

WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO THE
INTERDISTRICT SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM AT THE MAGNET PROGRAM FOR
MATH AND SCIENCE

By

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A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School of Education
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Graduate Program in Educational Leadership
written under the direction of

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May 2017

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WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE ON SCHOOL CHOICE

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Why and How do Parents Decide to Send Their Children to the Interdistrict School Choice

Program at the Magnet Program for Math and Science

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The New Jersey Interdistrict School Choice Program allows parents to send their students to schools outside of their local school district. Determining why parents send their students to choice schools is important to school leaders who are trying to attract new students, as well as those who are trying to retain their current students. This study examined the reasons why parents decided to send their students to the Magnet Program for Math and Science (MP4M&S), a school choice program in a suburban school district in northwest New Jersey, during the 2015-2016 school year. A large volume of research has focused on school choice programs in urban and poor communities. This study addressed the gap in the research by focusing on an affluent suburban school district.

This mixed methods study focused on three areas, why parents choose to send their students to the MP4M&S, what criteria they used to make their decision, and where they got their information. Research shows that these three areas of focus can be influenced by parental level of education, socioeconomic status, geographic location, academic rigor, school quality, and school environment. Parents from different groups, based upon their out-of-district status, were interviewed. The information from the interviews was used to focus a survey that was given to the families of all 137 students in the MP4M&S during the 2015-2016 school year. The results of this study show that parents found the academic focus, academic rigor, the school environment, the original research project, the activity offerings, and the economics involved in

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attending the program to be important attractors. The study also found that the Information Nights, the school website, and interactions with members of the MP4M&S community to be important sources of information. Finally, the study found that there were few differences between in and out-of-district parents when assigning importance to both the attractors and the sources in the study.

The results of this study will be shared with the leadership team of the MP4M&S and the Morris Hills Regional District so that they can develop strategies and resources that attract parents to the program.

Keywords: Interdistrict School Choice, in-district, out-of-district, attractors, sources.

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CHAPTER 1

THE MATH AND SCIENCE MAGNET PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL CHOICE

New Jersey's Interdistrict School Choice Program Act of 2010 gave parents the ability to choose public schools outside of their local district to send their students. This was a new concept for suburban families, especially for those from wealthy school districts. For those districts trying to attract students through the Interdistrict School Choice Program, it was important to know how parents go about making their decisions to pick an out-of-district school. This study looked at how and why out-of-district parents choose to apply to, and then send their students to, the Magnet Program for Math and Science (MP4M&S) in the Morris Hills Regional District (MHRD).

MHRD hosted several choice programs, and the MP4M&S competed with other area schools for the same students during the student application process. It was vital that the MHRD understood what parents found important when choosing a school so that the district attracted students to their school ahead of their competition. This was the first study completed about the decision-making process that parents went through with regards to applying to the MP4M&S.

This study adds to the growing body of research that centers on issues of school choice. These issues include whether school choice programs were encouraging other schools to improve their educational programs, and what parents find important in a school for their children. Of these two issues, this study only focused on what parents found important in a school for their children. This study will focus on a choice school program in a wealthy area. The body of research is lacking with regards to school choice in affluent suburban school districts.

The MP4M&S had to address two main issues when attracting new students. First, transportation to the MP4M&S was not guaranteed through the Interdistrict School Choice

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Program. Out-of-district families that lived within 20 miles of the school received aid in lieu instead of busing to and from the school, which did not convert to the actual cost of transportation. Chubb and Moe recognized the issues that transportation could play in their study of school choice (1990). The second issue was the rapid growth of the school choice program in the state. Because of the rapid growth, the state restricted the program's growth in 2015-2016 to ensure that the program was properly funded. The NJDOE also capped the number of out-of-district students each school received. This cap limited the financial growth that the MHRD had relied upon to maintain its programs. In order to maximize the financial gains the MP4M&S brought to the district through the Interdistrict School Choice Program, it had to attract those students who were going to be successful in the program and who were going to want to stay in the program for four years.

The main purpose for this study is to support the MHRD's school choice program, specifically the MP4M&S. The study focuses on why and how parents chose to send their students to the MP4M&S. This focus includes the information that the parents gathered to make their decisions, and the criteria they valued when making their decisions? The study was intended to help the MP4M&S leadership team develop the strategies and resources needed to attract parents to the program. A mixed method approach was chosen because there is more that can be learned by using both quantitative and qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009).

From a research and policy making point of view, this study contributed to other research in the field. The data from the study can be used to support further research that focuses on determining if the school choice program at MHRD is challenging other local schools in the area to improve as they compete for the same students (Abernathy, 2005; Berends, Springer, Ballou,

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& Walberg, 2011; Betts & Lovelace, 2005; Holmes, DeSimone, & Rupp, 2003; Goldhaber, 1999; Lubienski, 2007; Maddaus, 1990).

