroded U.S. geo-economic standing and had diminished the nation’s global competitive advantage.

The report noted that the crisis in public education was akin to an invading army. The national defense metaphor emphasized the role that the federal government should

play. This idea of public education as a national defense issue is not a new one; it was also used in the 1950s with the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union that ushered in a curriculum that focused on mathematics and science (Lipton & Oakes, 2007).

To emphasize their point, the NCEE cited declining SAT scores and American students' position in relation to that of international students as evidence of U.S. declines in educational prowess. Others have disagreed with this analysis, arguing that the decline in SAT scores was due to the fact that more students were taking the test (Draper & Protheroe, 2010) and that no true comparison could be made among international tests (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Stiggins, 2002). To the contrary, because education has been more inclusive and more accessible, more students of diverse backgrounds are going to college, many in the first generation in their family to do so. The United States still held its dominance in research and development. Critics of the report argued that the authors intentionally used hyperbolic language to draw attention to the report. Cookson (1994) noted that the country was having a "national panic attack" over education and Barr and Parrett (2001) argued that the true crisis in public education was the unwillingness to educate all children.

An attempt to create national curriculum was met with resistance from multiple factions. Ironically, the failure to establish a national curriculum and to move the neoconservative education agenda forward created a policy window for neoliberal education reform initiatives regarding the national education agenda.

## Regulations

The central divide in the neoconservative and neoliberal education coalition centers on the role of government's regulatory powers. Neoliberals follow the adage that the best government is the one that governs least. Neoconservatives hold that government has an import role to play in forming a national cultural identity by using its regulatory powers of rule making, enforcement, and adjudication, along with the power of the purse to lead in shaping a national curriculum. To achieve this goal, neoconservatives sought to control what to teach (curriculum), who can teach (teachers), and how to measure compliance (assessment).

In order to shape curriculum and knowledge content, the federal government needed to create a policy space that allowed for more federal intrusion into public education. *A Nation at Risk* provided that catalyst. Legislation such as NCLB and RT3 uses the carrot-and-stick approach to create an agenda that serves global economic needs and advances the neoconservative agenda in the same way as *A Nation at Risk*, but the two programs also served neoliberal objectives. NCLB and RT3 served neoconservative objective by inserting more federal authority and neoliberal objects by establishing rules by which schools can be separated from local school authority.

One of the ways that neoconservatives have inserted federal control into public education is through the power of the purse. For example, the federal government has helped to establish the "right" content by funding education programs that support science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). As districts seek funding for STEM programs, they comply with federal guidelines for such programs.



## **Curriculum and Knowledge Content**

Curriculum serves as a guide as to what to teach and what students need to learn (Noddings, 2007). Adherence to the prescribed curriculum is induced through student assessment and standardized testing. Control of what is to be taught on a national level requires the influence of the federal government and/or coordination by state educational officials and governors. Although the first attempt to establish a national curriculum failed, the attempt was revived in the movement for CCSS. A part of the failure to establish federal guidelines on school curriculum came from resistance by states who considered the guidelines to be an intrusion on states' rights and failure of the state to anticipate the backlash over content (Ravitch, 2010). Currently, the push for Common Core has taken a different approach in that it has built support state by state. This is the same approach that was taken to build support for charter schools. Common Core must be seen as a state initiative rather than a federal one. The federal government has incentivized the use of Common Core as a core component in turning around troubled school districts. This relationship between federal and state education agencies in coordination with other stakeholders has led to a majority of the states committing to Common Core.

Gaining control over the curriculum is a key aspect in the neoconservative education reform movement. The first salvo in the attempt to control public education framed multicultural curricula as detrimental to quality public education. The neoconservative movement sought to re-establish a Western culture-friendly curriculum. Hirsch et al. (1987) asserted that low performance on standardized tests by low-income students was evidence of not teaching the right cultural knowledge.

## **Teachers' Competency**

To ensure that right knowledge content is taught, neoconservative education reform needed to gain control over who could teach. Curriculum not only tells students what to learn; it also tells teachers what to teach (Aronwitz & Giroux, 1985; Ravitch, 2010). The curriculum is reinforced by controlling who can teach. In this aspect, teachers' competency fills the same role as student assessment and standardized testing that reinforces what is acceptable knowledge. Teachers' competency is interrelated to curriculum because teachers must master subject matter. But mastery of subject matter does not require that one be a good teacher. Mastery in this sense has subjugated teachers to teach the content; the teacher's effectiveness is dependent on the students learning the right knowledge. In recent years, attempts have been made in many states to tie teachers' bonuses and raises to students' performance on state-wide testing.

Competency is controlled through licensing and credentialing. Credentialing is a form of power and control over teachers and the schools. In order to be credentialed, one must submit to the rules and regulations of the credentialing agency. NCLB added another level of credentialing, requiring school districts to have a certain percentage of their teachers certified as "highly qualified" teachers (HQT); however, such certification does not necessarily equate to effective teaching (Center for Public Education, 2009).

In the neoconservative movement, "what to teach" (content) is closely associated with "how to teach" (pedagogy). Pedagogy ensures that the subject is taught in the manner in which the students are to assimilate the material (Sarason, 1983). A standardized Western culture approach to prepare teachers for the classroom has led to many teachers being ill prepared to teach in culturally different environments (King,

1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Aronson and Anderson (2013) noted the contradictory nature of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) recommendation of preparing teachers as critical thinkers for working with diverse students , but it has been infiltrated by neoconservative and neoliberal reform rationale that values testing and marketization. Cross (2005) argued that teacher education curriculum reinforces stereotypes of ethnic groups. Reportedly, urban school districts have the least-prepared teachers and annual teacher turnover ranges from 5% to 30% (Siwatu, 2011). The rationale for this turnover is that preservice teaching programs do not prepare students to teach in culturally different schools; many leave the profession within 3 to 5 years. This raises serious concerns when licensure and credentials are awarded for mastery of content that is prescribed for one particular cultural view. The return to a Western culture-based teacher preparation is a part of the neoconservative education agenda to control the content of teacher education and acceptable knowledge (Lasley, Siedentop, & Yinger, 2006). King (1991) argued that neoconservatives interpret diversity as a threat to “national unity” (p. 133). Yet, Hollins (1993) noted that teachers are more successful in teaching students from diverse cultures when they incorporate a diverse cultural teaching approach. Aronson and Anderson (2013) argued that NCLB diminished the importance of education theory and multiculturalism for “subject-specific” (p. 250) content.

### **Assessment and Standardized Testing**

There had been rapid expansion in the use of standardized testing since the 1960s. Reliance on these tests did not go unchallenged but continued to grow in popularity. Sacks (1999) argued that one of the reasons for this expansion in the use of standardized test was for their capacity to “sort” students, employees, and citizens. Haney, Madaus,

and Lyons (1993) noted that there was no scrutiny of the industry nor did the industry monitor the effectiveness of standardized tests.

The rationale given for the use statewide testing is to set “high expectations and standards” (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005, p.114). Goslin (1963) pondered the value of standardized tests, noting that this type of testing was culturally based in Western society, especially in the United States.

The standardized test has been argued to be a merit-based test, but research has shown that it is a poor predictor of performance (Sacks, 1999). Hollins (1993) noted that many researchers found these tests to be biased toward higher-income families and a disadvantage to lower-income families and students. Standardized tests have been argued to favor White upper-middle-class males. Inevitably, because standardized tests are culturally based, they are open to issues of validity and reliability.

The use of standardized tests serves different objectives for neoconservatives and neoliberals. For neoconservatives, the tests are used to assess mastery of knowledge content and credentialing; for neoliberals, they are used as a measure of performance. The reliance on high-stakes testing is not supported by core market beliefs that rely on the market to determine performance and success (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The continual reliance on high-stakes testing is driven by the neoliberal movement’s reliance on the business model of measurement.

Neoliberal high-stakes testing is problematic for a number of reasons, most important of which is that school success is predicated on the number of students who pass the test. African Americans, Latinos, and lower-income students are more likely to have lower test scores than White middle-class students (Borg, Plumlee, & Stranahan,

2007; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Hollins, 1993). Schools that hire teachers with advanced degrees have higher probability rates of student success. High-stakes testing becomes less about assessment of student ability and more about performance and the sanctions that result from failure to master content. Testing within itself has become a means by which to hold schools and districts accountable for teaching certain knowledge content. If the probability of students not being successful on standardized tests is known before the tests are taken, then the test can be seen as bias. Therefore, tests are not about students' ability to learn but about knowing certain content based on Western culture.

Standardized tests have become punitive in nature. An example of standardized tests being punitive is the high school exit examination. The purported use of these tests is to measure whether students master the particular content of the curriculum usually in math and language. The reward for learning acceptable content is a high school diploma. Although many states rely on these high school exit examinations, there is no evidence that they improve achievement (Grodsky, Warren, & Kalogrides, 2009). Standardized tests qualify teaching a particular curriculum and, if teachers are evaluated by how well their students perform on these tests, it reaffirms the cultural identity of the curriculum. Notably, high school exit examinations exclude subjects that research has shown help to make well-rounded students (Graham et al., 2002). These subjects are indicative of elementary and middle school testing. Because so much is at stake with these tests, schools devote time and resources, at the expense of other subjects, to prepare students for the tests. Because these subjects are the only ones that are measured on statewide and national assessments, many schools are forced to "teach to the test." These high-stakes

tests have increased the amount of public funds going to private institutions to design, prepare, administer, and evaluate the tests (Snell, 2005).

From a national perspective, high-stakes testing is used to measure annual progress in relationship to NCLB policy. Schools that do not make adequate progress on statewide testing can be sanctioned, closed, or converted to charter schools or turnaround schools, where school administrators and teachers can be dismissed. Additional funding is given to turnaround schools to dismiss at least 50% of the school personnel. If this is based on predictions that certain students and certain schools will not do well on these tests, the tests are used to penalize districts that do not prescribe to the dominant culture on which the tests are based. High-minority-populated schools are more likely to be adversely affected by this educational policy.

The argument has been made that standardize testing perpetuates stratification in schools and society. Although standardized testing has been hailed as bringing accountability and high standards to struggling school districts, it has effectively lowered the quality of education in these districts and increased inequality. McNeil (2000) and Sahlberg (2010) argued that there is evidence that high-stakes testing actually hinders conceptualized learning and critical thinking; they noted that too much of the academic day is set aside for test preparation. Students are being prepared to be test takers instead of academic learners. This argument is now being made by college and university presidents who see that relying on high-stakes testing is not preparing students for the rigors of college. Ravitch (2013) noted that tests contain two measurements: the scale score and the achievement score. The scale score represents how well students did on the test and the achievement score represents “what students should know” (p. 59).

### **Neoliberal Education Policy**

The main thrust in public school reform over the past 20 years has been led by constant inroads of neoliberal policies from vouchers to charter schools. Neoliberalism calls for a revaluation of the role and function of government. Since the New Deal era, government has played an increasing role in creating opportunities and providing a safety net for a many citizens (Lipman, 2011). Olssen (2010) contended that the intent of neoliberalism (which he viewed as modern-day capitalism) is to weaken government control over the economy. Gulson (2011) asserted that neoliberalism focuses on five principles of economic policy beliefs: individualism, choice, market freedom, less regulation, and minimal government involvement. Implicit in neoliberal theory is the idea of competition, competitive behavior, and access by more competitors into the market.

To increase market principles in government organizations, NPM was offered as a way to reduce government inefficiencies. NPM granted the private sector opportunities to affect government's economic decisions and to provide government services. This served two objectives: to increase efficiency and to reduce the role of government. Efficiency is achieved through the market's ability to rationalize and self-regulate. The market provides only what the consumer wants and therefore requires less government.

Allowing the private sector to provide public goods and services gave that sector greater influence in governmental decision making. Increasing the private sector influence may not be synchronous with democratic principles or what society has mandated: a social safety net. The privatization and outsourcing of governmental goods and services is based on the premise that (a) the private sector is more effective than the

public sector, (b) the private sector is more ethical than the public sector, and (c) efficiency is the central value of American society. Keynes argued that the market is neither rational nor self-regulating and that government's influence over the economy is necessary to control market excesses, to sustain the middle class, and to provide a safety net for the poor. Gulson (2011) argued that neoliberalism is the rejection of the welfare state and Keynesian economic policies.

### **Competition**

Although neoliberal discourse refers to public education as a monopoly, there are significant differences in the supply of public schooling from state to state and from district to district. Many school districts, especially large urban school districts, offer school choice. The choice that is espoused by neoliberalism decouples the supply of education from the central school district and stands in competition to traditional public schools. To create competition between schools, state governments had to establish quasi-education markets. The appealing aspect or incentive for new providers to enter this education market is that charter schools would be granted a level of autonomy (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002). Godwin and Kemerer (2002) stated that this trade-off of autonomy was designed to produce better student outcomes. The neoliberal argument contends that public schools have failed to educate the children in their charge (Bethell, 2000; Ravitch, 1998), emphasizing dismal performance by urban school districts.

### **Choice**

Choice considers options from the consumer perspective to select not only the school but the type of school. Neoliberal education policies developed two paths for public school choice: vouchers and charter schools. Friedman (1955) called for a



voucher system for public education, allowing government to be the funder but not the provider of public education. Charter schools were cast as public schools detached from the local school authority.

Essentially, neoliberal education policies have argued for creation of choice and opportunity for low-income students to access a more equitable distribution of quality public education. Implicit in the choice school argument is competitive behavior, that is to say, competition's behavior is predictable. Economic self-interest will serve as a motivator for innovation and the production of better public education systems (Aronson & Anderson, 2013; C. Lubienski, 2003a; C. Lubienski, Gulosino, et al., 2009).

### **Marketization**

Choice advocates describe citizens as a captive audience (Moe, 1984) and government as a monopoly (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The hyperbolic language is indicative of the school choice discourse that diminishes government and extols the market. C. Lubienski (2006a) described this as a campaign in the marketization of public education. School choice shifted the fundamental aspect of public education in the United States from a public good to a private interest (C. Lubienski, 2003b). From the private interest perspective, education becomes a consumable good and, as a consumable good, allows for exclusion (C. Lubienski, 2003b, 2006b) and inequality (Witte, 2000). Witte (2000) argued that markets continue to fail minority communities where most of the school choice programs and charter schools are located. Educators are concerned about the application of school choice, noting that it did not develop in education theory but in economic theory. Neoliberals used the "crisis" in public education as a policy window to argue their theory of smaller and less-intrusive government. The goal of neoliberalism is

not to achieve a more effective educational system but to achieve a more efficient government.

The benefit to public schools is that marketization will bring on innovation and best practices to failing schools, and such benefits outweigh any adverse effects of the market. One of the hurdles that a market-based education system must overcome is that there was no education market ready to be tapped with capacity and expertise to effect change. According to Chubb and Moe (1990), the market will sort out underperforming schools, forcing them to close for lack of students (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003). In this paradigm, the market is the only accountability mechanism. Van Dunk and Dickman (2003) argued that there is no evidence that any charter schools have closed due to market forces. Henig (1994) suggested that citizens support school choice but reject market-style approaches to “achieve public ends” (p. 190).

### **Citizens as Consumers**

In the traditional public school paradigm, school districts and the state are accountable and responsible for quality of content and the mastery of the subject matter. In the school choice paradigm, schools are held accountable but are not responsible (Apple, 2001). The responsibility for providing an adequate education belongs to the parents. Parents are charged with making the best informed selection for the child; if the school is not adequate to meet the student’s need, it is reflective of a lack of due diligence on the part of the parents. The market allows for schools to fail (close) and the student and parent are left to recover from the harm. Parents as rational decision makers must make appropriate choices for their children’s education. Figure 3 shows the differences in responsibility for education between public and private/charter schools.

School Responsibility		
	Accountability	Responsibility
Public Schools	School	State
Private/Charter Schools	School	Parent

*Figure 3.* Differences in responsibility for education between public and private or charter schools.

## Vouchers

A voucher program is a true market program; parents choose the school that their children will attend, with minimum government involvement. Vouchers are cash payments to parents to use in the school of their choice. Friedman (1955) and Chubb and Moe (1990) contended that vouchers are the only way to provide public education. The argument against vouchers is that voucher payments shift much-needed funding from public schools to private schools. Pilot vouchers programs were tested in Cleveland and Milwaukee. Supporters suggested that data from these cities showed that the voucher program made a significant difference in student achievement (Savas, 2000). However, further analysis of the data indicated no significant difference in academic achievement (Ravitch, 2010) and revealed that voucher programs had increased student segregation. A large proportion of parents who participated in the voucher program in both cities were already sending their children to private schools, allowing the state to subsidize private

education. The failure of the voucher program to gain national prominence allowed for development of charter schools.

### **Charter Schools**

Charter schools are considered public schools that have been granted autonomy from the local district by the state or an appointed authorizing agency. Many contend that, as the lines between “public” and “private” schools become blurred, the true objective of the charter school movement is to move public education to a market-based system.

In the dichotomy between public and charter schools, public schools are seen as too slow to change and weighted with bureaucratic regulations that have a negative effect on the quality of education. School administrators cannot dismiss incompetent faculty, financial contracts are too generous, and too much power is given to unions (Bethell, 2000). Proponents of charter schools contend that the removal of these impediments to education would increase productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency. Charter schools are capable of instituting innovative change in public education (Bettinger, 2005). C. Lubienski’s (2004) analysis of charters schools as catalyst for change found that charter schools had not brought about the innovation in public education that advocates had suggested. Lubienski’s findings showed that charter schools were less likely to be innovative. Lubienski concluded that change, when it happened, usually happened at the school administration level and not at the curricular or classroom levels.

### **Prelude to Privatization**

Some opponents to neoliberal education contend that charter schools are a prelude to privatization of public schooling. This line of thinking has been supported by

similarities in discourse and theory that propelled the privatization movement. Chubb and Moe (1990) openly stated that implementation of state charter programs would make it easier to reintroduce voucher programs. The view of charter schools as a prelude to privatization is a natural outflow of competition. Competition by its nature looks to replace its competitor. Referring back to the language and discourse of public education, an argument was made that public schools should not be trusted to educate students.

In order to move to a private market, the disadvantages of a market-style education system must be mitigated. Two obstacles to market-based education are market failures and exclusivity. To overcome the market failure challenge, a discourse was established that argues that market failures are infrequent events, especially in comparison to government failures. Government failure is an easier concept to convey than market failure. Government failure emphasizes mistakes made by government; market failure, an economic event, occurs when the market cannot or will not provide a service.

Defining education as a consumable good presumes that the market determines the level and type of service, even excluding certain segments of the population. Because public education is provided by the government, the government cannot create tiers of public education to which one has access or from which one is excluded because of race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

### **Chapter Summary**

Public education reform in the past 25 years has been driven by neoconservative and neoliberal education policies. Although the ideologies of these theories work from opposite ends of the political continuum, proponents of each ideology have worked

together to advocate for their education agendas. Working together, they established a discourse that emphasized the failure of public schools, gathering support from families and political officials representing minority districts, and pushed passage of NCLB and RT3.

The main difference between the two approaches lies in the level of government involvement to provide public education. Neoconservatives call for a strong nation government presence to shape a national curriculum and national identity; neoliberals view government as an impediment to quality education. Neoconservatives articulate an agenda that allows for more state and federal control through the use of legislation with an attempt to hold district and school administrators accountable for teaching the “right” knowledge content. Neoconservative education policies are based on Western education traditions and thought and call for a return to traditional education. Neoconservative policies have relied on the federal government to set national standards for public education, and the “right” knowledge content is reinforced through teacher accreditation and student assessment.

Faith in neoliberalism lies in support of a minimalist government role in the economy and a parallel belief that the market behaves rationally. Critics argue that neoliberalism is an attempt to delegitimize government (Van de Walle, 2010). Neoliberal education policies are an outgrowth of these beliefs and are influenced by choice, markets, and competition.

Choice establishes preference for the types of schools that parents want for their children if given the option. Neoliberal policies call for schools to be detached from the

local school authority so they can behave as in a market. Proponents argue that competition will allow schools to innovate, leading to better student outcomes.

In order to create competition, states had to establish education markets that would allow for new providers to enter into the market. The first attempt to marketize public education was through vouchers, but the voucher programs never gained national prominence. The failure of the vouchers to provide market-style public education created a policy window to implement charter school programs.

Opponents argue that school choice and charter schools are undemocratic in practice and that competition does not behave the same in noncompetitive markets. They have noted that, if the market were capable of providing public education, it would have done so already. Simply put, the battle for public education can be drawn as a continual shift between capitalism and Keynesian theories.

## CHAPTER 5: NEW JERSEY EDUCATION REFORM AND *ABBOTT* SCHOOL DISTRICTS

This chapter discusses education reform in New Jersey. The first section of the chapter gives an overview of the education reform issues. The second section discusses the New Jersey Supreme Court *Abbott* decision(s), a watershed in public school in New Jersey that addressed equity funding for poor school districts. The final section of this chapter discusses the application of neoconservative and neoliberal education policies in New Jersey.

In the past 40 years, education reform in New Jersey has been emblematic of progressive and neoliberal education reform movements. The predominant education reform movements have been shaped by two solutions: equity funding and school choice. The first argues that problems in public education lie in the fact that poor school districts have not been properly funded; the second argues that public school administrators and teachers are not held accountable for poor performance and that the school districts have no incentive to improve. Each solution has been posited as a panacea to public education problems in struggling school districts.

The New Jersey public education system is a system of two extremes: high-performing, well-funded districts and low-performing, underfunded districts. The issue of reform centers on equity funding in low-performing districts and the inability to close the achievement gap. As discussed in Chapter 1, lack of success in increasing student outcomes through reform initiatives has strengthened the argument for school choice.

Education reform initiatives in New Jersey have ranged from the creation of the *Abbott* school districts and equity funding to establishing the CCCS and the NJQSAC to



school choice and charter schools, but no iteration of education reform has yet closed the achievement gap to any significant extent.

New Jersey public schools are ranked high on national examination scores (Hester, 2011). The state's public school students perform significantly above the national average in reading and mathematics in both the fourth- and eighth-grade cohorts on the NAEP. The aggregate scores on the 2013-2014 academic year New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) test showed that 59.8% of fourth graders were *proficient* or higher in language arts and 74.9% were *proficient* or higher in mathematics, and that 79.8% of eighth graders were *proficient* or higher in language arts and 71.5% were *proficient* or higher in mathematics (NJDOE, 2015). In the 2014-2015 school year, the NJASK was replaced by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) state-wide tests.

On the whole, New Jersey public schools are performing well in relation to schools in other states. The problem is that educational success is not equally distributed. In school districts designated as low-income districts, the aggregate percentage of students who were *proficient* or higher in fourth and eighth grades were 33.3% and 55.9% for language arts and 54.0% and 46.7% for mathematics, respectively (NJDOE, 2015). It is in these districts where education reform initiatives have been placed and where the state has played a greater role in finance, management, and governance of the district. The discourse of education reform in New Jersey is primarily a discourse about urban education in predominately minority school districts.

### New Jersey Urban Education

There are issues affecting student outcomes in urban school districts that social critics argue cannot be solved with a one-fix solution. Figure 4 illustrates the complexity of urban school districts in New Jersey. As the figure shows, the discourse over urban education is shaped by pedagogy, accountability, inequality, and urban discourse as functions and products of education.

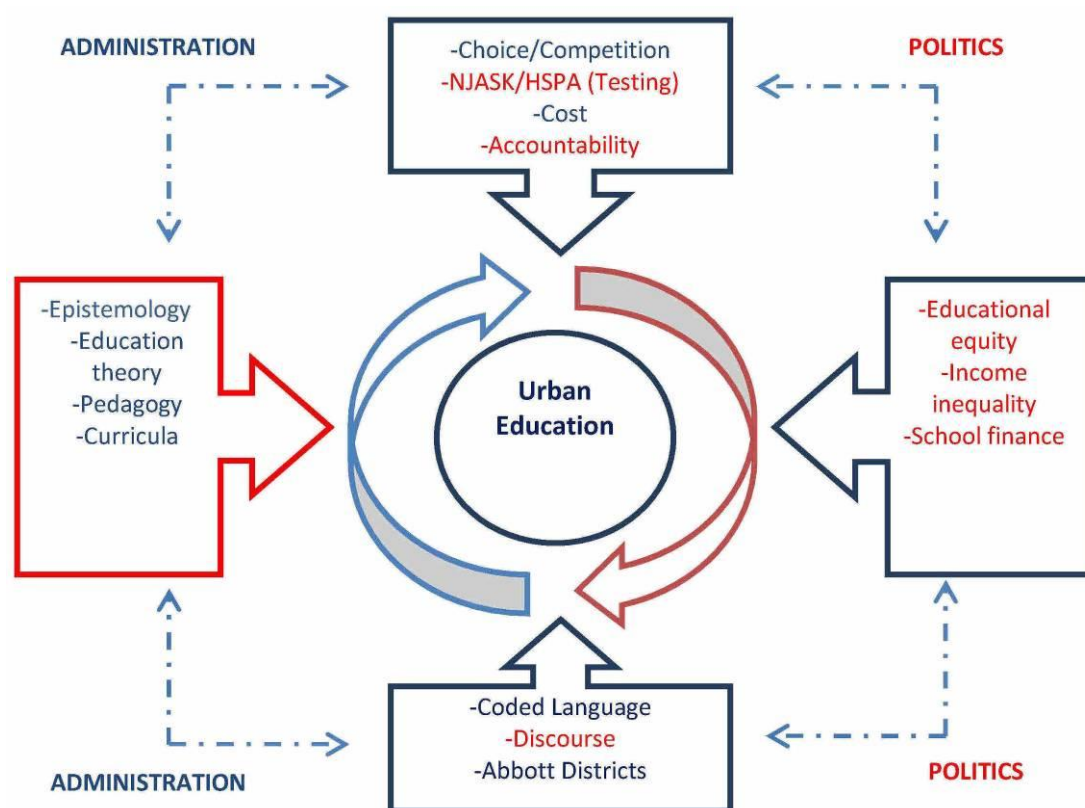


Figure 4. New Jersey urban education policy issues.

Public education in urban school districts differs from that in affluent districts. It is in this backdrop that public education policies are formulated, debated, implemented, and impeded. The issues facing urban education are mired in entrenched factors such as

poverty, high unemployment, crime, dilapidated infrastructure, and racism (Bowles & Gintis, 2007). Gillborn (2005) and Lipman (2011) argued that the social construct of Whiteness confers privilege on White people while considering Blacks and Latinos to be undeserving. The pathology of racism shapes the discourse and social construct of Blacks and Latinos as lazy, not willing to work as hard as other racial and ethnic groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Andre-Bechely (2007) argued that the pervasiveness of racism in society and White privilege gives “greater access to education opportunities (p. 1360) to White students. The effects of racism are so invasive in society that they inevitably play out in public policy, including education (Bowles & Gintis, 2007).

Crucial to the argument of urban education is continual underperformance in many urban districts that belies efforts to close the achievement gap, which may lead to the question, “Does urban education require a different pedagogy?” The idea of a different pedagogy for Black students was argued in the 1960s and 1970s in an effort to use a more Afrocentric education model (Yancey, 2004). Pedagogy, like curriculum, has been argued as a social construct of the elite class used to perpetuate their advantaged position in society. If what and how students are taught are designed to perpetuate social order, the current reform initiatives may be ill suited to close the achievement gap.

### ***Abbott v. Burke Decisions***

Important in the ongoing struggle for education reform in New Jersey is the *Abbott* decision. *Abbott* is a liberal approach to education reform that stands in contrast to the neoliberal and neoconservatives reform policies. To understand education reform in New Jersey, one must study the issue of the *Abbott* decision and the *Abbott* school

districts. The initiation of neoconservative and neoliberal education reforms gets at the heart of the struggle over resources and ideology for public education in New Jersey.

*Abbott* challenged the way public education was funded in New Jersey. *Abbott v. Burke* is a series of court decisions spanning 25 years, seeking, in the tradition of the progressive education movement, to expand education opportunity in vulnerable communities. *Abbott I* (1985), *Abbott II* (1990), and *Abbott V* (1998) are indicative of progressive education. Social equity, equal access, and equal opportunity were at the heart of the *Abbott* decisions. The plaintiffs, the Education Law Center, argued that the achievement gap was mainly caused by inequality of funding for public education. *Abbott* established a stable funding for public education in poor school districts (Brown, 1996).

Prior to *Abbott*, the majority of public school funding in New Jersey was provided through local property taxes, which created “have and have-not” school districts. As populations shifted from urban centers to suburban communities, the tax base in urban centers shrank, leaving fewer dollars for public education (Davis, 2008). By the virtue of residence, some students were afforded greater educational opportunities than other students. The *Abbott* decision acknowledged the inherent inequity of funding public education in this manner. The plaintiffs successfully argued that children in poor school districts were not receiving the same educational opportunities and were falling behind their counterparts in more affluent school districts. Research has shown that funding is a significant variable in student outcomes (Arum, 1996; Greene & Anyon, 2010), but, as seen in the *Abbott* districts, funding alone has not brought about the sought objectives,

although critics argue that *Abbott* has never been adequately tested because it has never been fully funded (Brown, 1996; Gold, 2007).

*Abbott v. Burke* was originally filed in 1981 with the New Jersey Supreme Court, which handed down what would be called *Abbott I* in 1985. The Court remanded *Abbott I* to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for adjudication. OAL declared the School Funding Act of 1975 unconstitutional. The School Funding Act of 1975 was an attempt to resolve an earlier case, *Robinson v. Cahill*, that had petitioned the Court in 1970 in a challenge to the legality of school funding. In the *Robinson* ruling, the Court reaffirmed the state's responsibility to ensure each child a thorough and efficient education. The court noted that, when a local district fails to provide a sufficient education, the state is responsible to do so. In 1990, *Abbott II* upheld the OAL decision. Chief Justice Wilentz, writing for the Court, stated,

We again face the question of the constitutionality of our school system. We are asked in this case to rule that the Public School Education Act of 1975, L. 1975, c. 212, N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-1 to -52 (the Act) violates our Constitution's thorough and efficient clause. We find that under the present system the evidence compels but one conclusion: The poorer the district and the greater its need, the less the money available, and the worse the education. That system is neither thorough nor efficient. We hold the Act unconstitutional as applied to poorer urban school districts. Education has failed there, for both the students and the State. We hold that the Act must be amended to assure funding of education in poorer urban districts at the level of property-rich districts; that such funding cannot be allowed to depend on the ability of local school districts to tax; that such funding must be guaranteed and mandated by the State; and that the level of funding must also be adequate to provide for the special educational needs of these poorer urban districts in order to redress their extreme disadvantages. (*Abbott v. Burke*, 119 N.J. 287, June 1990, para. 1)

The court acknowledged two public education systems in New Jersey: poor urban school districts and property-rich districts, emphasizing that the issue with public education in New Jersey was an issue of public education in urban school districts where

the majority of students were Black or Latino. The decision noted that poor school districts were presented with “special educational needs.” That is to say, there were external issues that had an effect on public schooling that were not present at sufficient levels in wealthier school districts. The court in its *Abbott II* decision rejected the Commissioner of Education’s claim of no relationship between property wealth and school expenditures and further rejected the argument that these poor districts would only waste the money. The arguments presented by the State to overturn OAL ruling presented rationale for policy makers to resist the court’s intent in the *Abbott* decisions.

*Abbott II* (1990) shifted education reform from a predominance of pedagogy and access to reform based on equity funding. The Court’s decision was to remedy the achievement gap by providing an equitable and stable funding source for public education in poor school districts. The Court determined that this achievement gap was due to social disadvantages. Urban school districts accounted for 35% of poor students and 43% of minority students (Ravitch, 1998).

The theory supporting equity funding suggests that students in poorer school districts will have the same educational opportunity as students in affluent districts. Unfortunately, educational issues are not that clear cut. As Anyon (2005) argued, there are policy links among public education, land-use restrictions, and economic development. Economic development and land-use policies have an effect on public education. These effects have created pockets of poor communities, affecting these communities’ ability to provide quality education. As federal and state policies shifted economic power from urban centers to suburbia, a concentration of the poor remained without economic or political power (Anyon, 2005; Lake, 1981). In other words, the

disparities created in affluent school districts could not be explained by funding issues alone.

Race and racism have been shown to be predictors of student success. The effects of public policy and the pervasiveness of racism in society have helped to create poor communities (Anyon, 2005; Bowles & Gintis, 2007). Because public school attendance is geographically defined, policies, norms, and customs that help to shape the demographics of neighborhoods also shape the make-up of the schools. New Jersey has been described as one of the most segregated states in the country (Lee et al., 2008; Logan, Stowell, & Oakley, 2002). Segregation of neighborhoods in essence segregates schools, denying equal access and equal opportunity (Keen, 2004; Kirp et al., 1995; Squires et al., 2002). While arguing over funding, access, opportunity and the effectiveness of the *Abbott* decisions, most *Abbott* districts continued to perform poorly, giving rise to other solutions to effect education reform and close the achievement gap.

The Court recognized in its *Abbott V* (1998) decision the many problems facing poor school districts and ruled that the State had to institute whole-school reform, full-day kindergarten, and half-day pre-school in the *Abbott* school districts. Whole-school reform is a comprehensive school reform initiative that seeks to address multiple issues that impede operational and learning aspects of schooling. In addition, *Abbott V* required the State to provide funding in support of facilities, a school construct management program, accountability and technology programs to assist in implementing whole-school reform, alternative education programs, a program for secondary students to move from school to college or work, and a way for individual schools to adopt supplemental education programs. The *Court* accepted the State's plan to implement whole-school

reform through the Success for All (SFA) model. The Education Law Center, acting for the plaintiff, argued that the State's whole-school plan did not go far enough in implementing the Court's earlier decisions. Justice Handler, writing for a unanimous Court, noted the zero-based budgeting of SFA but accepted the argument by the State that other funds would be available as the State implemented *Abbott IV* (1998), which stipulates parity funding.

Quint, Zhu, Balu, Rappaport, and DeLaurentis (2015) found that SFA is an effective program for improving literacy skills for students with low literacy skills. They also noted an increase in per-pupil cost of \$277 to implement SFA, which is at odds zero-based budgeting. Quint et al. argued that implementation problems with SFA are usually associated with the added cost.

According to Sweetland (2008), two aspects of whole-school reform are building an education community and supporting learning. Justice Handler noted in the *Abbott V* opinion:

Many of the intractable problems that plague city schools are deeply rooted in the poverty, unemployment, crime, racism, and human despair that pervade the neighborhoods around them. Too often, teachers and administrators are asked to solve problems that the public and its leaders in statehouses and city halls have lacked the will and courage to tackle. (Education Law Center, *Abbott v. Burke*)

Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) argued that a part of the whole-school reform should address systemic racism that is embedded in education policies designed to close the achievement gap between minority and White students. They argued that "what many in education fail to realize is that education inequalities between minority and Whites are no accident" (p. 2).



### ***Abbott* School Districts**

*Abbott* school districts represent the 31 lowest-performing school districts in New Jersey. *Abbott v. Burke* established that the State has a responsibility to provide equity funding to struggling school districts at the level of more affluent districts (NJDOE, 2007). Originally, 28 schools districts were designated as *Abbott* districts; this was later expanded to 31 districts. *Abbott* school districts represent not only the lowest-performing districts but also low-income districts. (The *Abbott* School District designation was discontinued by the State in 2011, but this study continues to use the designation for references and identification of these districts.)

After more than 3 decades of court intervention, the *Abbott* school districts continue to show poor performance in student achievement (Gold, 2007). Opponents of *Abbott* argued that the reason these districts are failing is mismanagement, an indication that the achievement gap is due to incompetence on the part of public school officials. This shifts the blame from equity in resources to mismanagement. Indicative in this is that *Abbott* district funding is adequate to meet educational obligations and the reallocation is unnecessary and unwise. If the issue is one of incompetence and mismanagement, allocating more funding will not close the achievement gap. *Abbott* school districts have underperformed for years; five (Camden, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton) were put under state control (Teske, Schneider, Buckley, & Clark, 2000). Even with continued threats of state takeover, most *Abbott* districts continue to do poorly on statewide assessment tests. Within the discussion and reform debate the question is raised, why has the *Abbott* decision been unsuccessful in most districts in bringing about change in student outcomes?

The implementation and success of *Abbott* has been fraught with many challenges. Proponents claim that *Abbott* has not been successful in closing the achievement gap because it has never been fully funded by the state legislature. *Abbott* school districts represent less than 1% of the public school districts in New Jersey and are located in communities without enough political “clout” in the state legislature. The Court agreed with the underfunding argument in later decisions that required the State to set aside more funding for *Abbott* districts. From a critical approach, the continued underfunding of *Abbott* districts is best explored as a conflict over resources.

Marxist theory, a form of conflict theory, views conflict between social classes as a struggle over resources—not only who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell, 1950) but who is deserving. Resistance to the *Abbott* decisions has been based on the argument that *Abbott* districts do not deserve more resources to be wasted on failed school systems. The effect of the argument, although not explicitly about race, adversely affects minority school districts. Conflict theory does not capture nuances of race and racism. Because race is a strong predictor of student outcomes, critical race theory (CRT) may better explain resistance to the *Abbott* decisions.

CRT was first utilized as a theory to understand inequities in the legal system (Powers, 2007). Gloria Ladson-Billings began to apply CRT to education as a means to understand the continuing education gap between minority and White students (Epstein, 2012). CRT analyzes the relationship of educational inequalities and race and racism in society. Because race and racism is so much a part of society, race and racism must be examined to understand the issues of education and other social institutions (Epstein, 2012). Goodman (1999) argued that the prescription for reaching students in

underperforming districts is not likely to have a great effect because the prescription is designed to reproduce existing inequalities. Fischer (2003) argued that policy makers in essence serve as gatekeepers for the power elites and that their policies ultimately reinforce existing social constructs. Advocates of critical pedagogy call for different curricula for diverse students (Goodman, 1999).

### **New Jersey Education Reform Initiatives**

One of the criticisms of education reform is that new education initiatives are instituted and implemented every few years. Noted in education initiatives is the fact that trial studies may show significance but results have been shown to be difficult to reproduce on a large scale. New Jersey, like many states, has tried numerous education initiatives to improve student outcome and performance, such as course standards, quality assurance, and school choice. Many of these education initiatives have been unsuccessful in large-scale implementation. Reform in New Jersey has continued to advocate neoliberal and neoconservative education principles

### **Core Curriculum Content Standards**

New Jersey was one of the first states to address the challenge put forward by the *Nation at Risk* report. The CCCS, a forerunner of CCSS, were established in 1996. The core standards are indicative of neoconservative education initiatives that introduce more monitoring, regulating, and control over public education by the state or federal governments. The core curriculum was designed to establish a common statewide curriculum. The irony of this initiative is that public schools have been called government schools in this one-size-fit-all configuration but there is extensive educational diversity in the public school systems among states and within states. The

impetus of the common core acknowledges this diversity and argues that there is a difference in curriculum content across states that makes comparisons of achievement difficult to comprehend.

New Jersey is one of 45 states, plus the District of Columbia, to have adopted the CCSS, doing so in 2010. According to the website, CCSS are designed to standardize the learning process within and among states in order to compete globally. This coincides with the mandate set forth in the *Nation at Risk* report that makes education a means instead of an end.

### **NJSAC**

The NJSAC is a performance measurement system that focuses on external classroom control and considers the management of the district as a system. NJSAC is an example of NPM principles that focus on management techniques, assessment, and measures. The stated objective of NJSAC is to provide technical assistance to struggling school districts; it is a self-administered monitoring system. The system helps New Jersey to administer federal legislation such as NCLB. Critics have argued that NJSAC works against urban school districts and have noted that charters school are exempt from the regulations.

NJSAC measures school district performance in five categories. The performance categories are similar to performance indicators and benchmarks used in the private sector. From this perspective, it could be argued that NJSAC considers all school districts equal because the districts are judged by the same standards, which indicates that the inputs should also be equal. A negative rating is based on poor management. NJSAC from this perspective is designed to improve management to

increase district performance. Kloby (2007) noted that critics have raised concerns about the ability of NJQSAC to improve underperforming school districts. A business model management system measures performance by its output in relationship to its inputs. Using a management model to improve schools suggests that underperformance is caused by mismanagement. For this to be true, funding, environment, and student ability would have to be equal across school districts.

### **School Choice**

School choice in New Jersey has been implemented through two choice programs: interdistrict school transfers (IDSTs) and charter schools. More focus has been given to charter schools than to district or school transfers. From a policy standpoint, choice establishes a dual education system that is disconnected from and in direct competition with the public schools. School and district transfers do not achieve the policy initiative of separation from the public school authority.

The IDST program allows students to transfer to another school district if their district chronically underperforms. This transfer policy is a prominent feature in NCLB. Research shows that many parents in struggling school districts forgo this option. The policies established to administer this program are restrictive. Districts must enroll in the program to receive students from other districts. Receiving districts must be located within 20 miles of the sending districts and the social/ethnic makeup of the district must be within 1% of the community's social/ethnic makeup. Research from Michigan and Minnesota shows that the closer an outlying school district is to an urban district, the less likely it will open itself to receive students under this plan. In 2013, the State announced that it had doubled the number of available seats for IDST. Even this number of

available seats constituted only 0.6% of the public school population. From the perspective of a competitive catalyst, the available seats created through IDSTs do not meet the threshold to initiate a competitive environment.

### **Charter Schools**

A charter school is a public school that operates independently of the district board of education under a charter granted by the Commissioner. Once the charter is approved and established, the school is managed by a board of trustees with status as a public agent authorized by the State Board of Education to supervise and control the school. A charter school is a corporate entity with all the powers needed to carry out its charter program. (NJAC 6A:11-1.2)

Charter schools in New Jersey, as in other states, are public schools, autonomous to the local school board. In New Jersey, charter schools are under the jurisdiction of the NJDOE and the New Jersey State School Board. The schools are governed by boards of trustees and the board members are considered agents of the state. In order to establish a charter school, an entity must receive a charter from the NJDOE. The initial charter is issued for 5 years and may be withdrawn or not renewed by the state. An assumption is made that, because the charter can be withdrawn or not renewed by NJDOE, charter schools are held more accountable than public schools. A consistent complaint about public schools is that they lack accountability (Savas, 2000). Savas argued that it is difficult to institute change in the public school system.

New Jersey instituted a charter school program as part of its public education policy to provide alternatives to traditional public schools. New Jersey charter school legislation designates the Commissioner of Education as the sole authorizer of charter schools (NJAC 6A:11). (An authorizer is the person or organization who is sanctioned to issue a charter to operate a charter school.) Unlike New Jersey, most states have multiple charter school authorizers. Research has shown a correlation between the type of

authorizer and student outcomes (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2010). States that have multiple authorizers are more likely to see improvement in student outcomes.

According to the New Jersey Charter School Act, the purpose of establishing a charter school program is to promote accountability and innovation, improve students' outcomes, offer more school choice to parents, and provide more teaching opportunities. This is consistent with current literature. One of New Jersey's stated objectives for the creation of the charter school programs is to promote innovation. New Jersey, like many other states, offered innovation as a way to improve traditional public schools and as a rationale for creating a charter program. It was reasoned that the charter school would create new learning and teaching models; however, as noted earlier, charter schools produce very little innovation for classrooms (Chi & Welner, 2008; C. Lubienski, 2004).

In the district selected for this research study, there is very little interaction between the charter schools and the local school district, nor is there a mechanism from the state perspective for transference of knowledge and skills that would improve teaching and learning. The lack of innovation in educational teaching methods is due to risk aversion by charter school administrators (C. Lubienski, 2004) and opponents argue that innovation has become secondary to competition (Chi & Welner, 2008). Some research studies measuring the effect of charter schools on student achievement have shown no significant differences (Bifulco et al., 2009; Cullen, Jacob, & Levitt, 2005).

A second aspect of charter schools focuses on providing alternatives to traditional public schools. This aspect of charter school legislation sees public schools as failing a particular segment of the school population. Charter schools offer a way to provide quality education in underperforming school districts.

A third aspect of the charter school legislation is to reduce bureaucratic control. The proponents of choice contend that market devices will radically change education, arguing that school administrators are hampered by burdensome regulations that hinder their ability to improve their schools.

The New Jersey Charter Schools Act states that charter schools are

open to all students on a space available basis and shall not discriminate in its admission policies or practices on the basis of intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, status as a handicapped person, proficiency in the English language, or any other basis that would be illegal if used by a school district; however, a charter school may limit admission to a particular grade level or to areas of concentration of the school, such as mathematics, science, or the arts. A charter school may establish reasonable criteria to evaluate prospective students which shall be outlined in the school's charter. (N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-7)

When there are more applicants than spaces available, students are selected via a lottery system. Because of the limited number of spaces available, the majority of parents have no choice as to what school their children attend. Considering the limited number of available spaces in charter schools, choice may be unattainable for many *Abbott* district parents. Choice advocates see the lack of space as a problem in creating real reform in public education. Any data derived from charter schools' impact on public education are invalid because market forces were not given a chance to effect change (Savas, 2000).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the nature of education reform in New Jersey. Education reform in New Jersey is marked by progress, neoconservative, and neoliberal education policies. *Abbott*, NJQSAC, and charter schools represent different approaches to closing the achievement gap between poor and rich school districts.



*Abbott* represents progressive education that sought to expand educational access and opportunities. The decision noted economic and social disadvantages of underperforming urban school districts. Yet, the implementation of the *Abbott* decision in most *Abbott* districts did not close the achievement gap. Supporters of *Abbott* argued that the program was never adequately funded and thus that the remedies that *Abbott* sought to address never came to fruition. Gold (2007) contended that the designation of *Abbott* districts acknowledged that these districts were distinctly different from other school districts in New Jersey but claimed that equity funding was allocated to these districts to make them equal to other districts. Gold (2007) noted that the outcome harkens back to the racially segregated education policy of “separate but equal.” Opponents of the *Abbott* decision argued that the issue was not inadequate funding but incompetency and mismanagement. The *Abbott* decision, its later iterations, and the resistance to full implementation of the court’s ruling served as the major battle over urban education reform in New Jersey. The introduction of charter schools shifted the public school reform debate from equity to governance.