Outside of MHRD community, this was an important area of study for various reasons. First, the Interdistrict School Choice Program in New Jersey has grown from 15 school districts in 2010 to its present size of 132 school districts for the 2015-2016 school year. The growth has been so quick that the state put a cap on school choice growth across the state (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015c). The study can serve leaders of choice schools if they try to refine their marketing strategies and attract students to their districts. Schools have been motivated by accountability pressures to seek and attract students who were likely to perform well on accountability-linked measures. School accountability, based upon test score, has inspired choice schools to seek out those students who brought higher test scores to the district, thus lessening the overall scores for those schools losing the high-quality student. This has led to the creaming effect that research has identified in magnet school admissions (Goldring & Philips, 2008; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Competing school leaders can also use this information to keep students from choosing other schools. This study is important to those districts in New Jersey that are in suburban and affluent communities and therefore do not get strong financial support from the State. This study also provided an opportunity to study parents as decision-makers in a suburban school setting. Parents can use the results of this study to see how other parents made their decisions to send their students to a choice school. Last, this study is intended to broaden the research done so far as it studied a choice school in a suburban setting, mainly consisting of wealthy school districts.

Research Questions

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In this study, I focused on the following research question as it pertains to the MP4M&S, an out-of-district school choice program offered by the MHRD:

1. Why did parents choose to send their students to the MP4M&S?

In order to do this, I added the following sub-questions:

1. What criteria did parents use when picking a school to send their children?
2. What data sources did parents use when picking a school to send their children?
3. How did the criteria and data sources that parents use differ depending on their school choice status?

As this study examined why and how parents chose to send their students to the MP4M&S, a choice school program in a wealthy section of New Jersey, it can provide school districts in a suburban setting with the information they needed to attract future students to their district through the Interdistrict School Choice Program. At the beginning of the process, based upon both the literature and the researcher's experience in the school system, it was believed that there were several factors that attracted students to the MP4M&S. It was hypothesized that the school environment, especially the physical appearance of the school and the academic rigor of the program, as well as the STEM-based focus of the program influenced parents to choose the MP4M&S. The researcher believed that the factors that influenced parents to send their students to the MP4M&S were different for parents who lived in the MHRD as compared to out-of-district parents who used the state's school choice program. At the end of the data analysis, it was determined that there were very few differences between the factors that in-district and out-of-district parents used in the decision-making process.

Structure and Intent

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This study was intended to help the leadership team of the MP4M&S develop those strategies and resources needed to attract parents to the program. The following chapters provide an account of the study. Chapter Two discusses the theoretical and contextual backgrounds with regards to school choice. Chapter Three reviews the design of the study and the methodologies used to conduct the study. Chapter Four discusses the results of the study. Chapter Five further relates the findings of the study to the literature and provides recommendations for future studies.

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CHAPTER TWO

SCHOOL CHOICE - THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Researchers have studied several different questions in regards to providing parents with school choice options for children. These questions centered around two main themes. First, did school choice options improve student outcomes (Holmes, DeSimone, & Rupp, 2003; Goldhaber, 1999; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2002)? Second, what influenced parents decision-making when making school choice decisions (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Buckley & Schneider, 2003; Goldhaber 1999, Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Hastings & Weinstein, 2008; Holmes, 2002; Reay & Ball, 1998; Schneider, et al., 2002; Schneider, Teske, Roch, & Marshall, 1997)? These questions were mainly studied in programs that were either outside the U.S. or in American urban districts (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995; Beal & Hendry, 2012; Buckley & Schneider, 2003; Hastings & Weinstein, 2007; Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Jacobs, 2013; Lubienski, 2007; Maddaus, 1990; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014; Neild, 2005; Van Dunk & Dickman, 2002; Wilkins, 2012). Studies in the United States that were not conducted across an entire state focused on schools in urban settings (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Buckley & Schneider, 2003; Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Jacobs, 2013; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014; Neild, 2005) These questions have rarely been studied in the suburban school setting (Abernathy, 2005; Teske & Schneider, 2001). However, in some cases, the research studied both suburban and urban schools (Schneider, et al., 1997; Schneider, et al., 2002).

Understanding how parents, when given the opportunity to use a school choice program, chose the schools to which they send their children is a complex task. Schools are multi-dimensional institutions that have many different characteristics that parents used to pick an appropriate school for their child. These characteristics were reported to parents via different

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information sources. Each information source had its own methods for weighting and reporting school characteristics. The choice of information source used in the decision-making process reflects on the priorities that parents used when choosing a school for their children.

Understanding these characteristics was important to the development of school choice policies that benefit a broader range of students (Buckley & Schneider, 2003).

The reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) allowed students and their families to leave their local school if it was identified as continually failing. The intent was to allow parents to switch schools even if they could not afford to move to a higher performing school district. It was hoped that this form of school choice would also improve student outcomes by balancing racial inequalities in the schools. Today, school choice has been shown to increase segregation in the schools (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Bifulco & Bulkley, 2015; Roda & Wells, 2013). Research has also shown that it did not help those it was intended to help, including those in failing schools who did not have the financial means to change schools. Part of the problem was that parents in lower socioeconomic levels did not have enough information about their schools and their options. Parental access to high quality data about the schools they can choose from was linked to their socioeconomic status and their level of completed education (Buckley & Schneider, 2003).