The inability of the *Abbott* policies to make significant improvement in student outcomes helped to frame the arguments for NJQSAC and charter schools. NJQSAC and charter schools represent a move away from the progressive education movement, relying on greater state control (neoconservatism) and market principles (neoliberalism).

NJQSAC sought to establish a mechanism to measure district performance in five categories, but many opponents contend that NJQSAC is disadvantageous to urban and poor school districts. NJQSAC in its application rewards merit, which favors affluent school districts. Merit invokes ideals of hard work; it is implied that low performance is

caused by a lack of effort. School districts that fall below performance benchmarks may be sanctioned with a state takeover. Opponents argue that NJQSAC has not led to a significant improvement but has caused more harm to already struggling school districts.

Charter school advocates argue for less state involvement and regulations in exchange for better performance. The principle behind charter schools, at least in urban areas, is to loosen strict regulations and policy so schools can be innovative and responsive in meeting the needs of the community and provide a mechanism to bring accountability and better student outcomes. The rationale for this autonomy is that rules and regulation that govern public education make the system inefficient and ineffective (Ravitch, 2010). Gold (2007) contended that charter schools in New Jersey have done very little to close the achievement gap. His assessment of the failure to implement change was based on two factors: racism in the education reform policies and resistance by district and school administrators.

For low-performing school districts to succeed in closing the achievement gap may require more than just increased funding, more state control, or a change in school governance. If one considers the educational experience as informal as well as formal, it is reasonable to suggest that a different pedagogy may be required. *Different* is suggested not to imply that poor students be taught differently from other children; rather, it is suggested that these poor districts have to do something different from what they have been doing. Proponents on both sides of the reform debate must critically assess whether the policies and regulations that govern education reform in New Jersey are effective in the need for change in urban school districts.

A shift from an overreliance on the state may be required to create what functional theorists would suggest is a moral shared value (Sadovnik, 2007). The remedies (*Abbott* districts and charter schools) offered for underperforming urban school districts are based on different values in government and governance. What may be required is a pedagogic shift on the part of all actors—parents, teachers, students, administrators, local civic leaders, local government leaders, and school and district administrators—to build an education community that supports learning (Sweetland, 2008). What is being suggested here is not only a new pedagogy but a new shared moral culture in support of education, especially in vulnerable communities. The difference in approaches for education reform has been based on differences in beliefs and ideologies; it has not established a moral shared culture.

## CHAPTER 6: ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT INTERPRETATIONS

I'm a public school product and I love the public school teachers that helped to lay the foundation in my life for being able to get to this point in my career. I believe in a strong public education system, and a well-funded one. But at some point there has to be parity. There has to be parity between what's happening in the real world and what's happening in the public sector world. (Christie, 2010, para. 12)

In Chapter 6 the interpretation of the archival documents is presented. The charter is divided into four sections. The first section gives an overview of the techniques used to construct the interpretation. The second section discusses the archival documents and education reform. In the third section, beginning with Foucault's dividing practice, the interpretation is presented. This is followed by a summary of the findings in the fourth section.

### Archival Documents

The analysis of the archival documents and the comments from the survey was conducted using the methodology presented by Gee in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (2005). The discursive analysis model utilizes coding of words and phrases within context and situations to discover meaning. Gee suggested for discourse analysis the use of the "seven building blocks" of discourse: significance, identities, relationship, politics, connections, systems, and knowledge. Gee argued that language is constructed using these building blocks. Gee recommended the use of four language tools in conjunction with the seven building blocks: social language, discourse, intertextuality, and conversation. It is important to explain these tools of language, taken from Gee (2005, p. 20):

Social language is the language one uses depending on the social setting. The type and style of language is situational. One's language, the words in which one uses is dependent on the social environment and the role that inhabit at that time.

So that one's speech will differ from the home and office and differs from supervisor to subordinate; parent to child; co-worker to co-worker; siblings to siblings; etc.

Discourse is the use of language and one's persona given the situation. The situation is impacted with symbols, values, and habitus that affects one's behavior and action given the situation.

Intertextuality is the use of written or spoken words of others that refer to other written or spoken words that give meaning to the situation. This represents the relying on of word to making meaning that is understood by those in conversation. For intertextuality to take place, there needs to be a shared meaning of these represented words.

Conversation is the interplay of social conversations that gives meaning to the situation.

The analysis was used to discover meaning within the education reform discourse.

Relevant to the analysis is the discourse of decision makers. In this perspective there are multiple education reform discourses. Discourse analysis goes beyond language; it considers relevance of "discursive formation" in a system of conduct in a given situation (Fischer, 2003). As one is socialized to behave according to status, socialization, and family, these roles are reinforced by one's built reality. Words and positions have different meanings within different contexts (Gee, 2005). Discursive analysis is concerned with reality of the actor (Fischer, 2003). The discourse of educators and district administrators should differ from that of state policy makers in their school choice discourse. The alternatives and behaviors offered by the district personnel are part of the larger dialogue of what Gee described as "Big D" discourse. In other words, people are socialized to play their parts according to the reality in which they were indoctrinated.

The analysis of archival documents relied heavily on Foucault's discursive analysis techniques and Gee's seven building blocks of discourse and four language tools to give meaning to the text. To prepare the texts for analysis, they were first explored for

keywords and themes. This was accomplished by importing the documents into NVivo and performing a word analysis (Appendix A). The word analysis counted the frequency of a given word in the text. The parameters set for the word analysis identified words that contained five or more letters; this was done to control for conjunctions, articles, and prepositions in the text.

To form a working theory of keywords and emerging themes, an analysis was first performed on the press releases. The rationale for this action was based on the idea that press releases act as “documented ongoing discourse” of charter schools and public education reform from the state perspective. Keywords and themes emerging from the aggregate of the word frequencies of the press releases were compared to keywords and emerging themes from the other source documents. This process was used to determine whether the “ongoing discourse” represented by the press releases coincided with the discourse contained in the state’s education statutes and policies.

A discursive analysis considers the context in which language is used. From a Foucauldian perspective, it seeks to define meaning from context of power. This involves understanding the tools used to exert and maintain power, such as conflict and knowledge. This perspective is similar to Gee’s building blocks of discourse that help to contextualize language into meaning. Foucault argued that conflict has been conflated into dialogue (or discourse) because of the violent connotation of conflict (Foucault, Rabinow, & Faubion, 1997). In other words, conflict is played out in discourse and that discourse is a form and use of power. For Gee, to give meaning to discourse, one would have to frame it in the proper situation or context; for example, language used in a political context has different meaning from language used in a system context.

To interpret the texts, consideration was given to what context of discourse (seven building blocks) in which to place the texts. To enhance interpretation, some texts were examined in multiple contexts. To further assist in the analysis, the language tools were used by posing four questions to the texts: (a) How are the words used in the setting? (b) What symbols, gestures, and nonspoken communications are used? (c) How are other texts, ideas, and thoughts invoked? and (d) What is the interplay of the use of language within the conversation? What knowledge is deemed important and whom does it support? What symbols are employed to solicit support?

### **Press Releases**

The analysis also considered use of power. The review covered press releases from 2011 and 2012. Within this timeframe were 200 press releases that focused on public education, school funding, and school choice. The objective of the press releases was to notify the public and interested parties about public education issues. The press releases are housed on NJDOE website and in the state's databases. Only press releases found on the website were included in the analysis. The press releases operate in conjunction with NJDOE website that houses articles, reports, and data to support school choice. Featured on the NJDOE website is the Governor's Education Agenda. The website also provides links to national school choice organizations and data. The press releases provide the arguments to support charter schools and school choice as a policy debate and highlight school choice in practice to draw comparisons between traditional public schools and charter schools. The press releases argued that school choice provides better educational opportunities for students who attend school in underperforming school districts.

Every student in New Jersey deserves a choice of where they attend school, not only to ensure that no child is assigned to a failing school, but also so that families can select a school that gives their child the best opportunity for success. (Christie, 2012, para. 3)

The development of high quality charter schools is one way we are expanding public school options and improving student achievement for our students in underserved communities. We firmly believe that it is a privilege to operate a school in New Jersey, and as an authorizer we are committed to holding schools to high standards through our approval process and accountability measures. We believe the schools approved today will provide our students and families with excellent educational opportunities. (Cerf, 2013, para. 3)

The press releases served two purposes related to public administration. First, they served as a form of open government; second, they provided information to citizens and parents. Intuitive in school choice is access to information to make an informed decision. The information is used to decide to send one's child to a charter school or to a public school. The press releases also have links to NJDOE websites where citizens and parents can explore materials related to school choice and charter schools.

Individuals could sign up to receive the press releases by email and be linked to supporting documents. Newspaper reports on the education announcements helped to disseminate the Governor's or NJDOE messages and objectives. They sought to inform, frame the debate, and win supporters to the Governor's education agenda. The press releases were used to reframe the concept of a public school. They were also used to link citizens to the state's initiatives and to communicate the direction in which public education was headed. The objective of the press releases was to articulate to the public the necessity and effectiveness of the Governor's educational agenda. The press releases conveyed the Governor's education agenda and served both political and policy objectives.



Since Governor Christie took office, we have committed to being unapologetically impatient when students do not have access to the high quality school options that they deserve. In addition to working to improve all public schools by ensuring that every classroom has an outstanding educator and implementing the new Common Core State Standards aligned with college and career readiness, we are also committed to expanding the number of high-quality charter schools so that every student can choose the school option that is the best fit for them. The applications we approved today have demonstrated a strong educational program and the capacity to implement that program, in addition to articulating a clearly defined need for the school in their specific community. (Cerf, 2012a, para. 2)

The NJDOE is set in a political environment; the Commissioner serves at the pleasure of the Governor and is charged with implementing the Governor's educational agenda. Even though the Commissioner has Constitutional and regulatory responsibilities, the general agenda is set by the Governor. The press releases were used to convey the Governor's and NJDOE educational policies. They alerted people and the press about educational policy announcements by the Governor or NJDOE. The press releases highlighted changes in policy, policy accomplishments, and successful educational outcomes.

A word analysis was conducted on the NJDOE press releases. The texts were viewed using Gee's political and connection contexts. Politically, the press releases pushed the Governor's education agenda that sought to highlight charter schools and rationalize their importance in public education. The connection context considered the connection of the press releases and the Governor's education agenda. The press releases were a form of power in that NJDOE used its position to support the Governor's education agenda that espouses a particular discourse (Foucault et al., 1997).

"We are entering a new age of school accountability in New Jersey, one that frees high-performing schools from state interference and defines a stronger investment from the state to turn around pockets of persistent academic failure," said Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf. "No longer can we stand on the sidelines when our schools are not preparing students in New Jersey to graduate from high school

ready for college and a career. There is a moral imperative for the state to take a stronger role in persistently failing schools and to work collaboratively with communities and districts to give all students a fair chance.” (Cerf, 2012b, para. 2)

The analysis suggested that the press releases were used to establish a positive view of charter schools and disassociate public schools from government as the best way to improve public education in urban school districts. The press releases often spoke of the Governor’s objective of expanding school choice and the approval of charter school applications that would expand educational opportunities for students in underperforming schools and districts. This favorable viewpoint was supported and reinforced by omission of any acknowledgement of charter school closures (revocations, nonrenewals, suspensions) or any reference that showed charter schools in a negative light. A list of charter schools that were no longer in operations was found on the NJDOE website but no details were given concerning the closures, suspensions, or nonrenewals (NJDOE, 2013).

The overall theme of the press releases painted a positive image of charter schools in relationship to underperformance by urban school districts. However, the press releases mentioned the quality of service delivery only eight times, six of which focused on budgeting and finance, not on curriculum or classroom learning. The underpinning of the argument for charter schools was the need to provide better education choices in underperforming school districts, which correlates to majority minority school districts serving Black and Latino students. The interpretation was that charter schools were a prescription for urban school districts but not for suburban districts. This was a reoccurring theme that was prevalent in other archival documents.

Dividing public school districts into those that needed intervention and those that did not was a form of power, what Foucault (1982) called *dividing practices*. Urban and suburban, high-performing and low-performing, and public schools and charter schools as classifications denote norm and deviance. Repeatedly, this dividing practice appeared in the press releases:

Furthering the Christie Administration's commitment to increasing and improving educational opportunities for children and families, the New Jersey Department of Education announced that more than 6,000 families will be able to select the public school option that best fits their children's needs in the 2013-2014 school year. This fall, with the addition of 40 newly participating districts, 2,787 additional seats are projected to be available through the Interdistrict Choice program. In total, the program, which allows students the option of attending a public school outside their district of residence at no cost to their parents, will offer 6,144 seats across 107 school districts. There are currently 3,357 students in the program in the 2012-2013 school year. (NJDOE, 2012c, para.1)

Other key themes emerging from the press releases were *performance*, *evaluation*, and *governance* (boards). Performance was the most recurrent theme and achievement was the least recurrent theme. The terms *performance* and *achievement* were used interchangeably at times but, in fact, performance is based on scores, whereas achievement is based on the individual. Issues relating to performance were more than 2.5 times more likely than achievement to be discussed in the press releases.

"We approach these results today with both confidence and humility. Overall, New Jersey students continue to perform at extremely high levels overall, and with few exceptions the statewide numbers continue to inch upwards," said Acting Commissioner Cerf. "However, we have a persistent achievement gap that leaves our economically disadvantaged, African American, and Hispanic students far behind their peers. It is a disgraceful legacy in New Jersey that leaves tens of thousands of students behind each year—and has for decades. We must be honest with ourselves and our communities about this achievement gap, and be impatient and relentless in doing everything we can to close it once and for all." (NJDOE, 2012f, para. 2)

In the releases the idea of *competition* was hardly mentioned and *innovation* was mentioned only once. When competition or competitive were mentioned, it was not in the context of public and charter school competing against each other, but schools competing for funds.

“We developed these awards to shine a spotlight on the needs of our students with disabilities, and to make sure that we as educators work tirelessly to improve their performance,” said Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf. “By highlighting 12 successful districts last year and developing a competitive grant for next school year, we hope to learn from those that are most successful and scale their practices across the state.” (NJDOE, 2012d, para. 2)

For any innovation developed by charter schools to influence public schools, there would need to be a mechanism for collaboration; however, competition decreases collaboration. There was not found in NJDOE press releases within this time frame any effort to build collaborative relationships between public schools and charter schools.

Table 1 shows the aggregate word frequencies in the reviewed press releases.

Table 1

*Aggregate Frequencies of Words in Press Releases From the New Jersey Department of Education, 2011-2012*

Word	Rate of occurrence	Word	Rate of occurrence
Adequate	.02	Achievement	.29
Access	.09	Accountable	.31
Abbott	.05	Advantage	.01
Allocation	.01	Performance	.77
Improvement	.55	Evaluation	.65
Review	.59	Boards	.69
Funding	.18	Grades	.18
Testing	.06	Competition	.02

### **Education Transformation Review, NJQSAC, and Charter Schools**

Public education reform in New Jersey is focused on NJQSAC and the charter school program. These reforms are indicative of the coming together of neoconservative and neoliberal education policies that espouse accountability and competition. The analyses of NJQSAC and charter school legislations were conducted in conjunction with the Education Transformation Task Force report. The Task Force was commissioned by Governor Christie and charged with making recommendations for changes to education policies and legislation. The objective of the Task Force was to review public education initiatives to determine whether application of the policies was aligned with meeting the objective of improving public education (NJDOE, 2012a). The Task Force made recommendations for improving both NJQSAC and the charter school program. The recommendations were attempts to address lapses in the legislation design, implementation, or application that hindered public school improvement and to synthesize NJQSAC and charter school legislation. Noted in the Task Force recommendations was alignment of NJQSAC and the federally mandated NCLB. NCLB strengthened both neoliberal and neoconservative education policy objectives by instituting strict standards and a supportive nature of school choice and charter schools. Some of the sanctions in NCLB made it easier to establish alternative education systems, such as charter schools.

The Task Force noted that student outcomes correlated to zip codes, arguing that the objective to close the achievement gap and improve student outcomes had been unachievable in too many communities across the state (NJDOE, 2012a). A summation of the Task Force mission was the recommendation to take a close look at education

reform policy objectives to determine which ones were working, which ones were not working, and why.

The narrative of the Task Force report identified problems with the process of NJQSAC and the failure of NJQSAC to achieve its objectives in some school districts.

One of the conclusions of the Task Force was that NJQSAC had “failed to drive district improvement”:

A high-quality district accountability system would effectively improve the performance of our schools. QSAC has not done so. Only a quarter of New Jersey school superintendents agree that the Department helps them integrate the results of QSAC into their districts’ overall strategies for improving student achievement. QSAC provides little actionable information to the Department, so developing State assistance programs based on QSAC-identified deficiencies is difficult. This harms districts and the Department. Districts typically see QSAC as punitive, providing a wagging finger without a helping hand. The State receives alarming reports but isn’t certain how to respond: Nearly three dozen districts have received QSAC scores below 50% in at least one DPR, yet the State has never sought to use its legal authority under QSAC to engineer a partial State takeover. (NJDOE, 2012a, p. 16)

The solution presented by the Task Force report worked into the narrative of the state’s discourse for education reform. Two points are offered to support this observation. One of the recommendations of the Task Force was that school districts classified by NJQSAC as high performers should have less monitoring from the state. The Task Force argued that student outcome is predicated on zip code, indicating that students in poor communities were more like to be in underperforming districts. Districts that the report recommended to receive less state monitoring were more likely to be affluent school districts. While the task force noted the ineffectiveness of NJQSAC in achieving its goals, it argued for more state sanctions for underperforming school districts, as measured by NJQSAC. The report also recommended creation of more

charters, with changes in the charter legislation for districts and schools that were underperformers.

## **NJSAC**

Three documents were used for the analysis of NJSAC: (a) New Jersey State Statutes (N.J.S.A.18A:7A-3 et seq.); (b) the NJAC (6A:30); and (c) NJDOE policy for implementing NJSAC (Librera, 2004).

The purpose of NJSAC is to assess the ability of school districts to provide a “thorough and efficient” education and to align New Jersey’s student assessment and performance with federal standards (NJAC 6A:30-1.1). The educational problem that NJSAC seeks to address is how to ensure that school districts have the capacity to provide public education. As in most states, there is much variance in the quality of curriculum, proficiency, funding, and competency among school districts in New Jersey.

The legislation that authorized NJSAC established five categories of performance that the state deemed necessary to provide adequate public education: instruction and program, operations, fiscal management, personnel, and government. In essence, the statute established a threshold of adequate performance to administer a public school district effectively. Each public school district is required to report annually on its performance in these critical categories.

The regulation sought to establish the role of NJDOE in working with local school districts that do not meet proficiency in these categories. It established the terms by which NJDOE can intervene in the local school district, at what level, and the expectation of the local school district’s cooperation and responsibilities to improve proficiency in the critical categories. The state established an 80% threshold to meet

proficiency in any category. The legislation established the 80% threshold as high performing. If a school district meets the 80% threshold in all five categories, it is considered a high-performing school district. If a district falls below the 80% threshold in any category, it is required by NJDOE to develop a District Improvement Plan.

NJQSAC was designed to build the capacity of school districts that do not meet the 80% threshold. It established a working relationship between NJDOE and local school districts to improve their performance in specified categories. Crucial in this was the state's responsibility to provide a thorough and efficient education. NJQSAC seeks to hold local school districts accountable for performance. This approach addresses capacity and competency.

Each school district must submit an annual District Performance Review to NJDOE. NJDOE established key performance indicators for each category (NJAC 6A:30-2.2) by which to measure the district's "performance and capacity" in meeting statewide objectives. A comprehensive review of each school district is completed every 3 years; however, after a general evaluation of the annual District Performance Review, the Commissioner may decide that a more thorough review is warranted for districts designated by NCLB standards as "in need of improvement" (NJAC 6A:30-3.4).

NJQSAC permits NJDOE to intervene in a local school district under certain conditions: when a district has not submitted a District Review Plan or is below 50% in any category. NJDOE may take partial or full control of a school district. A part of NJDOE criteria for intervening is dependent on the local school district's "capacity to ensure that the public school district will provide a thorough and efficient education to its



students and an unwillingness or inability on the part of the public school district to develop such local capacity without State intervention” (NJAC 6A:30-6.2 (a) 5.)

According to NJQSAC, the objective of NJDOE taking partial or full control of a local school district is to build the local district’s capacity to meet the 80% thresholds that cannot be achieved without the state’s intervention. Noted in NJQSAC as it relates to public and charter schools is that charter schools are exempt from these regulations (NJAC 6A:30-1.1 9 c).

The Education Transformation Task Force reviewed an assortment of education policies and programs, but this study is concerned only with the portion that affects NJQSAC and charter schools. The analysis of the Task Force report was conducted using Foucault’s power theory and Gee’s politics context. The analysis noted an emphasis on discourse of NJQSAC and charter schools. The report aligned with the discourse that favors NJQSAC and charter schools objectives, in that the finding of shortcomings of the education initiatives were assessed to promote and parallel the Governor’s education reform initiative. On many occasions the Governor was highly critical of public education and very supportive of charter schools.

Identified in the state’s assessment of the reform initiatives were the failures of NJQSAC to achieve its desired objectives, placing blame on individual school districts, while the failures of the charter school program were blamed on limitations of policies and legislation. In this scenario, public schools were accused of “gaming the system,” while charter schools’ ineffectiveness was attributed to inadequate policies (NJDOE, 2011b). The Task Force’s initial report recommended legislative changes: one to correct unethical behavior and the other to correct inadequate policy.

One of the recommendations of the Task Force was to end the practice of district of residence (NJAC 6A:11-2.1m) for charter schools. The regulation requires that the charter school be placed in the district from which it will draw students. The effect of this change would allow charter schools to be located outside of the host district. The implication for such a change would overburden the host district's transportation budget and allow charter schools to be placed in suburban areas, branding themselves as suburban schools to attract students from the host district. This recommendation was omitted from the final report but it illustrates favoritism toward charter schools. The concept of favoritism carries over into the critique of NJQSAC.

One of the rationales for implementing NJQSAC was enforcement of NCLB. NCLB contains strong regulations for schools that chronically underperform on standardized tests and fail to make adequate yearly progress. NCLB supports and encourages converting chronically underperforming public schools into charter schools. In its assessment of NJQSAC, the Task Force acknowledged that NJQSAC had been ineffective in improving student outcomes. NJQSAC, like NCLB, is intended to bring accountability to public education. NCLB and NJQSAC hold public schools solely responsible for student outcomes, maintaining that student outcomes are the result of school environment and classroom learning, without considering the noneducational variables that affect learning, such as family.

### **Foucault's Dividing Practice**

A critical analysis of the legislation from a power construct reveals that NJQSAC fits into Foucault's dividing practice concept. The dividing practice is a form of power that facilitates people and groups to separate themselves from each other. The effect of

this dividing in essence creates norm and deviant groups, as seen in a number of New Jersey education policies. Schools that fit the norm (non-*Abbott*, high-performing, suburban, charter) are rewarded, while deviant schools (*Abbott*, low-performing, urban, public) are sanctioned. In this study, *deviant* is used to describe not the norm but different. Urban school districts do not fit the normative description of most public school districts in New Jersey. They are more likely to be majority minority, poorer, and lower performing. The dividing practice can be argued as a conceptual construct of NJQSAC. The opening premise of the statute states the following:

Under this new system, the type and level of oversight and technical assistance and support envisioned can best be described as a performance continuum. At one end of the continuum is the recognition of those school districts that have demonstrated effective practices in all areas and meet all state standards, thus requiring no intervention. At the opposite end of the continuum are those school districts that have consistently not met state standards, have not shown improvement after administrative and/or instructional remedies have been offered and implemented, warrant substantial improvement and require maximum intervention (partial or full state control) and the placement of a Highly Skilled Professional (HSP) to oversee one or more of those activities. (Librera, 2004, p. ii)

The above NJQSAC excerpt is typical of Foucault's dividing practice, which focuses on the idea of performance continuum. In the performance continuum there is recognition of high-performance school districts in comparison to low-performance school districts. The high-performance school districts meet all of the expectations that the state has established; low-performance school districts are those districts that have met none of the state requirements. The implication is that high performance is due to merit, earned through hard work. This implies that low performance is a result of lack of effort. This approach favors and rewards affluent school districts that have the ability to properly fund and enhance their public education.

Nowhere in the documents was there mention of key performance indicators. The documents used in the analysis of NJQSAC mentioned high-performing districts but did not identify the measures, nor did they indicate what measures were already established or the empirical evidence supporting the validity of the measures. Instead, they established sanctions for school districts that do not meet the measures, as well as a formal protocol to acknowledge high-performing school districts (N.J.S.A 18A:7A-14a; 18A:7A-14b; 18A:7A-14e). Normally, legislation is written broadly to allow the executive branch to set policy in administering the law; in this case, acknowledgement seems to enshrine in law the idea of the continuum of school performance and a division between high-performing and low-performing school districts.

The high-performing school districts are acknowledged for their success but the low-performing school districts may be sanctioned, with the possibility of losing partial or complete control of their school districts. One could ask, what is the baseline of the performance? Were high-performing school districts used to set the standard of quality performance? If this is the stated purpose of the statute, it could be argued that the baseline of performance measures was established by districts that were meeting the standards before implementation of NJQSAC. If so, then the districts that were seen as underperforming were at the start noncompliant and the legislation established a clear mechanism to sanction these deviant districts through state takeover (Librera, 2004).

State intervention in some form can be triggered when a school district falls below 80% of the targets in one or more categories (NJAC 6A:30-5.2). This 80% threshold seems to favor affluent school districts with more resources and fewer needy students. The threshold at which the state can seize some control over a district is met

when a district does not meet 50% of the targets in at least one of the categories and the state may take complete control if the district fails to meet 50% of the targets in all five categories (NJAC 6A:30-5.3). Districts that have been taken over by the state tend to have few resources and needier students.

When the state takes partial or complete control of a district, the state's agent supersedes the local school board's authority. This is a suspension of democratic rule in these districts. The school boards in these districts must defer to the state's agent and their policies and decisions may be overridden. The discourse surrounding takeover and suspension of democratic rule argues that these districts lack the necessary skills and expertise to manage a public school district effectively. The solution is to bring in technocrats to govern the district (without the consent of the people).

NJQSAC focuses on the technical aspects of operating a school district. This approach fits the discourse of urban education in that the school district's failures are presumed to be caused by mismanagement, especially fiscal mismanagement (Bethell, 2000). The tenor of the discourse argues that urban districts do not need any more funding; they just need to manage better the funds that they have. This argument was used to challenge *Abbott* schools funding (Davis, 2008). Improvement is not based on increasing student achievement but on management tools and benchmarks set by NJDOE.

The key to interpreting the discourse of NJQSAC is to investigate the language used to formulate the policy. Fischer (2003) argued that formation of policy and the language used serve to protect the advantaged group. Howarth defined *discourse* as a historical system of meaning (Fischer, 2003). Meaning then defines truth and truth is dependent on who is interpreting the problem (Fischer, 2003). The problem of public

education interpreted by the advantaged group defined the problem of urban schools' mismanagement and incompetency. The standards to be applied to the problem focus on technocracy and meritocracy that are reflective of the advantaged group. The narrative of the advantaged group is that they got to where they are by hard work. The discourse is then reflective of this point of view. The standard (truth) is based on the advantaged group (high-performance school districts). If NJQSAC standards were based on school districts that have been designated as high-performing school districts, the standards are protective of the advantaged group and do not put their position in jeopardy. By the same measure, underperforming school districts are now held to a higher standard which they do not possess the capacity to meet, which reinforces the narrative of mismanagement and incompetency. Bringing these districts into compliance requires intervention from the state through a takeover. The resources allocated to make improvements allow for hiring consultants ("highly skilled professionals") from the advantaged group or their agent to address the issue of mismanagement. Districts where the state had partial or complete control continued to underperform on standardized tests.

### **Intertextuality of Discourse**

Language and meaning are tools used to create discourse. Howarth's historical system of meaning is illuminated through intertextuality—the use of other text to give meaning to text. The hearer/reader must be familiar with the "used text" for meaning to be conveyed. The use of intertextuality conveys symbolism, culture, class, and status that are social cues that develop through discourse. Consider the following passage:

Under NJQSAC, public school districts are evaluated in five key component areas of school district effectiveness—instruction and program, personnel, fiscal management, operations and governance—to determine the extent to which public

school districts are providing a thorough and efficient education. (NJAC, 6A:30, Evaluation of the Performance of School Districts)

The above passage is the guise in which the state seeks to hold public schools accountable. The passage evoked the “thorough and efficient” phrase. The phrase refers to the New Jersey Constitution and elevates the language and objectives of NJQSAC to a higher idea of fairness through symbolic use of and reference to the state’s Constitution and elevates the advantaged group’s discourse on urban education and its solutions. But Foucault argued that “language and dialogue” are substitutes for conflict (Foucault et al., 1997). In other words, there is a war of words that strikes a symbolic call of superior ideas, methods, and intentions.

The guise of the NJQSAC is to improve low-performing school district through state intervention; this intervention and suspension of democratic rule are permissible because of coded language where “low performing” may be equated to minority districts. The statute may also be argued as sanctioning the devolution of state powers, in which local school districts are held accountable for providing “a thorough and efficient education.” Providing a “thorough and efficient education” is the responsibility of the state; although the state may delegate its *authority*, it cannot delegate its *responsibility*. In the education reform discourse, underperforming school districts are held *accountable* for their performance but, according to the New Jersey State Constitution, the *responsibility* rests solely in the state power. Ultimately, the state is responsible for failing schools, not the local districts.

These underperforming districts are in economically depressed communities with a high minority population and, as Anyon (1995), Coleman et al. (1966), and Apple (2001) argued, race and poverty are predictors of low student outcomes. The ruling by

the Court in *Abbott v. Burke* recognized the state's responsibility. Economic and political policies that help to create these high-poverty minority communities are the fault not of the school district but of the state, which, through NJQSAC, holds them accountable for predictable outcomes.

Epstein (2012), Anyon (2005), and Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that, until racism and the effects of racism are addressed, the achievement gap will persist. Anyon noted that, in order to address systemic problems in underperforming district adequately, the state must take a whole-school approach that looks at each student's needs and how those needs affect their learning. Research has shown that race/racism, crime, and poverty have negative effects on learning; any education reform program that does not address these problems will not yield an effective positive change.

### **The Charter Schools in New Jersey Report and the Performance Framework**

In trying to understand the state's discourse concerning charter schools, two documents proved to be useful. The documents deal with how the state assesses charter schools. The first document, the *Charter Schools in New Jersey Report*, deals with the state's overview of performance by charter schools. The second document, the *Performance Framework*, serves as a performance measurement framework by which to evaluate charter schools.

### **Charter Schools in New Jersey Report**

The *Charter Schools in New Jersey Report* was an attempt to measure performance by charter schools in comparison to schools in their host district. The report was intended to supply parents with information to inform their decision to send their child to a charter school or to their district school. As noted earlier, information is critical



in decision making. Because charter schools are usually limited to students in the host district, a report that compares the school with the host districts' schools should be a valuable piece of information. The findings of the report showed that charter schools were outperforming their host district's schools on standardized statewide testing. The report showed a directional trend that supported the idea that charter schools were more effective at educating students than were public schools. The report sought to dispel claims that charter schools dissuade special needs students from attending, which may give pause in consideration of the differences in student performance.

The *Charter Schools in New Jersey Report* stated that charter schools outperformed their host districts on the NJASK (NJDOE, 2011a). The report offered no analysis as to whether the differences in test scores were due to a charter school effect nor did it compare charter schools to the state average or to high-performing public school districts. The report provided little in statistical findings, offering only anecdotal evidence of the success of charter schools. The report is clearly different in content and analysis from a national report that found very little evidence that charter schools increased performance by their students (Gleason & Silverberg, 2010). Further analysis of the report showed that public schools served significantly more disabled and ESL students who took the test. What effect would controlling for disabled and ESL students have on differences in test scores? The report supported positive charter effects while offering rationales for deficiencies. The potential problem with this report is that the state may be seen as being supportive of one public education institution over another. This led to NJDOE being accused of favoring charter schools over public schools.

An accompanying document compared charter school data with state averages (NJDOE, 2011c). An analysis of the data, illustrated in Table 2, shows that the gap between charter schools and their host districts was smaller than the gap between charter schools and state averages. Even the title of the report, *Living Up to Expectations: Charter Schools in New Jersey Outperforming District Schools*, adds to the discourse.

Table 2

*Aggregate Charter School Differences in Test Scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK), 2010*

Grade	Mathematics		Language Arts	
	Host districts	State average	Host districts	State average
3	4.01	-16.35	7.06	-13.16
4	6.20	-15.16	9.90	-13.77
5	7.05	-14.90	12.10	-13.52
6	8.62	-14.51	10.13	-11.39
7	9.36	-15.00	12.39	-11.39
8	11.89	-16.25	13.19	-10.37

Source: *Living Up to Expectations: Charter Schools in New Jersey Outperforming District Schools*, by New Jersey Department of Education, 2011c, Trenton, NJ: Author.

When closely examined, the data from the 2010 report showed that the differences in test scores between charter schools and public school were closer in mathematics than in language arts. This was a predictable finding because mathematics learning usually takes place in the school. The opposite is true for language. Language

takes place in many places and is affected by family and social environments. For example, one could say that mathematics scores were more affected by school and language arts scores were more affected by family environment. Yet the gap between the charter schools and the state average was smaller for language arts than for mathematics. This may indicate that the differences in test scores between charter schools and the host districts could have had more to do with families than with charter schools. The achievement gap in language arts is greater than the achievement gap for mathematics. Murnane, Sawhill, and Snow (2012) suggested that the literacy gap between Black and White students has remained relatively consistent over the past 40 years, while the mathematics gap has decreased. Their analysis suggested that “non-school factors” (p. 10) may play a role in the literacy gap. The way the State presented the data may lead people to conclude that the achievement gap between charter schools and public schools happens because charter schools are better at educating than public schools. More analysis is needed before such conclusions may be drawn.

The presentation of data in such a way can be construed as an attempt to control the discourse and policy agenda and foster a belief that charter schools are more effective than public schools. The announcement of the data was accompanied by a press release that portrayed charter schools as the answer to fixing public education and bringing innovation to public schools (NJDOE, 2011d).

### **Performance Framework**

The rationale for positive assessment of charter schools was articulated in the *Performance Framework* (NJDOE, 2012e), which served as the charter school counterpart to NJQSAC. The *Performance Framework* established how success would

be measured for charter schools (NJDOE, 2012e) by suggesting that charter schools be measured against state standards and in comparison to their host district public schools. That is to say, charter schools could be considered successful if they outperformed their host district schools on statewide testing. This rationale for success correlates with the position of the state presented in the *Charter School Report* that argued the success of charter schools given their performance in comparison to host district schools. For public schools, successful performance is dependent on an established measure; success can be achieved by the schools and districts only when a certain percentage of students are proficient on standardized tests.

This two-tier evaluation of charter schools allows for performance success to be achieved even if the charter school's performance does not meet success in relations to state performance indicators. This gives charter schools an advantage over their host districts and explains why the state released such a positive evaluation of charter schools without a thorough analysis of the data. According to Carnoy et al. (2005), charter schools are usually not closed for poor academic performance. The *Performance Framework* can be viewed as more accommodating in evaluation of success for charter schools than NJQSAC was for public schools. The evaluation criteria for charter schools were aligned with the Governor's agenda that sought to champion charter schools over public schools.

To develop an interpretation of the performance and evaluation of charter schools, one should consider the politics and significance of performance and how it is used in the conversation that gives meaning to the situation. What are the politics surrounding the discourse and how does this discourse support the politics of charter schools and school

choice? The interpretation of these documents was framed by politics and significance. From a political perspective, whose agenda is advanced by this definition of performance? By having a different definition of performance and success, charter schools are deemed successful; however, if these same test scores were applied to traditional public schools, they would be considered as underperforming. Within the discourse of charter schools, they are presented as public schools; if they are public schools, why are they held to a different standard? It could be argued that the achievement gap has changed very little in urban school districts, regardless of whether the student attends a traditional public school or a charter school. Reports such as these tend to hide the cost/benefit analysis of the charter school program.

The *Performance Framework Report* was also analyzed through the significance perspective. Significance was approached in two ways. First, it was viewed as empirical data. Are the findings and interpretation of data significant? Does the difference in test scores exceed what would have happened by chance? If so, is this difference caused by a charter school effect? The problem arising from the report was that the report did not address these two questions but drew its conclusions without presenting critical empirical analysis. The second concept of significance asked, How is the report significant to the charter school debate and discourse? Using a Foucauldian approach, the dialogue of the report objectified the rationale of charter schools. The state argued that the analysis and findings justified establishment of charter schools in these underperforming districts.

The report accounted for the success of charter schools as a superior method of delivering public education while at the same time declaring in a second document that more analysis was needed (NJDOE, 2011c). It is interesting that the report found on

NJDOE website is an interim report; however, a final report has not been released in the ensuing 3 years (at least on the website).

The importance of this in the discussion centers on the idea of information.

Within the concept of school choice, parents are presented options and they choose from available options based on information to make informed decisions (Rosenbloom, 2010), while at the same time the state acknowledges that charter school students are predominately serving economically disadvantaged students (NJDOE, 2011a), which has been a predictor of student outcome (Coleman et al., 1966). What justification can the state offer that charter schools will improve student outcomes if it does not address race and social economic status? Accordingly, would a parent make a different choice to send a child to a charter school, given this information?

Foucauldians see this as a use of power in support of a particular discourse. In this situation, the dividing practice can once again be employed. Urban school districts are divided between public school parents and charter school parents. It could be argued from the research advocacy perspective that the state crafted the analysis to support a certain agenda, despite flawed methodology. The *Performance Framework* methodology supported the success of charter schools so long as they outperformed their host districts. An individual charter school was measured against the aggregate score of the district. The theory of the *Performance Framework* offered no methodology to explore its findings. That is to say, no proof was offered that student outcomes were caused by the charter school or that the difference in outcomes was significant.

According to the *Performance Framework*, charter schools are considered successful as long as they outperform the host district schools on statewide testing. In

this analogy, the public school may not have met the standards set forth by NJQSAC and may be labeled as underperforming while the charter school that underperformed is labeled as successful according to the *Performance Framework*. Considering the latitude that charter schools are given by being exempt from NJQSAC and the definition of success in the *Performance Framework* and the *Charter School Report*, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a bias favoring charter schools.

### **District Narrative**

Another source of analysis is the district narrative. Each school district submits a narrative of the district that becomes a part of the annual school report. The selected school district narrative emphasized the importance of human capital, the global economy, and sharing the NJDOE vision of school reform focused on mathematics and language arts proficiency (NJDOE, 2014). Unique in this narrative was that it did not offer an alternative narrative to the cause of the district's low performance but rather restated the state's objectives. This is counterintuitive to Foucault's theory of resistance. This narrative is aligned with NPM theory's emphasis on a business approach in which education is a means to an end and fits the discourse of NJQSAC. One could argue that the district is responding more to NJQSAC and the sanctions that it can levy than to competition from charter schools. The excerpts below illustrate the application of NPM principle in public education.

The development of human capital for the city and region will be realized when all students are able to participate fully in the global economy as productive citizens. (Anonymous target school district, 2014, para. 2)

While we celebrate our academic achievements, the majority of our students have not met the state's proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, and each cohort graduation rate is low. Consistent with the New Jersey State Department of Education's vision for reform, the [study target school district] is poised to

turning around its lowest performing schools and increasing academic performance in all schools throughout the district. (Anonymous target school district, 2014, para. 3)

### **Discussion of Archival Document Data**

The overall findings from the review of archival documents support the idea that education reform is directed at urban school districts. While supporting the conceptual framework of education reform, the findings showed that the reform continues in the status quo and has the propensity to divert funds and public education from democratic control. The reform initiatives were punitive in nature and supported the idea of meritocracy, which favored affluent school districts that have the resources to meet education requirements without the social issues known to stagnate learning that are often present in poor urban school districts.

Proponents of school choice argued that those who oppose charter schools and other public education reform initiative are self-interested individuals who put their needs above those of the children (C. Lubieski, 2006b). The counterargument to this narrative is that public school personnel's resistance to the charter school movement is due to fundamental disagreement on how to serve urban school districts. In essence, the disagreement is a conflict over public education resources and perpetuation of insufficient funding for urban school districts. Charter schools can be portrayed as a way of peeling support from urban school districts through dividing practice, where those who support charter school choose to adhere to the advantaged group narrative on urban education.

Why has NJQSAC not been effective in improving student outcomes? To answer this question, it is important to consider the legislation's design. Does the design of



NJSAC make the desired goals unachievable? The conceptual framework of NJSAC is derived from NPM theory in its ability to quantify productivity; in essence, NJSAC is a performance measurement system but it does not purport principles of a performance measurement system. There are three essential principles for establishing a performance measurement system (Parmenter, 2010; Poister, 2008). The first objective is to solicit input at all levels of the organization. Allowing employees to establish the key indicators and measures gives importance and buy-in to the initiative. Second, performance measurement systems must be supported by the executive leadership of the organization. Insufficient support from the executive leadership will cause failure in the design, implementation, and/or operation of the system. Third, the organization must involve external stakeholders in the process. External stakeholders provide valuable feedback in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the system. NJSAC has used a top-down approach that has not built sufficient support from local school districts and parents who are directly affected by the legislation.

An effective performance measurement system relies on timely data. Data are collected daily, weekly, or monthly and used to provide timely information to management (Parmenter, 2010; Poister, 2008). The NJSAC report is completed annually by all public school districts. According to Parmenter (2010) and Poister (2008), accessing data on an annual basis is an ineffective management tool. As a performance measurement system, NJSAC lacks specificity of reaching organizational goals because no two districts (or, for that matter, no two schools) have the same problems. The implication in providing such a performance measurement system is to contend that public education is a singular public education system. This would be akin

to viewing the auto industry as a singular organization and requiring that Ford and General Motors use the same tool to evaluate performance. The regulations that govern NJQSAC suggest that school districts may not possess the capacity or competency to meet the state's key performance indicators and that the solution is to provide these districts with expertise to increase their capacity and competency. In essence, NJQSAC is a management tool. Poister (2008) and Parmenter (2010) noted that, for a performance measurement system to be an effective management tool, data must be timely to make the necessary managerial corrections. This is in addition to employees' input into the design of the system and measures (Parmenter, 2010; Poister, 2008).

The goal of any performance measurement system is to improve performance through increased productivity or reduced cost. This can be achieved only with constant monitoring of key performance indicators. As noted by the Governor's Task Force on Education, NJQSAC has failed to meet its objectives. The inability of NJQSAC to bring about change may lie in the fact that the system does not possess the acumen for a performance measurement system. NJQSAC is based on rational theory and positivist modeling that all things are measureable and objective (Apple, 2001). Another way to view NJQSAC is through political economy theory that policy and decision making are based on values, beliefs, and ideology (Sackrey, Schneider, & Knoedler, 2005). This theory coincides conceptually with conflict over resources and who is deserving of such resources.

NJQSAC presents itself as a merit-based system but it gives the appearance of unfairness. To explore this idea of unfairness, one should consider one of the stated objectives of the legislation. NJQSAC was charged with enforcing NCLB. There are

similarities in these legislations; neither truly recognizes the difficulties of providing public education in urban environments. These difficulties are the same difficulties that Coleman et al. (1966) discussed nearly 50 years ago and with which the New Jersey Supreme Court agreed in *Abbott v. Burke* (1990). Urban school districts have myriad problems that affluent districts do not have, but NJQSAC holds that all districts are equal and that differences among school districts are managerial issues rather than societal issues. Coleman et al. (1966), Anyon (2005), and Gold (2007) argued that these difficulties have never been fully addressed and that, even worse, public policies have exacerbated them. NJQSAC upholds the equality of public education system outside of management. After years of neglect, urban school districts that had been noted as underperformers are called on to be measured against high-performing school districts.

One of the indices for evaluating school districts' performance is the NJASK. Foucault pointed out that knowledge is also used as a tool of power. NJASK is New Jersey's statewide achievement test, given to third graders through eighth graders each year. In addition, there is a high school examination, usually administered in the 11th grade; passing this test is a requirement for graduation. The statewide test is used to assess student performance. Accordingly, the state establishes what knowledge is deemed acceptable.

Research (Coleman et al., 1966) has shown that poverty and race have a correlated adverse effect on academic achievement. Knowledge in this sense is determined by what indicators or measures are acceptable. School districts that were already successful before implementation of NJQSAC will continue to be successful and those districts that were not successful will continue to be unsuccessful. This analysis

supports the idea of education continuing disparities in society. It may be rationalized that NJQSAC was designed to reinforce stereotypes about urban school districts and maintain the advantage group's social position. From a conflict perspective, it can be reasoned that NJQSAC is a continuation of a conflict over resources and a pushback of the *Abbott* ruling that noted that the achievement gap was mainly due to underfunding. According to NJQSAC, the achievement gap is caused by incompetency and mismanagement of school districts.

Foucauldian theory would suggest that high-stakes testing, charter schools, and NJQSAC are tools of power used to perpetuate the status quo. If this is true, then a market concept for public education will not show any significant change in student outcomes and underperforming districts will continue to underperform. The fact that a charter school is placed in a school district will not establish an education market but, according to Foucauldian theory, will be more likely to give rise to a resistance movement. The premise challenges the idea that charter schools create competition and serve as the catalyst to improve public education in urban school districts. The education reforms offered no acknowledgement of the difficulties of educating vulnerable populations or the myriad social problems that are external to the public school system that have a predicted effect on student outcomes. Two dominant reform initiatives in New Jersey (NJQSAC and charter schools) hold the school district, parents, and students responsible for underperformance. The accusation of underperformance is presented as due to incompetency or indifference (self-interest). One of the recommendations by the Governors' Task Force was not to treat all districts the same. But this recommendation was made as an argument for less regulation of high-performing school districts. New

Jersey's charter school program, supported by NJQSAC and NCLB sanctions, perpetuates the idea of urban school districts' inability to educate. The majority of the host school districts are financially struggling districts in communities with high crime rates and high unemployment. The difficulties of providing education to a vulnerable student population was not given consideration in either initiative; rather, underperforming school districts were held accountable, irrespective of their lack of social, political, and financial capital.

The emerging themes were used to develop the survey items. The survey was designed to measure perceptions of charter schools held by public school officials. Six themes emerged in support of school choice and charter schools: accountability, achievement, fairness, funding, improvement, and performance. Within the archival documents, the emerging themes support urban education reform. How will public school personnel view these themes in their efforts to effect change in their school districts?

### **Accountability**

Who is responsible for students receiving an adequate education? From the perspective of NJQSAC, the schools and school district are responsible for student achievement. The district assessment is measured in five categories. Depending on the score, the district may be sanctioned by the State. From the perspective of school choice, the school and parents are responsible. Because choice considers education as consumption, the provider (school) and the customer (parent) are equally responsible to ensure that the child receives an adequate education.

**Achievement**

Achievement centers on closing the achievement gap between poor and wealthy school districts and is the rationale for the implementation of education reform.

NJQSAC's position is that student achievement is affected by the school's management and operational procedures. School choice policy views that the system is the problem.

Student outcomes will improve if government plays less of a role in providing education.

Achievement for charter schools is to outperform the host district.

**Fairness**

Every student deserves access and opportunity to quality education. The idea of fairness was a part of the catalyst for *Abbott*. School choice and charter school see fairness as giving parents and students education opportunities other than the traditional public schools, especially in underperforming school districts.

**Funding**

The question of funding concerns how to fund education adequately in underperforming school districts. Funding is a contentious issue. For advocates of poor and urban school districts, the issue is a lack of adequate funding. Others argue that the issue is not necessarily more funding but proper management of current funds. A part of the NJQSAC position centers on district financial competency and capacity.

**Improvement**

Improvement is a continual theme, from improvement in student outcomes to improvement in organizational structure.

**Performance**

The issue of performance differs from the issue of improvement. Performance is based on a measure, such as the rating by NJQSAC or the pass rate on NJASK. The idea of performance is that it is used to hold entities accountable—a way for the state to exert control over districts.

## **CHAPTER 7: SURVEY FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the survey findings. The first section of the chapter gives an overview of how the survey was conducted and the demographics of the participants. In the second section a descriptive analysis is presented, along with a discussion of the charter school effect in the target district and perceptions of charter schools and education reform. The third section is a discussion of in-group and between-group differences among respondents. The fourth section is a discussion of the respondent comments and an overview of the survey findings. The survey instrument is presented in Appendix B and survey results are presented in Appendix C.

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to 1,485 persons via email. The initial design called for the survey to be sent by email and/or regular mail. In the approval of the research study, the district requested that no more than three contacts be made, all electronically. Participants could request a mailed survey but none did. The survey was sent to faculty and administrators of each school in the target district. Four emails were returned as undeliverable, 230 surveys were distributed, 33 surveys were excluded because they contained incomplete responses, and 197 response sets were received, for a response rate of 13.3%. The response rate may have been limited by involvement by the teachers union: Union officials advised members not to respond to the survey. After contacting the union president, it was agreed that the union would remain neutral. It is unknown whether the union action persuaded members not to participate or how that affected survey findings. Table 3 shows the schools' faculty population and the sample size. One of the objectives of the survey was to determine



Table 3

*Distribution of the District Sample by School*

School	Population	Sample
1	54	12
2	46	8
3	73	11
4	45	10
5	45	5
6	69	5
7	64	7
8	48	7
9	50	4
10	73	7
11	81	19
12	55	4
13	88	12
14	120	21
15	69	6
16	69	13
17	46	6
18	236	28
19	59	3
20	95	9
Total	1,485	197

whether the findings are generalizable to the district. The distribution of the sample size fits a normal distribution, making the survey findings generalizable to the district.

The survey consisted of 32 items divided into two sections. The first section asked respondents to agree or disagree with a series of statements concerning public education reform. The second section asked for demographic and employment information, such as race, gender, and years in education. Respondents were also given

the opportunity to offer comments. The responses in the comment section were treated like interview responses and were analyzed using discursive analysis.

The survey design led to choice of analyses. Four analyses were used to interpret the survey findings: descriptive, chi-square, correlation, and discursive. The descriptive analysis provided frequency of responses, such as how many respondents strongly agreed with an item or the number of respondents who were Hispanic/Latino. The chi-square nonparametric analysis was used to determine whether differences were significant within and between groups, such as males and females or HQT or non-HQT. The coefficient correlation tested the relationships among responses to survey items to measure the reliability of the survey instrument. Comments were analyzed using discursive analysis. The analysis was conducted using the same protocol when conducting the discursive analysis on the archived documents. The interpretation of the comments helped to give meaning to the survey data.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Descriptive analysis is one of the most-used data analyses. Descriptive data show the frequencies and/or percentages of responses to each survey item. Findings are usually displayed in graphs and tables as frequencies (*f*) for purposes of comparison.

The overall descriptive analysis of the survey responses indicated that the respondents were more likely to be females and teachers and unlikely to be supportive of the education reforms. Nearly 76% of the respondents were female; about 43% were White, 29% were Black, 10% were Hispanic/Latino, 4% were Asian, 5% self-identified as Other, and 7% listed more than one race/ethnicity. The district distribution by gender and race/ethnicity was 74% female, 49.7% White, 37.3% Black, 9.7% Hispanic/Latino,

and 2.8% Asian. Table 4 shows the race/ethnicity of all respondents and of female respondents. The racial/ ethnic make-up of the female respondents was similar to that of all respondents but dissimilar to the population of the district (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Table 4

*Racial/Ethnic Distribution of All Survey Respondents and of Female Survey Respondents*

Race/ethnicity	Total		Female	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Asian	8	4.3	8	5.7
Black	53	28.5	39	27.7
White	78	41.9	59	41.8
Native American	2	1.1	0	0.0
Caribbean	3	1.6	3	2.1
Hispanic/Latino	19	10.2	14	9.9
Self-identified	10	5.4	7	5.0
Multiple	13	7.0	11	7.8
Total	186	100.0	141	100.0

Table 5 shows the distribution of survey respondents by other demographic variables. The majority were females (75.8%) and teachers (77.1%), held HQT certification (81.4%), had attended public schools (83.4%), had been in public education

Table 5

*Distribution of Survey Respondents by Gender and Current Title*

Characteristic and category	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Female	144	75.8
Male	46	24.2
Current title		
Teacher	145	77.1
Other	33	17.6
Counselor	6	3.2
Vice-Principal	2	1.1
Principal	2	1.1
Certification as Highly Qualified Teacher		
Yes	122	81.4
No	23	15.9
Attended public schools		
Yes	121	83.4
No	24	16.6
Years working in public education		
< 1	3	1.6
1 to 3	30	15.9
4 to 7	21	11.1
8 to 14	49	25.9
15 to 20	32	16.9
21 to 25	29	15.3
26 to 30	11	5.8
31 or more	14	7.4
Political affiliation		
Democrat	104	58.1
Republican	22	12.3
Independent	40	22.3
Other	13	7.3

for 8 or more years (71.3%) and reported Democratic political affiliation. Responses from 4 school administrators were not analyzed.

Political affiliation of respondents to the survey differed from that of the host district (New Jersey Department of State, Division of Elections, 2012). Respondents were more likely to be Democrats than all persons living in the host district. This may be an anomaly because in the past two Presidential elections the district voted 88% and 93% for the Democratic candidate (New Jersey Department of State, Division of Elections, 2012). Over half of the registered voters in the districts are not affiliated with a political party.

### **Charter School Effect**

According to the literature review and discursive analysis, opposition to charter schools should develop within the local school district. For this to happen there must be an awareness of the presence of charter schools and the threat that they could pose to traditional public education. To assess respondents' perceptions of the effect of charter schools on the district, two questions were posed: (a) "How much competition has charter schools caused in the district?" and (b) "How much change in the district has been caused by charter schools?" These two questions were designed to measure the awareness of and perceptions of changes due to charter schools in the district. Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated that charter schools had led to extensive competition in the district and 59% indicated that competition had led to changes in the district (Table 6). An analysis showed that respondents who selected *a lot* for both items ( $n = 111$ , 57%) were more likely to favor public education, their responses differed significantly on six survey items, and they were more likely to offer comments at the end of the survey ( $n = 26$ ).

Table 6

*Distribution of Responses to Survey Items About Competition and Changes in the District Associated With Charter Schools*

Question and response	<i>f</i>	%
How much competition has charter schools caused in the district?		
None	2	1.0
A little	13	7.7
Some	67	34.2
A lot	114	58.2
How much change in the district has been caused by charter schools?		
None	6	3.1
A little	15	7.7
Some	59	30.3
A lot	115	59.0

Table 7 shows a comparison between respondents who answered *a lot* to both of the preceding survey items (53%) and the remaining respondents (21%) regarding whether charter schools have a negative effect on public education.

This difference was even more pronounced when the respondents were asked whether charter schools drain resources from public schools. Eighty-two percent of the *a lot* respondents strongly agreed, compared to 48% of the remaining cohort (Table 8).

### **Perceptions**

In this section the responses to survey items that measured perceptions are analyzed. There were 21 items that sought to measure perceptions of school choice, charter schools, and education reform in the selected school district. The survey items

Table 7

*Comparison of Responses Between Those Who Chose A Lot for Items Addressing Negative Effect of Charter Schools on Public Education and the Remaining Respondents*

Response	<i>A Lot</i>		Others	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0	2	1.8
Disagree	3	3.5	16	14.5
Neither agree nor disagree	10	11.8	26	23.6
Agree	27	31.8	43	39.1
Strongly agree	45	52.9	23	20.9
Total	85	100.0	110	100.0

Table 8

*Comparison of Responses Between Those Who Chose A Lot For Items Addressing Charter Schools Draining Resources From Public Schools and Remaining Respondents*

Response	<i>A Lot</i>		Others	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Strongly disagree	0	0	4	3.7
Disagree	0	0	0	0.0
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0	16	14.7
Agree	15	17.6	37	33.9
Strongly agree	70	82.4	52	47.7
Total	85	100	109	100

reported in Table 6 were designed to learn what the participants perceived to be the effects of charter schools on the host school district. The remaining perception items were designed to identify attitudes toward education reform policies and procedures. Indicative in the literature review were the advocacy for and the hyperbolic language use to support or oppose charter schools. Two paired survey items asked respondents to react to a negative criticism of charter schools and public schools. Table 9 shows responses to the statement that charter schools are nondemocratic; 34.6% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement. Table 9 also shows responses to the statement that public schools are a monopoly; 59.6% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed*, 24.4% *neither agreed nor disagreed*, and 16.1% *agreed* or *strongly agreed*.

Table 9

*Responses Reflecting Perceptions of Charter Schools as Nondemocratic and Public Schools as a Monopoly*

Item and response	<i>f</i>	%
Charter schools are nondemocratic.		
Strongly disagree	10	5.2
Disagree	28	14.4
Neither agree nor disagree	89	45.9
Agree	44	22.7
Strongly agree	23	11.9
Total	194	100.0
Public education is a monopoly.		
Strongly disagree	36	18.7
Disagree	79	40.9
Neither agree nor disagree	47	24.4
Agree	26	13.5
Strongly agree	5	2.6
Total	193	100.0



There was a negative correlation between the paired items: Those who *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that charter schools are nondemocratic were more likely to *disagree* or *strongly disagree* that public education is a monopoly. This suggests, as expected, that there was greater support for public schools than for charter schools in the district. But respondents were more likely to disagree with the negative statement about public schools than they were to agree with the negative statement about charter schools. Ninety percent of the respondents *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that public schools are not held accountable for their performance and 89.2% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that charters school drain resources from public schools.

The analysis of the archival documents findings showed favoritism toward neoliberal education reform that supports choice and parents' right to choose. A theory was developed that NJDOE policies favor charter schools over public schools. To test this theory of perception, a series of questions was posed to determine the respondents' perception that NJDOE shows favoritism toward charter schools. Table 10 summarizes the responses to these items regarding perceptions of NJDOE favoritism toward charter schools over public schools. The table shows that 59.9% of the respondents *agreed* that NJDOE favors charter schools over public schools. Also, 55.5% of the respondents *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that charter schools and NJQSAC were designed to strengthen public education and only 24.1% *agreed* that NJQSAC will improve public education. In addition, 74.3% of the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that NJQSAC has caused more harm than good and 73.5% *agreed* that NJQSAC places an unnecessary burden on urban school districts. These findings support the alternative

Table 10

*Responses to Survey Items Testing the Theory That the New Jersey Department of Education Favors Charter Schools Over Public Schools*

Item and response	<i>f</i>	%
Which of the following do you think best describes the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)'s stance towards public schools and charter schools?		
NJDOE favors public schools	30	16.0
NJDOE supports public and charter schools equally	45	24.1
NJDOE favors charter schools	112	59.9
Public education reform such as NJQSAC and charter schools are designed to strength public education.		
Strongly disagreed	46	24.1
Disagreed	60	31.4
Neither agreed nor disagreed	53	27.7
Agreed	28	14.7
Strongly agreed	4	2.1
NJQSAC and NCLB are designed to improve public school performance.		
Strongly disagreed	37	19.4
Disagreed	54	28.3
Neither agreed nor disagreed	54	28.3
Agreed	41	21.5
Strongly agreed	5	2.6
Public education reforms such as NJQSAC and NCLB have caused more harm to public education than good.		
Strongly disagreed	4	2.1
Disagreed	14	7.3
Neither agreed nor disagreed	31	16.2
Agreed	87	45.5
Strongly agreed	55	28.8

Table 10 (Continued)

Item and response	<i>f</i>	%
NJQSAC and NCLB placed an unnecessary burden on urban school districts.		
Strongly disagreed	6	3.2
Disagreed	12	6.3
Neither agreed nor disagreed	32	16.9
Agreed	69	36.5
Strongly agreed	70	37.0
Parents should have more freedom to choose what school their children attend.		
Strongly disagreed	3	1.5
Disagreed	15	7.7
Neither agreed nor disagreed	48	24.6
Agreed	99	50.8
Strongly agreed	30	15.4

narrative developed through the archival documents analyses that education reform policies are unsupportive of tradition public education.

Although the respondents were critical of school choice and charter schools, 66% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that parents should have a greater say in what school their children attend. This may indicate that the respondents favored a greater parental role in public education and may dispel the notion that public school teachers and administrators are self-interested. Parental choice, which supporters of school choice and charter schools argue is the key to creating a competitive education market, may indicate that the respondents objected not to choice but to competition. As the responses suggest, competition has an adverse effect on public education.

## Chi-Square Analysis

The chi-square analysis was used to determine whether the responses to the survey items differed by groups. The use of the Likert-type scale in the design of the survey led to use of the chi-square in the analysis. The chi-square has been shown to be useful in analyzing perceptions and attitudes. There are two tests for chi-square: goodness of fit and test for independence. The goodness of fit tests a sample against a known distribution. This study utilized the test for independence, which determines whether the differences between and within groups are significant. Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) is defined as the sum of the square of differences between what was expected and what was observed (Mantel, 1963). It is equal to the sum of the frequency observed minus the frequency expected squared and divided by the expected and is expressed as

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Chi-square works with two hypotheses: the null hypothesis ( $H_o$ ) and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ).  $H_o$  states that no difference exists between groups except that which would happen by chance;  $H_a$  states that the difference between groups is greater than what would happen by chance.

The first step to determine whether there is a significant difference between groups is to set up a contingency table. The contingency table is similar to the frequency tables, with the addition of summed columns and rows. The groups are listed in the columns and the scores are listed in the rows. To determine the expected score, an expected contingency table is constructed. The expected contingency table contains the same columns and rows but lists the calculated expected scores. If the groups are similar,

then the response distribution should be similar. The expected score is the expected value if the groups are similar. The observed value is the actual observed score. To determine the expected value, multiply the sum of the column and the sum of the row in which the score appears and divide by the sum total.

In the previous section it was reported that a majority (66%) of the respondents agreed that parents should have more freedom to choose what school their children attend. The question arose, Is there a significant difference in scores by race or ethnicity? Two hypotheses were formulated:  $H_o$ : There is no difference in responses among Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics/Latinos, and  $H_a$ : There is a difference in responses among Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics/Latinos.

When considering the survey results, were the findings influenced by other variables? Did the higher percentage of female respondents affect the survey results? Was there a difference in how females and males responded, or did years of experience in public education affect responses? The demographic profile of the respondents was used to test difference among groups. The respondents' experience, social status, or position—what Bourdieu (1977) defined as one's *habitus*—may have affected how they responded to the survey items. The demographics of the respondents show that the respondents were more likely to be White females, which is dissimilar to the district's population.

Important to this study is the design of the survey to predict the perceptions of the community about charter schools by measuring the perceptions of public school personnel. The chi-square was employed to detect any group differences. Before beginning the analysis, some categories were recoded: Years in education was recoded as

$7 \leq$  equals 0 and  $8 \geq$  equals 1; title was recoded as teacher = 1 and all others = 0. To prepare the data for analysis, the demographic items were separated from the perception items. The demographic items were used to divide the respondents into groups (females, teachers, Hispanics/Latinos) and were tested against the perception items.

To perform the chi-square test, each of the 21 perception items was evaluated against the seven demographic categories, resulting in 147 combination group analyses. Group significance was founded in only 13 combinations. The overall interpretation of the data led to the conclusion that there were very few within-group or between-group differences. The chi-square analyses found within-group or between-group differences related to gender, race/ethnicity, political affiliation, years in public education, title, and HQT certification (Table 11).

### **Race/Ethnicity**

Race/ethnicity was recoded to determine whether there were group differences among Black, Hispanic, and White respondents. Because race/ethnicity (and political affiliation) had more than two categories in the group, when group difference was found to be significant, a more detailed analysis was employed to determine the location of the group differences.

Significance across race/ethnicity was found in three survey items: parental choice, charter school governance, and charter school accountability. The in-depth analysis was conducted to determine where the difference occurred. The initial group difference analysis determined that race/ethnicity had a chi-square score of 18.93 ( $df = 8$ ,  $p = .015$ ). The difference was seen between Black and White respondents. Black respondents were more likely to support parental choice ( $p = .002$ ). There was no

Table 11

*Relationships Between Groups and Survey Perception Items*

Group	Perception items
All	<p>How much competition has charter schools caused in the district?</p> <p>How much change in the district has been caused by charter schools?</p> <p>Charter schools have a negative impact on public education</p> <p>Charter schools drain resources from public schools</p>
Race/Ethnicity	<p>Competition from charter schools will help public schools perform better</p>
Gender	<p>Charter schools are better at educating students</p>
Political Affiliation	<p>Parents should have more freedom to choose what school their children attend</p>
Years in Public Education	<p>Charter schools are non-democratic</p>
Title	<p>Charters schools are a more efficient and effective way to provide public education</p>
Highly Qualified Teachers	<p>Charter schools are held more accountable than public schools</p>
Attended Public School	<p>Charter schools have more freedom in hiring and firing faculty and staff</p> <p>Which of the following do you think best describes NJDOE's stance towards public schools and charter schools?.</p> <p>Public education reform such as NJQSAC and charter schools are designed to strength public education</p> <p>Public education reforms such as NJQSAC and NCLB have caused more harm to public education than good.</p> <p>NJQSAC and NCLB placed an unnecessary burden on urban school districts</p> <p>NJQSAC and NCLB are designed to improve public school performance</p> <p>Public education is a monopoly</p> <p>Public education has failed to educate the students under their charge</p> <p>Public education wastes a lot of resources</p> <p>Teachers' unions are against education reform</p> <p>Public schools are not held accountable for their performance</p>

significant difference between Blacks and Hispanics ( $p = .578$ ) nor between Whites and Hispanics ( $p = .339$ ). Even though there was a significant difference between Black and White respondents on this item, overall, both groups supported parental choice.

With respect to charter school governance, differences were found between Black and White respondents ( $p = .000$ ) and between Black and Hispanic respondents ( $p = .020$ ). No difference was found between White and Hispanic respondents. Black respondents were more likely to *strongly agree* that charter schools had more freedom in selection and retention of faculty than were White or Hispanic respondents.

With respect to charter school accountability, there was a significant difference between Black and White respondents ( $p = .005$ ). White respondents were more likely to *strongly disagree* that charter schools are held more accountable than public schools. There was no significant difference between White and Hispanic respondents ( $p = .547$ ) or between Hispanic and Black respondents ( $p = .469$ ).

## **Gender**

One of the concerns about the survey results was the high proportion of female respondents. The overrepresentation of females may have skewed the results of the survey. One survey item was found to be significant across gender: charter schools have more freedom in hiring and firing faculty and staff. Female respondents (44.4%) were more likely than male respondents (19.6%) to agree that charter schools have greater freedom in selecting staff ( $p = .033$ ). Noted in the literature review, freedom from restricted hiring and firing practices would allow charter schools to select more effective teachers and get rid of non-effective teachers (Chubb & Moe, 1990).



### **Political Affiliation**

The discourse of school choice and education reform has been punctuated with political rhetoric. Within the literature, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to support neoconservative and neoliberal education reform initiatives (Kenny, 2005; C. Lubienksi, 2001). Did the respondents' political affiliation serve as a determinant of responses? One question was found to have a significant difference across political affiliation: responses to more parental choice. Upon further analysis, the difference was found between Democrats and those who selected Other as their political affiliation. The differences among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were not significant.

### **Years in Public Education**

Within the literature review, teaching professionals were argued to be self-interested. If this idea of self-interest holds true, teachers and school administrators who have more years invested in public education may feel a greater threat from charter schools. Do years of experience have an effect on the way the respondents answered the survey items? No items showed significant differences across years in public education.

### **Title: Teachers and Non-Teachers**

Did the respondents who were teachers have a different distribution on the survey items from non-teachers? Is the education discourse within the district reflective of the teachers' discourse or is the discourse reflective of the district as a whole? Because teachers accounted for 73% of the respondents, interest arose concerning the distribution of non-teachers. This category was recoded to two groups: teachers and non-teachers. Significant differences between these two groups were found in four survey items. Teachers (49.7%) were more likely than non-teachers (21.4%) to *strongly disagree* that

charters schools are a more efficient and effective way to provide public education.

Teachers (34.9%) were more likely than non-teachers (9.3%) to *strongly disagree* that public education is a monopoly. Non-teachers (27.9%) were more likely than teachers (8.3%) to *agree* or *strongly agree* that public education has failed to educate students. Teachers (80.7%) were more likely than non-teachers (48.9%) to *disagree* or *strongly disagree* that teachers' unions are against education reform.

### **Highly Qualified Teachers**

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), the Highly Qualified certification is a federal designation for teachers who meet certain competencies. This designation is a part of the education reform initiative that is rooted in standards and competencies to improve public education, which is indicative of neoconservative education reform. Did the responses of those who hold the HQT certification differ significantly from the responses of those who do not hold the designation? One survey item showed significant between-group differences in responses: charter schools have a negative impact on public education. Non-HQT respondents (78.3%) were more likely than HQT respondents (67.6%) to *agree* or *strongly agree* that charter schools have a negative impact on public education.

### **Attended Public Schools**

It was expected that a difference would be found depending on whether respondents had attended a public school. Three survey items were found to be significant. Non-public school attendees (71.9%) were more likely than public school attendees (47.1%) to *strongly disagree* that charter schools are held more accountable. Non-public school attendees (43.8%) were more likely than public school attendees

(25.2%) to *strongly agree* that public education reforms such as NJQSAC and NCLB have caused more harm than good to public education. Public school attendees (31.8%) were more likely than non-public school attendees (15.6%) to *agree* or *strongly agree* that public education wastes resources. Non-public attendees were more likely than respondents who attended public schools to support public education on these three survey items.

### **Correlation**

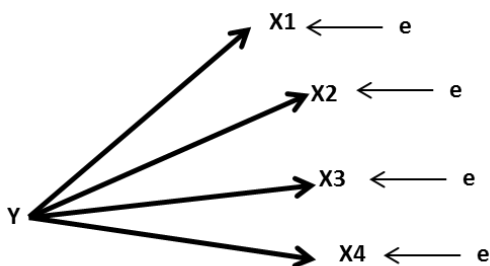
A part of the analysis tested whether there were relationships between individual item scores and the latent variable and to test whether there was a relationship between item scores. This was achieved by conducting a correlation analysis. In Chapter 6 it was noted that an assumption was made that the item scores would be reflective of the latent variable. That is to say, the scores recorded on the survey items would reflect the respondents' perceptions and attitudes about charter schools and other education reform in New Jersey. Evidence of a correlation between item scores increases the probability that the assumption was correct (DeVellis, 1991). An item score is reflective of the true score minus any error in score. The true score is the sum of the score and error.

Correlation shows a relationship between item scores that can be positive or negative. A correlation analysis was completed to test the strength and direction of the relationships between pairs of item scores. Correlation is represented by 0 and 1, with 1 representing a strong relationship and zero representing no relationship. The direction of the relationship ranges from -1 to +1, with -1 representing a strong inverse or negative relationship and +1 representing a strong positive relationship. To test the strength of the survey to measure the latent variable, a correlation analysis was completed. It was

assumed that latent variable X would have a relationship with response Y. Relationships among responses increase the validity of the survey instrument. In the correlation test, only perception items were included in the analysis.

The 21 perception items produced 420 item combinations; results showed that 263 combinations (62.6%) were correlated. The median number of an item correlating to another item was 13; that is to say, an item correlated with 13 other items. The probability value for correlation was set at .05. The high degree of correlation among item scores supported the assumption that item scores were affected by the latent variable. The table in Appendix D shows the correlations among item scores. The strength of the correlation strengthened the validity of the survey instrument in that it appeared to measure what it was designed to measure. The assumption was made that the item scores were homogeneous in that they purported to measure the same latent variable. There was a high degree of correlation among survey items.

To test the reliability of the survey, a coefficient alpha analysis was performed. The reliability of a survey is dependent on its capacity for replication. The score on an item is reflective of the latent variable and the residue (error). The question is, How close does the score represent the true score? Figure 5 shows scores of X1, X2, X3, and X4 being affected by Y (the latent variable) and by e1, e2, e3, and e4. As shown in the figure, there was no connection between Xs or the (e)s. The error represents how far the item score is from the true score. If there is too much variance between the scores and the true scores, the survey would be considered to be unreliable.



*Figure 5.* Relationship between perceptions and attitudes toward school choice (Y) and multiple item scores on the survey (X1 through X4) minus error (e). (Modified from *Scale Development: Theory and Applications*, by R. F. DeVellis, 1991, Newbury Park, CA: Sage)

### **Discursive Analysis of the Comments**

An analysis was conducted on the voluntary comments submitted by survey respondents. The analysis followed the same protocol that was used to analyze the archival documents. Although the comments were submitted by multiple respondents, the comment section was treated as a single text for analysis. The comment analysis was useful in giving meaning to the survey findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Agreement among the comments, survey results, and interpretation of the archival documents would increase the validity of the study. Since the survey was constructed based on interpretation of the archival documents, agreement between the two findings would validate the interpretation.

Before conducting the discursive analysis, a chi-square analysis was completed to test for differences between the survey response comment group and the no comment group. Forty-seven of the 191 respondents (23.9%) provided comments. It was assumed that those who expressed their opinions through comments would have a stronger reaction against school choice, charter schools, and education reform initiatives, but there was very little difference between the comment group and non-comment group.

The test of independence (chi-square) found one item score to be significantly different ( $p < .05$ ). When asked whether charter schools have a negative impact on public education, 55.3% of the respondents in the comment group *strongly agreed*, compared to 28.2% of the non-comment group.

The comments expressing opposition to education reform drew a contrast to the discourse in support of school choice and charter schools. Foucauldian theory argues that resistance to public policy will develop at the local level. Qualitative research allows for different worldview perspectives (Cohen et al., 2000) and the contextualization of behavior (De Vaus, 2001). Education professionals who work in urban school districts are more likely to be affected by such policies. Their view or perception of education reform will be shaped by their experiences in working in an urban school district and by the impact of implementation and application of the reform policies. Their perspective will differ from that of policy makers.

To conduct the analysis, keywords and themes were developed using NVivo word analysis, which counted the frequencies of words appearing in the text. As keywords and themes emerged, they were linked to the responses to the survey items. This allowed for interpretation of the survey beyond a statistic and helped to explain particular survey findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The overall assessment of the comments had to do with unfairness. The idea that New Jersey education reform was unfair to urban school districts appeared in 53% of the text responses. The respondents' ideas of unfairness can be contrasted to the rationale for New Jersey school choice policies and to NJQSAC. Charter schools are supposed to create greater opportunities and equal access to quality education for students in

underperforming school districts (C. Lubienski, Weitzel, et al., 2009). NJQSAC was designed to provide accountability and processes to bring underperforming school districts into compliance (NJAC 6A:30-6.2 (a) 5). Charter school policies and NJQSAC regulations were viewed as unfair, according to the respondents, to the very districts that they were designed to help. This finding supports Fischer's (2003) assertion that policies designed by the advantage group to remedy problems in the disadvantage group will not effectively solve the problems. The majority of the respondents agreed that the NJDOE favors charter schools over public schools and that reform policies have caused more harm than good. One of the participants commented that he or she was not opposed to school choice but was opposed to competition. This comment aligns with the support given to parental choice.

The unfairness centers on three subthemes: loss of resources, returning students, and student selection ("creaming"). It was agreed by the respondents that charter schools as parallel education systems are not held to the same level of accountability as public schools. The unfairness was measured by what was considered to be unfair treatment in the allocation of funding and resources. The respondents agreed that public schools are being asked to do more with less and that their decreased funding is being diverted to charter schools. The respondents noted that charter schools have not closed the achievement gap in urban school districts.

### **Loss of Resources**

The respondents expressed concern that charter schools are taking resources from public school districts.

While the idea of charter schools sounds good the reality for those in urban districts is that they drain resources causing layoffs and building shut downs.

Then they fail after so many years with students coming back to the district below their peers. W[e] have had this happen over and over again. There is also a cutoff date in October that is the number used for funding the next year. After that date the charter schools dump larger numbers of students, often struggling students back into our schools. We [g]et a large influx in Nov-Dec but we will not receive funding for those students the next year. We have had charters fail and had to reopen buildings that were closed and find staff to teach hundreds of students. Charters get to keep the materials and furniture so we also have to scramble to purchase those things even though we have not received funding to provide for these students. (Commenter 1)

Charters pull the active parents from the public school district. I know because my child attends a charter. (Commenter 2)

The above comments are examples of how the respondents viewed education reform policies as having caused more harm than good. But comments from a different perspective show a negative consequence of education reform in the district. Given that the majority of students will remain in public schools, if only because of limited space in charter schools, the effect can be argued as having an adverse effect on public education. Even students who are chosen through the lottery eventually return to the same public school district and, when they return, they may be academically behind other students.

Comments 1 and 2 articulate the drain of resources from a financially struggling school district, along with diminished social capital. In comparison to the discourse of archived documents, the reform objectives are to provide better education opportunities and assist in building the capacity to perform in struggling school districts. One of the capacity builders is to engage parents to be more active in their children's education. A consequence of establishing charter schools in underperforming school districts is that they have drawn active parents out of the district and, as a result, may have diminished social capital and student advocacy in the district. The respondent who wrote Comment 2 articulated this point as a teacher and as a parent whose children attend a charter school.



Another potential consequence of the charter school selection process occurs with students whose parents are not actively engaged in their children's education and are penalized by school choice policies because of the parents' inaction. Valuing charter schools over public schools from the perspective of the respondents facilitated parallel school systems that are separate and unequal. The unfairness theme exposed these contradictions in the charter school movement. The diminished funding caused by students leaving the district schools to attend a charter school has an effect on the district's ability to maintain services. As these districts allocate resources to make improvements, the loss of funding may hinder their ability and capacity to improve. Yet, because they do not show improvement, sanctions may be imposed by the state. An argument can be made that there is a disconnection between the two policies. One policy drains resources from the district and the district is expected to make improvements with fewer resources. The themes support the argument that public education reform is a conflict over public resources: who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell, 1950). For example, one respondent stated,

I support Public Education 100%. I think Charter Schools takes away the resources from Public Schools because when we lose students to Charter Schools, the district loses money from the State. In effect, this causes more budget cuts and layoffs and as a result causes a major setback on resources and loss of teachers that could benefit many of our students' education. (Commenter 3)

Charter schools incorporate the same strategies and techniques that public schools do however, for every charter school that opens up more public school jobs are lost due to decreased student enrollment. This would not be a problem if the State picked up [t]he tab instead of holding the city government accountable for such a large portion of the cost. Ultimately, this shifting of students to the charter schools cost the public school districts millions of dollars which invariably affect jobs across the board. Now those of us who have worked for years in the school system are in jeopardy of losing our jobs or having our pay cut so much that our personal living is hard to maintain. I am not opposed to charters I am opposed to who foots the bill. (Commenter 4)

Commenters 3 and 4 articulate the shifting of public school funding to charter schools. This practice disproportionally affects *Abbott* school districts. According to NJDOE in 2013, 78% of charter schools were located in former *Abbott* districts. It could be rationalized that the public-charter school dichotomy is a zero sum gain. As the number of school providers increased, funding remained flat, allowing for fewer dollars per school. Since funding is tied to student enrollment, public schools lose funding as students leave public schools for charter schools. Respondents agreed that charter schools are “gaming the system” in that they keep students until annual enrollment is assessed and then expel troubled students, who then return to the public schools. Students who are expelled or leave after the annual enrollment count are counted toward the charter school enrollment for the following academic year and funded accordingly. Unfairness is seen in the fact that charter schools can dismiss troubled students and return them to the public schools but public schools cannot use this tactic.

### **Student Selection**

Some respondents discussed the issue of student selection, noting that charter schools avoid or get rid of hard-to-teach students.

Students with behavior problems or those with special needs do not have the choice to choose charter schools. Charter schools do not accept those students, or upon learning about their issues, they are expelled to the local public school. (Commenter 5)

Charter schools have the option of selecting the best students who want to learn and cause no interruption in the educational environment. Thus, they practice “decimation” based on how they can select and discharge problem students after they have received money from the state. Charter schools keep the money and get rid of problem students. If charter schools were held to the same standard as public schools “teaching ALL students” that would level the field. Charter schools should not be able to get rid “put out” difficult students and also teach students with special needs from the entire spectrum. Of course teachers can teach

in charter schools because they are not “charged” with dealing with extreme difficult students. (Commenter 6)

Charter Schools have the right to choose who is welcome in there school based on their previous performance which does not represent an accurate demographic in relation to Public Schools, which must educate. (Commenter 7)

An aspect of this unfairness and negative perception of charter school stems from the belief that charter schools select the best students from the district, even though state law prohibits bias in the selection process. The respondents agreed that the charter schools’ selection process is condoned by the state. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that charter schools are draining resources from the school district and 78.2% of the respondent agreed that charter schools are not held accountable for their action. This perception fits into the narrative that NJDOE favors charter schools. Commenters 5, 6, and 7 captured the sentiments of the respondents’ perceptions of charter school recruitment. They agreed that the charter schools are not held accountable for a student body makeup that is dissimilar to the student body of the school district. This perception aligns with the *Charter School Report* that shows that charter schools serve significantly fewer special education students (NJDOE, 2011c).

### **Returning Students**

The commenters expressed concern about the number of students returning to public schools.

We have watched charter schools come and go in our area. There has been 8 school that have opened and closed within 5 years. Each time we have taken the students back. One year our school had 15 difficult students leave for charter schools. Those same 15were back within a month. (Commenter 8)

Majority of the charter schools that started in . . . NJ has failed. Also charter schools take the cream of the crop an[d] leave students who families don’t care anyway. (Comment 9)

Many charter schools in the district where I work are only open for a few years. They open, pull students and resources from the public schools, cause absolute chaos with public school enrollment and disenrollment, and then close, sending the kids back to public schools. I wonder how many parents would chose a charter school if they knew the true odds of that school being around long enough to fully educate their child. (Comment 10)

There is a perception of a revolving door for students who leave the public school system to attend a charter school, only to return to the public school. For most students, charter schools are their only alternative to public schools. When the charter schools fail, the students are sent back to the host school district. The returning student problem is amplified by the state' discourse that has championed charter schools as an opportunity for a quality educational for many urban students, often citing dismal performance by local school districts. The unfairness can be measured from the student perspective, as well as the district perspective. Promises of better educational opportunities were made to students, who were be returned to the district when the charter school closed.

Milner and Williams (2008), in their assessment of education reform, stressed the importance of “getting it right,” because the consequences of “getting it wrong” have the potential of adversely affecting the student for the rest of his/her life. Comment 10 addresses the limited information that parents are given concerning charter schools in the district. The literature review stressed the importance of information in the competition model and the lack of access to information for poor and minority parents. Information is needed to make rational choices; the press releases that heavily favored a positive image of charter schools and a negative image of urban public schools failed to mention the high number of charter school closures.

The perception of the revolving door supports the idea that school choice and charter schools are reflective of a political ideology rather than educational theories. This

is supportive by the perception that the reform initiatives have been ineffective and may have caused more harm than good. Comment 9 notes that more charter schools in the selected district had closed than had remained opened, which is seen as a continuation of a failed policy. This may be interpreted that behind school choice is a motive other than improving student outcome and educational opportunities.

### **Alternative Discourse**

Teachers' and public school officials' opposition to charter schools is said to be motivated by self-interest, which describe individual market behavior. The alternative discourse is that teachers' behavior is motivated by public service, a noneconomic motivator. The premise that competition will improve public schools is based on economic behavior. Public service motivators establish a discourse and behavior that do not respond to market incentives. The following comments offer an alternative discourse:

Applying corporate business terms like "monopoly" and "waste of resources" to public institutions like schools reveals a sharp misunderstanding of what public schools are for. We take care of, raise, and educate the nation's children. This is not something that should be profit driven. (Comment 11)

Additional school opportunities can be beneficial, such as charter schools, but the current model is doing more harm than good for all schooling systems. (Comment 12)

I think urban education is set up to fail by a vast socio-political system. There is a need for failure in order to maintain a lower class. It is very easy to shine a "new school" concept in front of parents in poverty who feel their child is getting less than a great education because public urban schools have consistent years of failing data. (Comment 13)

The above comments position themselves not as self-serving but as supporting a greater good. The resistance to NJQSAC and charter schools, according to the comments, is based on a perception that the reform policies are driven by ideology

instead of education theory and research. This aligns with ACF, which support policies and a core belief despite empirical evidence that does not support that position.

### **Discussion**

The findings show a perception that the NJDOE favors charter schools over traditional public education. The findings are similar to the interpretation of the archival documents that showed state support for neoliberal education reform that is emphasized by school choice and charter schools. The respondents' views are in contrast to those of state policy makers and in opposition to policies that are perceived to draw resources away from traditional public schools without decreasing the achievement gap between academically troubled schools and successful schools. The opposition to state policies was predicted through the use of discursive analysis. The survey findings do not suggest opposition to charter schools but opposition to charter school policies and the perceived governmental favoritism for charter schools. The analysis of the comments supports the conclusion that respondents perceive unfairness toward public schools in the application of public education reform. This conclusion also aligns with the interpretation of the archival documents.

The majority of the respondents' total item scores are highly supportive of traditional public schools over charter schools. Eighty-one percent of the respondents' total item scores were above the total mean score, indicating opposition to the state's education reform policies. The anomaly in these findings is that 66% of the respondents were supportive of increased parental choice in school selection. This may indicate a rejection of competition but not of choice (Henig, 1994).

The original intent of the choice model was to serve as a collaborative model to the traditional public schools (Medler, 2004). The collaborative model would allow public and charter schools to network, sharing best practices, and is conducive to innovation (Wohlstetter et al., 2003). This is in contrast to the review of the NJDOE press releases that had no mention of collaboration in the time period reviewed and were rarely mentioned in the state statutes and policies that govern charter schools. The deletion of innovation as a rationale for establishing charter schools, as Ravitch (2010) noted, may have had an effect on the perception of charter schools by the teaching profession. Without the promise of innovation and the prospect of improved public schools, charter schools are viewed as competitors that siphon resources from urban school districts (May, 2006).

The survey also measured perceptions of neoconservative education reform initiatives. As noted in the literature review, one of the objectives of neoconservative education reform focuses on teacher competency. The respondents were asked to report their years of experience and whether they held HQT certification. Nearly 78% of the respondents were HQT certified and 71% had 8 or more years of experience in public education.

The HQT certification acknowledges the teacher's competence as defined by the USDOE and within the debate on student performance. Research studies on student performance (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Martin & Shoho, 2000) show that years of experience of the teacher and knowledge competency have an effect on student outcomes. Within the selected district, these two standards have not been shown to have raised student outcomes to the level of *Proficient*, as defined by the

state. Two assumptions can be made. First, these variables do not significantly change student outcomes, at least in the selected school district. Second, these two variables have an effect and, without them, student outcomes could have been worse. While the effect of these two variables has a significant impact on student outcomes, because the overall outcome does not meet state proficiency level, the importance of their impact is not considered in the assessment of the teacher, the school, or the district. From this perspective, the issue of unfairness is raised in that the district, with its myriad problems that affect education, cannot overcome their effect by focusing on education alone. Of note, the respondents perceived NJQSAC positively because it acknowledges these external education issues that have a bearing of education.

The findings of the survey are similar to the findings and interpretation of the archival document analysis. The interpretation found a bias for charter schools and showed that the reform initiatives such as NJQSAC and school choice put an unnecessary burden on urban school districts without addressing the underlying causes of the student achievement gap. One of the objectives of the document analysis was to create an alternative narrative or discourse through the discursive analysis for the rationale and justification for the public education reform initiated in New Jersey. The alternative discourse established that the state and NJDOE initiatives are not designed to improve student outcomes but divert resources from the classroom to corporate test preparation, outside consultants, and charter schools. This is in addition to the devolution of democratic authority within urban school districts.

The document interpretation was tested using the survey. The analysis of the survey responses showed that the respondents agreed that New Jersey's public education



reform was unfair to urban school districts. To give insight to the survey findings, a discursive analysis was completed on the comments provided by the respondents. The comments noted unfairness of reform initiatives and treatment of urban school districts whose policies do not acknowledge the special challenges in the communities of many of these urban districts, all of which has an adverse effect on learning and educating.

## **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents a summary of the research study, implications for public administration, future directions for research on the topic, and limitations and importance of the study.

The study was designed to address two research questions:

RQ1. How does the State of New Jersey view school choice charter schools, and education reform?

RQ2. How do public school personnel's perceptions of school choice and charter schools affect acceptance of charter schools in public school districts?

The purpose of this study was to analyze the use of language in state education reform documents to determine the state's perspective on school choice and education reform and to measure perceptions of school choice and charter schools held by public school personnel. The analysis of archival documents revealed the discourse of education reform from the state's perspective. An assumption was made based on discursive analysis theory that the state's discourse would differ from the discourse held by public school personnel. A survey measured perceptions of charter schools and education reform held by public school personnel. To test the theory that the state's discourse differs from that of public school personnel, a comparison of the state's discourse and the survey findings was conducted. The value of the research study is strengthened if there is agreement between the interpretation of the archival documents and the survey findings. Three theoretical concepts were used to guide the research: discursive analysis, new public management, and advocacy coalition framework

To explore RQ1, a discursive analysis was conducted on archival documents that established education reform policies in New Jersey. The researcher's interpretation of the documents concluded that the reform policies showed a bias against urban school districts. Expectations of urban districts were set at the same level as those for affluent districts. The language used in the documents did not give consideration to New Jersey Supreme Court decisions in *Robinson v. Cahill* or *Abbott II*, which ruled the state responsible for providing an adequate education when local districts do not have the capacity or resources to do so and declared that the education achievement gap was mainly due to persistent underfunding of these districts.

Reflected in the literature review is that the neoliberal and neoconservative education reform policies were not reflective of the current educational, political, or social environment in urban districts. In addition, neoliberal and neoconservative policies ignore research that does not support their core beliefs. The reforms offered through NJQSAC and charter schools are indicative of rejection of the underperformance rationale offered in urban districts. NJQSAC and charter schools shifted the rationale for urban school districts' underperformance from inadequate funding and social inequalities to mismanagement and incompetency within the districts.

Both reform initiatives focus on the administration of the district and schools as ineffective. Reform policies and programs implemented in New Jersey followed the same pathology that labels urban communities as incompetent and lazy. For example, one of the legal arguments that the state made against fully funding the *Abbott II* decision was that it would be a waste of money to give more resources to *Abbott* districts because of incompetency and mismanagement of those districts.

Urban districts come under more scrutiny of reform policies because the policies were designed to have an effect on underperforming (urban) districts. The policies created what Foucault termed *dividing practice*. This is a form of power used to exert control. For NJQSAC, the dividing practice established formal designations for high-performing and low-performing school districts. School choice divides urban districts into public and charter schools, putting them in direct competition with each other. School choice does not call for more money to be spent in the district but allows funding to follow the student. Since the clear majority of charter schools are located in urban districts, they are disproportionately affected by charter school policies.

To address RQ2, a survey was administered to district personnel. The results showed that NJQSAC and charter school policies were not supported in the district. Eighty-one percent of the respondents had a total item score indicating opposition to charter school and education reform. The survey findings correlated with the assumption that the discourse in the school district differed from the state's education reform discourse.

The literature review produced two emerging themes: belief in government and rejection of empirical evidence. These two themes actually stem from the same ideology and were evident in the interpretation and survey findings. Research studies have shown for decades that external issues have an effect on student outcomes, yet the policies do not address these external issues. External variables were excluded because they do not fit into policy makers' core beliefs. If policy makers rationalize that underperformance is due to incompetency, then policies will address incompetency. As noted with ACF, coalition members will not abandon their core beliefs, even when facing empirical

evidence to the contrary. The language use in support of NJQSAC and charter schools followed the argument that what is wrong in underperforming school districts has to do with incompetency and mismanagement.

As discussed in the literature review, neoconservative policies call for more government control. NJQSAC is indicative of the use of government regulations to enforce standards in curriculum, teacher competency, and organizational management. NJQSAC is considered to be merit based, rewarding effort. But within these urban districts, merit or effort do not shield students from “stop and frisk” policies that often target Blacks and Latinos (Goel, Rao, & Shroff, 2015; Tyler & Fagan, 2012) or address the problem that the unemployment rate for Black college graduates is only slightly better than that for White high school graduates (Weller & Field, 2011). Education reform based on merit, without a level playing field, will reward high-performing districts and punish low-performing districts, perpetuating social inequality. For example, the majority of school districts under state control have not seen any significant improvement in student outcomes.

Neoliberalism argues that the government cannot be trusted to institute reform. Charter schools are indicative of the effects of separating public education from government control. Again, the problem is seen as an issue of governance and management. As noted in the comments section of the survey, respondents agreed that charter schools rid themselves of hard-to-teach students; even the state’s own report noted that charter schools have a significantly lower proportion of special needs students.

The second theme is rejection of research evidence that goes against core beliefs about education, government, and governance. Advocacy groups supported research

findings that aligned with predisposed beliefs. AFC theory was used to explain rejection by school choice proponents of NAEP data that showed that charter schools were no better than public schools at educating students.

In academic year 2013-2014, charter schools in the selected district had 9.7% special needs students and 0.4% ESL students, in comparison to 20.3% and 9.7%, respectively, in the host district (NJDOE, 2015), a significant difference in student body makeup ( $p = .000$ ). In the charter school report, the state played down these empirical data that could have had an effect on the difference in test scores. It also plays into the alternative narrative that there is a bias against urban school districts. Nearly 1 in 5 students in the selected district had special needs, compared to less than 1 in 10 in the charter schools. The public schools are 9 times more likely to have students whose first language is other than English. These two issues add to the costs and resources needed to provide an adequate education.

The state's perspective of education reform stands in opposition to the alternative perspective that argues that social variables such as poverty, crime, and economic development have an effect on student outcomes. Green and Anyon (2010), Apple (2001), and Lipman (2011) expressed support for data that show that external educational variables affect public schooling, often along racial and ethnic lines. Witte (2000) expressed concern over using the market to provide public education because the market routinely takes advantage of poor and minority communities. It is these variables that the New Jersey Supreme Court attempted to mitigate in its *Abbott* decisions.

### **Implications for Public Administration**

NPM was supposed to bring better management and performance to government agencies (Maxcy, 2009). Rejection by public school personnel in the selected school district of NPM, school choice, and charter schools suggest that market-based approaches to the delivery of government services may not be compatible. The application of NPM serves an economic need to reduce the cost of government (Maxcy, 2009) but is not based on education principles or public good theory. The notion of using business practices in government agency relies on belief in the superiority of the private sector in relation to government. However, this is not always the case, as news accounts of deceptive business practices are commonplace, ranging from cheating on emission tests to safety violations in the workplace. As noted in Chapter 1, public education has become a microcosm in the debate over government and governance. NPM has been introduced as a way to make bureaucracies more responsive to citizens and to make oversight authorities more efficient and more effective.

According to competition theory, the introduction of new providers into public education would create a spirit of competition that would induce innovation and improved performance (C. Lubienski, 2009; Witte et al., 2007). The responses from the administrators, faculty, and staff were not based on competition. Their responses were based on differences in beliefs and values of government and governance.

Competition as a motivating factor in government may not align with a public service ethic that is motivated by noneconomic factors. Implementation of charter schools has not provided the competitive catalyst to improve student outcomes. Consider the assumption that competition and market-based approaches may not work in a

noncompetitive market, based on the fact that the response to charter schools in the selected district has been a noncompetitive response.

Instinctive in this assessment are the ways government and the private sector are dissimilar. The private sector can be exclusionary in its practices, but government cannot. For example, one of the rationales for the success of private schools is that they are able to select their students. Coleman et al. (1966) and Arum (1996) noted that most of the success of private school students is due to less disruptive behavior. Noted in the survey findings and *Charter Schools in New Jersey* (NJDOE, 2011a), charter schools have a significantly lower rate of hard-to-teach students. If the charter school student body is different from the host district student body (particularly in special needs and non-English-speaking students), the success of charter schools may not be due to organizational structure, curriculum, or teacher competency.

### **Predictability and Future Research**

One of the objectives of this research study was to create a tool to measure perceptions of charter schools. This will be a useful tool in future research, given that perceptions of charter schools help to determine the level of support for them. To achieve this, a baseline score of 70 or above was established to indicate opposition to charter schools. The analyses of the data led to the conclusion that there is a high level of opposition to charter schools in the selected district.

The test for reliability (Cronbach's alpha) showed that the survey was a reliable tool to measure the phenomenon; 80% of the survey items were correlated. However, the value of the survey tool rested in its predictability: Do the perceptions of public school personnel indicate their level of support for charter schools? Equally important, does the



level of charter school support among public school personnel indicate the level of support for charter schools in the community at large? Both questions raise implications for NPM, in that the response to competition is not what is predicted by NPM theory.

The second implication for the predictability of the survey instrument focuses on the relationship between this study and future studies that could measure perception and acceptance of charter school in the larger community. If it can be determined that a positive correlation exists between perceptions of charter schools by public school personnel and the community at large, this will challenge the selection of competition as a tool to improve schools. If the majority of parents in a host district select not to participate in the charter school process, would that be deemed a choice? If choosing *not* to participate equates to competition, then how would placing a charter school in the district spur competition? Although charter schools may not work as a model for competition, they may work in collaborative programming with the school district. As noted in the literature review and in the comment section of the survey, the opposition opposes competition, not the concept of nontraditional education models. This is a recognition that the traditional public education model does not work for every student.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has some limitations. The first limitation is that it was delimited to one urban school district. How similar or dissimilar is the selected school district to other urban school districts in New Jersey and nationally? Would similar results be found in suburban school districts that may have charter schools? The inference of this study cannot yet be determined and its predictability is unknown.

Another limitation of the study is the unanswered question of how similar or dissimilar would responses be between public school personnel who participated in the study and those who did not. About 13% of those who were invited to participate actually participated. An assumption was made that the respondents were representative of the public school personnel population of the selected district. This issue could have been minimized if another sample group from the same population had been asked to participate in the survey and comparisons could have been made between the two sample groups.

Even with the acknowledged limitations, it is reasonable to conclude that the research is transferable to other urban school districts in New Jersey. Since the urban school districts are similar in their socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic makeup, inferences can be drawn based on the findings from the selected school district. The makeup of those who participated in the survey represented the general makeup of the public school personnel population. Even with teachers as the largest segment of those who responded, their representation was proportional to the percentage of teachers in the district, who represent the majority of district employees (NCES, 2014).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study considered perceptions of charter schools and public education reform within an urban school district. In order to expand support for charter schools, it was proposed that competition from charter schools would increase performance by underperforming public school districts. The reality is that, since charter school space is limited, the majority of public school children will remain in public schools. Equity of charter school policy requires some beneficial factors for all students. The reality is that

most charter schools are located in financially struggling, underperforming urban school districts. The state charter school laws allow funding to follow students as they leave public schools, which diverts public school funding. For charter schools not to have a negative impact on the majority of students who remain in public schools, the idea that competition will improve public schools must work. In order to realize improved performance in public schools, competition must exist in the districts. Before it is possible to test the merit of the claim that competition improves public school performance, the concept school competition must be defined and measured. The ability to measure the perception of charter schools and school choice among public school personnel may offer some insight into perceptions of charter schools held by the larger community.

This study takes on greater importance because the state has allocated considerable resources to create an alternative to traditional public education in urban school districts. Milner and Williams (2008) warned of the necessity to test education reform initiatives thoroughly because of potential lasting effects on students' lives.

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## APPENDIX A: WORD FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
abbotts	7	16	0.02	aggressive	10	6	0.01
ability	7	17	0.02	aggressively	12	7	0.01
absolute	8	15	0.02	agreement	9	7	0.01
absolutely	10	5	0.01	aligned	7	18	0.03
academic	8	69	0.1	allison	7	18	0.03
academy	7	27	0.04	allocation	10	6	0.01
accepted	8	5	0.01	allotted	8	5	0.01
accessed	8	5	0.01	allowed	7	5	0.01
accessibility	13	43	0.06	allowing	8	5	0.01
accordance	10	19	0.03	already	7	24	0.03
according	9	19	0.03	alternative	11	5	0.01
accordingly	11	7	0.01	although	8	10	0.01
account	7	13	0.02	ambitious	9	6	0.01
accountability	14	171	0.24	amended	7	14	0.02
accountable	11	29	0.04	amendments	10	7	0.01
accounting	10	5	0.01	america	7	8	0.01
accuracy	8	15	0.02	american	8	22	0.03
accurate	8	9	0.01	analysis	8	14	0.02
accurately	10	6	0.01	analyze	7	5	0.01
achieve	7	18	0.03	announced	9	31	0.04
achievement	11	170	0.24	announces	9	47	0.07
achievenj	9	15	0.02	annually	8	10	0.01
achieving	9	10	0.01	another	7	38	0.05
actionable	10	7	0.01	appellate	9	8	0.01
actions	7	14	0.02	appendix	8	15	0.02
activities	10	43	0.06	applicable	10	32	0.05
actually	8	25	0.04	applicant	9	7	0.01
addition	8	55	0.08	applicants	10	24	0.03
additional	10	99	0.14	application	11	106	0.15
additionally	12	8	0.01	applications	12	65	0.09
address	7	52	0.07	applied	7	7	0.01
addresses	9	10	0.01	applies	7	7	0.01
addressing	10	9	0.01	appoint	7	42	0.06
adequacy	8	6	0.01	appointed	9	75	0.11
adequate	8	8	0.01	appointment	11	19	0.03
adjusted	8	8	0.01	appointments	12	6	0.01
adjustment	10	8	0.01	appreciate	10	10	0.01
administer	10	5	0.01	approach	8	13	0.02
administration	14	151	0.21	approaches	10	7	0.01
administrative	14	58	0.08	appropriate	11	78	0.11
administrator	13	68	0.1	appropriately	13	6	0.01
administrators	14	40	0.06	approval	8	115	0.16
admission	9	5	0.01	approve	7	20	0.03
adopted	7	15	0.02	approved	8	101	0.14
adoption	8	6	0.01	approves	8	13	0.02
advance	7	13	0.02	approving	9	5	0.01
advanced	8	7	0.01	approximately	13	12	0.02
advantages	10	5	0.01	arbitrary	9	5	0.01
adversely	9	6	0.01	archived	8	117	0.17
advisory	8	61	0.09	arguments	9	8	0.01
African	7	19	0.03	aspects	7	5	0.01
afternoon	9	6	0.01	assemblyman	11	30	0.04
agencies	8	92	0.13	assemblywoman	13	52	0.07
aggregate	9	13	0.02	assessing	9	7	0.01
assessment	10	57	0.08	challenge	9	12	0.02
actually	8	25	0.04	applicant	9	7	0.01

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
addition	8	55	0.08	applicants	10	24	0.03
assessments	11	62	0.09	challenges	10	15	0.02
assigned	8	10	0.01	changes	7	54	0.08
assistance	10	74	0.11	chapter	7	40	0.06
assistant	9	24	0.03	charter	7	607	0.86
association	11	18	0.03	charters	8	30	0.04
assurance	9	36	0.05	chartock	8	38	0.05
Atlantic	8	26	0.04	childhood	9	10	0.01
attendance	10	24	0.03	children	8	87	0.12
attended	8	7	0.01	choices	7	6	0.01
attending	9	10	0.01	Christie	8	206	0.29
attention	9	20	0.03	circumstances	13	31	0.04
authority	9	44	0.06	classroom	9	32	0.05
authorized	10	17	0.02	classrooms	10	8	0.01
authorizer	10	72	0.1	clearly	7	13	0.02
authorizers	11	77	0.11	climate	7	7	0.01
authorizing	11	48	0.07	closely	7	12	0.02
autonomy	8	28	0.04	closing	7	20	0.03
available	9	43	0.06	closure	7	8	0.01
average	7	57	0.08	collaboration	13	24	0.03
awarded	7	15	0.02	collaboratively	15	10	0.01
balance	7	8	0.01	collective	10	17	0.02
Barbara	7	17	0.02	college	7	117	0.17
bargaining	10	12	0.02	colleges	8	20	0.03
basically	9	8	0.01	collegiate	10	6	0.01
becomes	7	9	0.01	Colorado	8	7	0.01
beginning	9	23	0.03	combination	11	7	0.01
believe	7	35	0.05	combined	8	6	0.01
believes	8	13	0.02	comment	7	11	0.02
benchmarks	10	14	0.02	comments	8	7	0.01
benefit	7	6	0.01	commissioner	12	499	0.71
bipartisan	10	10	0.01	commitment	10	23	0.03
bringing	8	8	0.01	committed	9	19	0.03
Brunswick	9	10	0.01	committee	9	64	0.09
building	8	22	0.03	communication	13	11	0.02
buildings	9	9	0.01	communities	11	19	0.03
burdensome	10	6	0.01	community	9	158	0.22
Burlington	10	36	0.05	compared	8	12	0.02
business	8	41	0.06	comparisons	11	9	0.01
calculated	10	9	0.01	competition	11	7	0.01
cancelled	9	6	0.01	competitive	11	7	0.01
candidates	10	18	0.03	complete	8	35	0.05
capacity	8	104	0.15	completed	9	14	0.02
capital	7	15	0.02	completing	10	12	0.02
categories	10	11	0.02	completion	10	23	0.03
category	8	9	0.01	compliance	10	23	0.03
centers	7	10	0.01	component	9	33	0.05
century	7	11	0.02	comprehensive	13	117	0.17
certain	7	12	0.02	comprised	9	11	0.02
certainly	9	19	0.03	concerns	8	11	0.02
certificate	11	19	0.03	conclusion	10	13	0.02
certificates	12	11	0.02	conclusions	11	12	0.02
certification	13	14	0.02	condition	9	6	0.01
certified	9	14	0.02	conditions	10	20	0.03
conduct	7	45	0.06	current	7	50	0.07
conducted	9	31	0.04	currently	9	37	0.05
conducting	10	11	0.02	curriculum	10	43	0.06
conference	10	7	0.01	December	8	8	0.01
confident	9	6	0.01	decision	8	55	0.08

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
conflicts	9	6	0.01	decisions	9	29	0.04
educate	7	7	0.01	expanding	9	18	0.03
education	9	750	1.07	expansion	9	15	0.02
educational	11	69	0.1	expectations	12	16	0.02
educator	8	36	0.05	expected	8	13	0.02
educators	9	206	0.29	expedited	9	8	0.01
effective	9	80	0.11	expenditures	12	11	0.02
effectively	11	8	0.01	expense	7	7	0.01
effectiveness	13	146	0.21	experience	10	36	0.05
efficiency	10	10	0.01	experiences	11	16	0.02
efficient	9	33	0.05	expertise	9	9	0.01
efforts	7	24	0.03	experts	7	13	0.02
election	8	6	0.01	extension	9	7	0.01
elementary	10	17	0.02	extensive	9	7	0.01
elements	8	10	0.01	external	8	23	0.03
eligibility	11	7	0.01	facilities	10	25	0.04
eligible	8	50	0.07	facility	8	7	0.01
eliminate	9	7	0.01	factors	7	35	0.05
Elizabeth	9	6	0.01	failing	7	40	0.06
employed	8	9	0.01	failure	7	20	0.03
employees	9	16	0.02	families	8	99	0.14
employment	10	10	0.01	February	8	27	0.04
empower	7	8	0.01	federal	7	80	0.11
encourage	9	13	0.02	feedback	8	42	0.06
engaged	7	7	0.01	fidelity	8	6	0.01
engagement	10	9	0.01	figures	7	9	0.01
English	7	12	0.02	finally	7	18	0.03
enrolled	8	35	0.05	finance	7	8	0.01
enrollment	10	71	0.1	financial	9	29	0.04
ensuring	8	42	0.06	financing	9	6	0.01
entitled	8	7	0.01	findings	8	36	0.05
environment	11	7	0.01	flexibility	11	24	0.03
equally	7	6	0.01	focused	7	15	0.02
especially	10	8	0.01	focuses	7	9	0.01
essentially	11	8	0.01	focusing	8	9	0.01
establish	9	29	0.04	followed	8	9	0.01
established	11	31	0.04	following	9	95	0.14
establishing	12	12	0.02	formula	7	18	0.03
establishment	13	6	0.01	forward	7	22	0.03
evaluate	8	29	0.04	foundation	10	15	0.02
evaluated	9	20	0.03	founders	8	6	0.01
evaluating	10	14	0.02	founding	8	7	0.01
evaluation	10	345	0.49	framework	9	13	0.02
evaluations	11	40	0.06	functioning	11	14	0.02
everything	10	9	0.01	functions	9	19	0.03
gateway	7	6	0.01	increasing	10	22	0.03
general	7	13	0.02	independent	11	18	0.03
generation	10	9	0.01	indicate	8	10	0.01
getting	7	14	0.02	indicated	9	6	0.01
Gloucester	10	33	0.05	indicator	9	8	0.01
governance	10	50	0.07	indicators	10	100	0.14
governing	9	33	0.05	indiscernible	13	7	0.01
government	10	7	0.01	individual	10	27	0.04
Governor	8	176	0.25	individualized	14	6	0.01
graders	7	6	0.01	individuals	11	17	0.02
graduate	8	53	0.08	ineffective	11	6	0.01
graduates	9	22	0.03	influence	9	6	0.01
graduating	10	6	0.01	information	11	90	0.13
graduation	10	78	0.11	informed	8	6	0.01



Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
granted	7	17	0.02	infrastructure	14	7	0.01
greater	7	16	0.02	initial	7	46	0.07
goad	8	39	0.06	initiate	8	16	0.02
guidance	8	11	0.02	initiating	10	15	0.02
happens	7	8	0.01	initiative	10	8	0.01
hearing	7	31	0.04	innovation	10	15	0.02
helping	7	17	0.02	innovative	10	10	0.01
hierarchy	9	6	0.01	instead	7	19	0.03
highest	7	45	0.06	institute	9	22	0.03
Hispanic	8	18	0.03	institutions	12	16	0.02
history	7	21	0.03	instruction	11	58	0.08
holding	7	14	0.02	instructional	13	52	0.07
however	7	27	0.04	instrument	10	10	0.01
Hunterdon	9	21	0.03	instruments	11	7	0.01
identified	10	60	0.09	insufficient	12	9	0.01
identify	8	51	0.07	intended	8	9	0.01
immediate	9	46	0.07	intends	7	6	0.01
immediately	11	10	0.01	interdistrict	13	34	0.05
impatient	9	8	0.01	interest	8	28	0.04
implement	9	75	0.11	interested	10	9	0.01
implementation	14	56	0.08	interesting	11	7	0.01
implemented	11	22	0.03	interim	7	13	0.02
implementing	12	21	0.03	internal	8	9	0.01
importance	10	10	0.01	intervene	9	12	0.02
important	9	41	0.06	intervention	12	199	0.28
improve	7	103	0.15	interventions	13	37	0.05
improved	8	11	0.02	interview	9	12	0.02
improvement	11	227	0.32	interviews	10	10	0.01
improvements	12	7	0.01	introduce	9	7	0.01
improving	9	36	0.05	invested	8	6	0.01
inability	9	6	0.01	investment	10	12	0.02
include	7	115	0.16	invincible	10	7	0.01
included	8	12	0.02	involved	8	9	0.01
includes	8	25	0.04	involvement	11	8	0.01
including	9	75	0.11	Irvington	9	6	0.01
incorporate	11	12	0.02	issuing	7	8	0.01
incorporated	12	20	0.03	knowledge	9	26	0.04
incorporates	12	6	0.01	language	8	39	0.06
increase	8	51	0.07	largely	7	6	0.01
increased	9	19	0.03	largest	7	16	0.02
leaders	7	28	0.04	nationally	10	10	0.01
leadership	10	36	0.05	necessary	9	28	0.04
leading	7	12	0.02	newsroom	8	15	0.02
learned	7	11	0.02	northern	8	6	0.01
learning	8	89	0.13	notification	12	14	0.02
legislation	11	21	0.03	notwithstanding	15	6	0.01
legislative	11	9	0.01	November	8	14	0.02
legislature	11	20	0.03	objective	9	13	0.02
lessons	7	8	0.01	objectives	10	17	0.02
library	7	117	0.17	obligation	10	10	0.01
limitations	11	8	0.01	obligations	11	7	0.01
limited	7	54	0.08	observation	11	7	0.01
literacy	8	19	0.03	observations	12	23	0.03
located	7	19	0.03	observers	9	11	0.02
location	8	14	0.02	October	7	15	0.02
looking	7	12	0.02	offered	7	11	0.02
mailing	7	38	0.05	officer	7	14	0.02
maintain	8	6	0.01	offices	7	6	0.01
maintaining	11	7	0.01	ongoing	7	10	0.01

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
majority	8	10	0.01	opening	7	17	0.02
management	10	42	0.06	openings	8	7	0.01
mandated	8	21	0.03	operate	7	14	0.02
mandates	8	9	0.01	operated	8	22	0.03
materials	9	17	0.02	operating	9	14	0.02
mathematics	11	12	0.02	operation	9	20	0.03
matters	7	27	0.04	operational	11	23	0.03
maximum	7	6	0.01	operations	10	34	0.05
meaningful	10	42	0.06	operators	9	10	0.01
measurable	10	8	0.01	opportunities	13	24	0.03
measure	7	51	0.07	opportunity	11	52	0.07
measured	8	21	0.03	options	7	42	0.06
measures	8	72	0.1	organization	12	24	0.03
measuring	9	7	0.01	organizational	14	17	0.02
meeting	7	74	0.11	organizations	13	6	0.01
meetings	8	17	0.02	oriented	8	7	0.01
members	7	132	0.19	original	8	9	0.01
membership	10	9	0.01	originally	10	8	0.01
mentioned	9	7	0.01	otherwise	9	11	0.02
methodology	11	20	0.03	outcomes	8	43	0.06
methods	7	10	0.01	outlined	8	17	0.02
Michael	7	6	0.01	outlining	9	7	0.01
Middlesex	9	30	0.04	outperforming	13	7	0.01
million	7	71	0.1	outside	7	10	0.01
minimum	7	11	0.02	outstanding	11	16	0.02
minority	8	6	0.01	overall	7	40	0.06
minutes	7	7	0.01	oversee	7	11	0.02
mission	7	11	0.02	oversight	9	48	0.07
monitor	7	13	0.02	overview	8	11	0.02
monitoring	10	51	0.07	parents	7	43	0.06
Monmouth	8	36	0.05	partial	7	70	0.1
morning	7	8	0.01	participate	11	29	0.04
movement	8	10	0.01	participating	13	39	0.06
multiple	8	35	0.05	participation	13	18	0.03
municipality	12	9	0.01	particular	10	11	0.02
national	8	64	0.09	partners	8	10	0.01
partnership	11	22	0.03	probation	9	7	0.01
Passaic	7	24	0.03	problem	7	17	0.02
passing	7	8	0.01	problems	8	13	0.02
Paterson	8	29	0.04	procedure	9	8	0.01
pending	7	7	0.01	procedures	10	36	0.05
percent	7	126	0.18	process	7	197	0.28
percentage	10	27	0.04	processes	9	9	0.01
perform	7	20	0.03	professional	12	62	0.09
performance	11	424	0.6	professionals	13	49	0.07
performing	10	93	0.13	proficiency	11	75	0.11
permitted	9	6	0.01	proficient	10	23	0.03
persistent	10	15	0.02	program	7	231	0.33
personnel	9	57	0.08	programs	8	105	0.15
persons	7	18	0.03	progress	8	77	0.11
perspective	11	10	0.01	project	7	27	0.04
Pitts grove	10	9	0.01	projects	8	6	0.01
placement	9	44	0.06	promise	7	8	0.01
placing	7	9	0.01	promote	7	6	0.01
planning	8	20	0.03	properly	8	11	0.02
policies	8	31	0.04	property	8	7	0.01
political	9	14	0.02	proposal	8	12	0.02
politics	8	6	0.01	proposed	8	89	0.13
population	10	19	0.03	proposes	8	6	0.01

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
position	8	21	0.03	protect	7	7	0.01
positions	9	19	0.03	provide	7	164	0.23
positive	8	14	0.02	provided	8	73	0.1
possible	8	26	0.04	provider	8	15	0.02
potential	9	15	0.02	providers	9	6	0.01
poverty	7	18	0.03	provides	8	26	0.04
practice	8	54	0.08	providing	9	38	0.05
practices	9	62	0.09	provision	9	20	0.03
preceding	9	9	0.01	provisions	10	32	0.05
preliminary	11	7	0.01	publications	12	6	0.01
preparation	11	12	0.02	purpose	7	15	0.02
prepare	7	18	0.03	purposes	8	8	0.01
prepared	8	12	0.02	pursuant	8	158	0.22
preparedness	12	6	0.01	putting	7	7	0.01
preparing	9	7	0.01	qualified	9	11	0.02
preschool	9	34	0.05	quality	7	227	0.32
present	7	21	0.03	question	8	35	0.05
presented	9	19	0.03	questions	9	29	0.04
president	9	14	0.02	readiness	9	30	0.04
presources	10	6	0.01	reading	7	32	0.05
previous	8	15	0.02	reality	7	6	0.01
previously	10	12	0.02	reasonable	10	9	0.01
primary	7	6	0.01	reasons	7	10	0.01
principal	9	73	0.1	receipt	7	16	0.02
principals	10	37	0.05	receive	7	60	0.09
principles	10	29	0.04	received	8	25	0.04
priorities	10	17	0.02	receives	8	11	0.02
priority	8	47	0.07	receiving	9	18	0.03
privacy	7	44	0.06	recently	8	13	0.02
private	7	27	0.04	recognition	11	10	0.01
privileges	10	8	0.01	recognize	9	6	0.01
probably	8	9	0.01	recognizing	11	9	0.01
recommend	9	20	0.03	resources	9	61	0.09
recommendation	14	34	0.05	respect	7	39	0.06
recommendations	15	46	0.07	respective	10	7	0.01
recommended	11	13	0.02	response	8	10	0.01
recommends	10	8	0.01	responses	9	35	0.05
reconsideration	15	16	0.02	responsibilities	16	18	0.03
recovery	8	6	0.01	responsibility	14	19	0.03
reduced	7	7	0.01	responsible	11	29	0.04
reflect	7	8	0.01	restriction	11	8	0.01
reforms	7	25	0.04	restructuring	13	8	0.01
regarding	9	32	0.05	results	7	94	0.13
regardless	10	40	0.06	returned	8	14	0.02
regents	7	7	0.01	reviewed	8	9	0.01
regional	8	59	0.08	reviewers	9	10	0.01
register	8	10	0.01	reviewing	9	9	0.01
registered	10	9	0.01	reviews	7	29	0.04
regular	7	10	0.01	revised	7	9	0.01
regulation	10	69	0.1	rigorous	8	16	0.02
regulations	11	75	0.11	rollout	7	21	0.03
regulatory	10	23	0.03	running	7	6	0.01
reinforcing	11	6	0.01	Rutgers	7	28	0.04
related	7	15	0.02	satisfaction	12	6	0.01
relations	9	7	0.01	satisfied	9	10	0.01
relationship	12	6	0.01	satisfies	9	21	0.03
relative	8	11	0.02	satisfy	7	21	0.03
release	7	37	0.05	satisfying	10	6	0.01
released	8	19	0.03	schedule	8	9	0.01

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
releases	8	24	0.03	schools	7	813	1.16
relevant	8	24	0.03	schools?	8	6	0.01
reliability	11	6	0.01	science	7	30	0.04
reliable	8	6	0.01	secondary	9	10	0.01
remains	7	8	0.01	secretary	9	10	0.01
remedial	8	8	0.01	section	7	20	0.03
remediation	11	15	0.02	sections	8	11	0.02
renewal	7	30	0.04	seeking	7	7	0.01
renewed	7	8	0.01	selected	8	34	0.05
replace	7	9	0.01	selection	9	11	0.02
reported	8	11	0.02	senator	7	44	0.06
reporting	9	18	0.03	sending	7	38	0.05
reports	7	57	0.08	September	9	48	0.07
represent	9	7	0.01	service	7	21	0.03
representatives	15	17	0.02	services	8	172	0.24
request	7	23	0.03	serving	7	12	0.02
requested	9	8	0.01	sessions	8	6	0.01
require	7	23	0.03	setting	7	7	0.01
required	8	81	0.12	several	7	39	0.06
requirement	11	15	0.02	showing	7	11	0.02
requirements	12	77	0.11	significant	11	40	0.06
requires	8	15	0.02	significantly	13	16	0.02
requiring	9	11	0.02	similar	7	8	0.01
research	8	39	0.06	skilled	7	55	0.08
residence	9	21	0.03	solutions	9	6	0.01
resident	8	11	0.02	someone	7	6	0.01
residents	9	10	0.01	Somerset	8	13	0.02
resolution	10	19	0.03	something	9	19	0.03
special	7	32	0.05	support	7	119	0.17
specific	8	63	0.09	supported	9	11	0.02
specifically	12	13	0.02	supporting	10	9	0.01
specified	9	11	0.02	supports	8	13	0.02
spending	8	39	0.06	sustained	9	10	0.01
staffing	8	7	0.01	systems	7	56	0.08
stakeholder	11	12	0.02	talking	7	9	0.01
stakeholders	12	8	0.01	targeted	8	23	0.03
standard	8	13	0.02	targets	7	18	0.03
standards	9	121	0.17	teacher	7	133	0.19
started	7	11	0.02	teachers	8	117	0.17
statement	9	136	0.19	teaching	8	48	0.07
statewide	9	110	0.16	teachnj	7	11	0.02
statistics	10	8	0.01	Teaneck	7	8	0.01
statute	7	19	0.03	technical	9	63	0.09
statutes	8	11	0.02	technology	10	14	0.02
statutory	9	10	0.01	testimony	9	12	0.02
strategies	10	29	0.04	testing	7	12	0.02
strategy	8	6	0.01	therefore	9	10	0.01
strengthen	10	15	0.02	thorough	8	32	0.05
strengths	9	7	0.01	thousands	9	14	0.02
structure	9	7	0.01	throughout	10	24	0.03
struggling	10	9	0.01	Thursday	8	6	0.01
student	7	349	0.5	timeframe	9	7	0.01
students	8	622	0.88	timelines	9	6	0.01
studies	7	6	0.01	together	8	15	0.02
subchapter	10	25	0.04	towards	7	9	0.01
subcommittee	12	6	0.01	township	8	28	0.04
subgroup	8	20	0.03	traditional	11	7	0.01
subgroups	9	21	0.03	training	8	32	0.05
subject	7	40	0.06	trainings	9	6	0.01

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
subjects	8	16	0.02	transfer	8	6	0.01
submission	10	10	0.01	transformation	14	7	0.01
submitted	9	26	0.04	transition	10	64	0.09
subsection	10	8	0.01	transparency	12	7	0.01
substantial	11	12	0.02	transparent	11	7	0.01
succeed	7	16	0.02	transportation	14	26	0.04
succeeding	10	6	0.01	Trenton	7	106	0.15
success	7	39	0.06	trustees	8	22	0.03
successes	9	11	0.02	tuition	7	8	0.01
successful	10	42	0.06	turnaround	10	20	0.03
successfully	12	7	0.01	turning	7	6	0.01
sufficient	10	6	0.01	ultimately	10	15	0.02
superintendent	14	95	0.14	undergo	7	10	0.01
superintendents	15	13	0.02	underperformance	16	7	0.01
superior	8	9	0.01	underperforming	15	7	0.01
supervisors	11	6	0.01	underserved	11	8	0.01
understand	10	14	0.02	warrant	7	10	0.01
understanding	13	8	0.01	warranted	9	10	0.01
university	10	37	0.05	weakness	8	6	0.01
updated	7	7	0.01	website	7	16	0.02
utilize	7	8	0.01	weighted	8	68	0.1
utilized	8	7	0.01	weights	7	9	0.01
vacancy	7	6	0.01	whatever	8	10	0.01
variety	7	9	0.01	whether	7	109	0.15
various	7	7	0.01	withdrawal	10	17	0.02
verification	12	13	0.02	without	7	28	0.04
Vespucci	8	12	0.02	workforce	9	21	0.03
viewing	7	117	0.17	working	7	57	0.08
vocational	10	35	0.05	writing	7	8	0.01
voucher	7	6	0.01	written	7	16	0.02

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

To begin, please answer the following questions about charter schools in the Trenton district, as you see things.

	None (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)
How much competition has charter schools caused in the district? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much change in the district has been caused by charter schools? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following statements are claims made about charter schools, competition, and school choice. To what degree do you agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

	Strongly disagreed (1)	Disagreed (2)	Neither agreed nor disagreed (3)	Agreed (4)	Strongly agreed (5)
Charter schools have a negative impact on public education (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charter schools drain resources from public schools (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competition from charter schools will help public schools perform better (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charter schools are better at educating students (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents should have more freedom to choose what school their children attend (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charter schools are non-democratic (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charters schools are a more efficient and effective way to provide public education (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charter schools are held more accountable than public schools (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charter schools have more freedom in hiring and firing faculty and staff (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which of the following do you think best describes the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)'s stance towards public schools and charter schools?

- ☐ NJDOE favors public schools (1)
- ☐ NJDOE supports public and charter schools equally (2)
- ☐ NJDOE favors charter schools (3)

To what degree do you agreed or disagreed with the following statements concerning New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

	Strongly disagreed (1)	Disagreed (2)	Neither agreed nor disagreed (3)	Agreed (4)	Strongly agreed (5)
Public education reform such as NJQSAC and charter schools are designed to strength public education (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public education reforms such as NJQSAC and NCLB have caused more harm to public education than good. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NJQSAC and NCLB placed an unnecessary burden on urban school districts (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NJQSAC and NCLB are designed to improve public school performance (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



The following statements are claims made about public schools. To what degree do you agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

	Strongly disagreed (1)	Disagreed (2)	Neither agreed nor disagreed (3)	Agreed (4)	Strongly agreed (5)
Public education is a monopoly (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public education has failed to educate the students under their charge (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public education wastes a lot of resources (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers' unions are against education reform (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public schools are not held accountable for their performance (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Gender

- ☐ Male (1)  
☐ Female (2)

Race/Ethnicity Check all that apply.

- ☐ Asian (1)  
☐ Black (2)  
☐ White (3)  
☐ Native American (4)  
☐ Caribbean (5)  
☐ Hispanic/Latino (6)  
☐ Pacific Islander (7)  
☐ Self-Identification (8) \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked in public education?

- ☐ Less than a year (1)
- ☐ 1-3 years (2)
- ☐ 4-7 years (3)
- ☐ 8-14 years (4)
- ☐ 15-20 years (5)
- ☐ 21-25 years (6)
- ☐ 26-30 years (7)
- ☐ 31 plus years (8)

What is your current title?

- ☐ Superintendent (1)
- ☐ School Board Member (2)
- ☐ Principal (3)
- ☐ Vice Principal (4)
- ☐ Teacher (5)
- ☐ Counselor (6)
- ☐ Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in your current job title?

- ☐ Less than a year (1)
- ☐ 1-3 years (2)
- ☐ 4-7 years (3)
- ☐ 8-14 years (4)
- ☐ 15-20 years (5)
- ☐ 21-25 years (6)
- ☐ 26-30 years (7)
- ☐ 31 plus years (8)

Do you hold a highly qualified teacher certification?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Did you attend public school?

- ☐ Yes (3)
- ☐ No (4)

Answer If Did you attend public school? Yes Is Selected

In what city and state did you attend public school? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your political affiliation?

- ☐ Democratic (1)
- ☐ Republican (2)
- ☐ Independent (3)
- ☐ Other (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating. If you would like to add or express any other thoughts or concerns about school choice and charter schools you may do so in the space provided below.

If you would like the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview, please provide your e-mail address.

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY RESULTS

### How much competition has charter schools caused in the district?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
	A little	13	6.6	6.6	7.7
	Some	67	34.0	34.2	41.8
	A lot	114	57.9	58.2	100.0
	Total	196	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		197	100.0		

### How much change in the district has been caused by charter schools?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	6	3.0	3.1	3.1
	A little	15	7.6	7.7	10.8
	Some	59	29.9	30.3	41.0
	A lot	115	58.4	59.0	100.0
	Total	195	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		197	100.0		

### Charter schools have a negative impact on public education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Disagree	19	9.6	9.7	11.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	36	18.3	18.4	29.6
	Agree	70	35.5	35.7	65.3
	Strongly agree	68	34.5	34.7	100.0
	Total	196	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		197	100.0		

### Charter schools drain resources from public schools

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	2.5	2.6	2.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	16	8.1	8.2	10.8
	Agree	52	26.4	26.7	37.4
	Strongly agree	122	61.9	62.6	100.0
	Total	195	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Competition from charter schools will help public schools perform better**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	4	2.0	2.1	2.1
	Agree	32	16.2	16.4	18.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	39	19.8	20.0	38.5
	Disagree	61	31.0	31.3	69.7
	Strongly disagree	59	29.9	30.3	100.0
	Total	195	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Charter schools are better at educating students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	3	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Agree	2	1.0	1.0	2.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	39	19.8	20.0	22.6
	Disagree	64	32.5	32.8	55.4
	Strongly disagree	87	44.2	44.6	100.0
	Total	195	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Parents should have more freedom to choose what school their children attend**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Disagree	15	7.6	7.7	9.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	48	24.4	24.6	33.8
	Agree	99	50.3	50.8	84.6
	Strongly agree	30	15.2	15.4	100.0
	Total	195	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Charter schools are non-democratic**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	10	5.1	5.2	5.2
	Disagree	28	14.2	14.4	19.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	89	45.2	45.9	65.5
	Agree	44	22.3	22.7	88.1
	Strongly agree	23	11.7	11.9	100.0
	Total	194	98.5	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.5		
Total		197	100.0		

**Charters schools are a more efficient and effective way to provide public education**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Neither agree nor disagree	39	19.8	19.8	22.3
Disagree	62	31.5	31.5	53.8
Strongly disagree	91	46.2	46.2	100.0
Total	197	100.0	100.0	

**Charter schools are held more accountable than public schools**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	1	.5	.5	.5
Agree	9	4.6	4.6	5.1
Neither agree nor disagree	33	16.8	16.8	21.8
Disagree	52	26.4	26.4	48.2
Strongly disagree	102	51.8	51.8	100.0
Total	197	100.0	100.0	

**Charter schools have more freedom in hiring and firing faculty and staff**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	11	5.6	5.6	5.6
Disagree	4	2.0	2.0	7.7
Neither agree nor disagree	49	24.9	25.0	32.7
Agree	75	38.1	38.3	70.9
Strongly agree	57	28.9	29.1	100.0
Total	196	99.5	100.0	
Missing System	1	.5		
Total	197	100.0		

**Which of the following do you think best describes the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)'s stance towards public schools and charter schools?.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid NJDOE favors public schools	30	15.2	16.0	16.0
NJDOE supports public and charter schools equally	45	22.8	24.1	40.1
NJDOE favors charter schools	112	56.9	59.9	100.0
Total	187	94.9	100.0	
Missing System	10	5.1		
Total	197	100.0		

**Public education reform such as NJQSAC and charter schools are designed to strength public education**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	4	2.0	2.1	2.1
	Agree	28	14.2	14.7	16.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	53	26.9	27.7	44.5
	Disagree	60	30.5	31.4	75.9
	Strongly disagree	46	23.4	24.1	100.0
	Total	191	97.0	100.0	
Missing	System	6	3.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Public education reforms such as NJQSAC and NCLB have caused more harm to public education than good.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	4	2.0	2.1	2.1
	Disagree	14	7.1	7.3	9.4
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	31	15.7	16.2	25.7
	Agree	87	44.2	45.5	71.2
	Strongly Agree	55	27.9	28.8	100.0
	Total	191	97.0	100.0	
Missing	System	6	3.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**NJQSAC and NCLB placed an unnecessary burden on urban school districts**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	3.0	3.2	3.2
	Disagree	12	6.1	6.3	9.5
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	32	16.2	16.9	26.5
	Agree	69	35.0	36.5	63.0
	Strongly Agree	70	35.5	37.0	100.0
	Total	189	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	8	4.1		
Total		197	100.0		

**NJQSAC and NCLB are designed to improve public school performance**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	2.5	2.6	2.6
	Agree	41	20.8	21.5	24.1
	Neither agree nor disagree	54	27.4	28.3	52.4
	Disagree	54	27.4	28.3	80.6
	Strongly disagree	37	18.8	19.4	100.0
	Total	191	97.0	100.0	
Missing	System	6	3.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Public education is a monopoly**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	2.5	2.6	2.6
	Agree	26	13.2	13.5	16.1
	Neither agree nor disagree	47	23.9	24.4	40.4
	Disagree	79	40.1	40.9	81.3
	Strongly disagree	36	18.3	18.7	100.0
	Total	193	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	2.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Public education has failed to educate the students under their charge**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	7	3.6	3.6	3.6
	Agree	17	8.6	8.8	12.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	34	17.3	17.6	30.1
	Disagree	82	41.6	42.5	72.5
	Strongly disagree	53	26.9	27.5	100.0
	Total	193	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	2.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Public education wastes a lot of resources**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	7	3.6	3.6	3.6
	Agree	49	24.9	25.4	29.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	32	16.2	16.6	45.6
	Disagree	55	27.9	28.5	74.1
	Strongly disagree	50	25.4	25.9	100.0
	Total	193	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	2.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Teachers' unions are against education reform**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	2.5	2.6	2.6
	Agree	18	9.1	9.3	11.9
	Neither agree nor disagree	29	14.7	15.0	26.9
	Disagree	77	39.1	39.9	66.8
	Strongly disagree	64	32.5	33.2	100.0
	Total	193	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	2.0		
Total		197	100.0		



**Public schools are not held accountable for their performance**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	4	2.0	2.1	2.1
	Agree	4	2.0	2.1	4.1
	Neither agree nor disagree	12	6.1	6.2	10.4
	Disagree	65	33.0	33.7	44.0
	Strongly disagree	108	54.8	56.0	100.0
	Total	193	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	2.0		
Total		197	100.0		

**Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	46	23.4	24.2	24.2
	Female	144	73.1	75.8	100.0
	Total	190	96.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	3.6		
Total		197	100.0		

**Race/Ethnicity**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Asian	8	4.1	4.3	4.3
	Black	53	26.9	28.5	32.8
	White	78	39.6	41.9	74.7
	Native American	2	1.0	1.1	75.8
	Caribbean	3	1.5	1.6	77.4
	Hispanic/Latino	19	9.6	10.2	87.6
	Self-Identified	10	5.1	5.4	93.0
	Multi Race/Ethnicity	13	6.6	7.0	100.0
	Total	186	94.4	100.0	
Missing	System	11	5.6		
Total		197	100.0		

**Comment**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	150	76.1	76.1	76.1
	Yes	47	23.9	23.9	100.0
	Total	197	100.0	100.0	

**How long have you worked in public education?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than a year	3	1.5	1.6	1.6
	1-3 years	30	15.2	15.9	17.5
	4-7 years	21	10.7	11.1	28.6
	8-14 years	49	24.9	25.9	54.5
	15-20 years	32	16.2	16.9	71.4
	21-25 years	29	14.7	15.3	86.8
	26-30 years	11	5.6	5.8	92.6
	31 plus years	14	7.1	7.4	100.0
	Total	189	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	8	4.1		
Total		197	100.0		

**What is your current title?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Principal	2	1.0	1.1	1.1
	Vice Principal	2	1.0	1.1	2.1
	Teacher	145	73.6	77.1	79.3
	Counselor	6	3.0	3.2	82.4
	Other	33	16.8	17.6	100.0
	Total	188	95.4	100.0	
Missing	System	9	4.6		
Total		197	100.0		

**Do you hold a highly qualified teacher certification?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	46	23.4	24.3	24.3
	Yes	143	72.6	75.7	100.0
	Total	189	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	8	4.1		
Total		197	100.0		

**How long have you been in your current job title**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than a year	13	6.6	6.9	6.9
	1-3 years	55	27.9	29.3	36.2
	4-7 years	31	15.7	16.5	52.7
	8-14 years	41	20.8	21.8	74.5
	15-20 years	18	9.1	9.6	84.0
	21-25 years	20	10.2	10.6	94.7
	26-30 years	5	2.5	2.7	97.3
	31 plus years	5	2.5	2.7	100.0
	Total	188	95.4	100.0	
Missing	System	9	4.6		
Total		197	100.0		

**Did you attend public school?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	157	79.7	83.1	83.1
	No	32	16.2	16.9	100.0
	Total	189	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	8	4.1		
Total		197	100.0		

**What is your political affiliation?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Democrat	104	52.8	58.1	58.1
	Republican	22	11.2	12.3	70.4
	Independent	40	20.3	22.3	92.7
	Other	13	6.6	7.3	100.0
	Total	179	90.9	100.0	
Missing	System	18	9.1		
Total		197	100.0		

**APPENDIX D: CORRELATION TABLE**