Theoretical Background

Drawing on existing literature, this study focused on parents as decision-makers and why they chose to send their children to the MP4M&S. The MP4M&S is a choice school located in an affluent region of New Jersey. Research has focused on several aspects of the decision-making process concerning school choice. The following review focuses on certain aspects of the literature that relate to this study. First, in order to understand why parents chose to send their

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children to MP4M&S, one must understand what enabled parents to make their decisions. In this section, I first discuss why parents can choose schools, and then examine the kinds of information used and how the information used varies across parents. Second, the criteria that parents used to make their decisions, and the sources that they used to make their decisions, need to be discussed. The criteria that was reviewed in this study included student body demographics, school environment, and academic rigor. The sources that were reviewed included social networks and academic measures. Parental characteristics influenced both the criterion and the sources and these characteristics need to be reviewed. These characteristics included the level of educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. This section is followed by a review of the Interdistrict School Choice Program in New Jersey, the Interdistrict School Choice Program at MHRD and the MP4M&S, and finally a review of the demographic data of the MP4M&S.

Groundwork to Parents as Decision-Makers

Developing an understanding of the mechanisms needed to make an effective choice for their students was important to understanding why parents choose the MP4M&S. The MP4M&S could not exist in its present state without NCLB and New Jersey's Interdistrict School Choice Program. The opportunities associated with these two acts allowed parents to choose schools outside of their local school district. Next, parents had to be informed about their choices. The information that was available to, and then used by, the parents helps one to understand how the parents made their decisions. This understanding was used to determine why they chose to send their students to MP4M&S.

Governmental Influence. NCLB has ushered in a new era of school accountability. School choice was now giving parents more power in holding schools accountable by giving

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them an exit strategy for their child. School Choice provided parents with the opportunity to focus on the educational outcomes that they want for their children when choosing a school (Maddaus, 1990). Under New Jersey's Interdistrict School Choice Policy, parents could send their students to schools that may be located in districts that were more desirable without having to relocate to districts where the housing prices, rental prices, and/or the property taxes are more than they can afford. School choice gave parents more control to choose the schools that they wanted (Bell, 2005; Goldhaber, 1999).

Information. School choice programs shifted school accessibility from only those who can afford to live in a district with high-performing schools to include those who had access to information about their school choice options. Parents who had access to multiple sources of information held an advantage over other parents when determining which school to send their student. Knowing how to use the information to make a choice that was aligned to parental values was as important as having the information. This gave parents more freedom to rely on their values when deciding where to send their child without having to move to a new school district (Maddaus, 1990).

The decision-making process that parents used was not uniform as parents search for information in different ways. Even if different sets of parents used the same information, the manner in which they used the information can differ (Goldhaber, 1999). The values that parents use to make their school decisions can include academic and nonacademic factors (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014). These factors are explicitly addressed in the next section about criteria.

The major roadblock to parents' ability to use school choice was access to information (Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan, 2006; Teske & Schneider, 2001; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall,

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2000). Before the study began, the MHRD limited its advertisement expenditures because enough qualified students applied to the program each year. Parents did not always have access to the information that they needed to make a decision to use school choice. Those that had access to the information often wanted more information to help them make their decisions (Goldring & Philips, 2008; Neild, 2005). This can include knowing that they had school choice options. Anecdotally, social networks and word of mouth appear to be important to the success of the school choice programs at MHRD and the major reason why the district has limited its marketing and advertising; this study examined this more systematically.

Parents who used school choice needed access to the information to make a choice with which they were comfortable. To make the decision that was best aligned to their educational wishes for their child, they had to invest large amounts of effort into the decision-making process (Roda & Wells, 2013). These efforts included sorting through all of the different school criteria, determining which criteria defines a high quality school, and was the school a good fit for their child. Once the decision was made, parents then had to invest the time needed to complete all of the steps necessary to apply to their choice school options. Motivation played a large part in successfully picking the right school for one's child (Teske & Schneider, 2001).

Now that parents can pick schools for their children that were outside their local district, and the information they need to make these decisions exists, it was important to determine what criteria and sources the parents use. These criterion and sources were influenced by the parents' backgrounds, beliefs, and desires. The next section relates the these three items to the research plan and link them to the parents at the MP4M&S

Criteria, Sources, and Parental Background

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Research on parental decision-making with regards to school choice has led to varied results. Some studies have shown that school choice has increased parental understanding of educational policies, statutes, and trends (Goldring & Philips, 2008; Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, & Branch, 2007). Other studies have studied the methods that parents use to obtain information and make their informed decisions (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Home, 2002; Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Roch, 1998) and found that parents relied on the information that they received from their social networks and the actual ethnic profile of a school when determining the quality of a school. The methods, criteria, and data sources that parents used to seek out information vary and depend upon several factors (Buckley & Schneider, 2003). To better understand the relationship between deciding to use a school choice option and the parents' criteria for making the choice, the sources they used, and the background of the parent, the literature review examined each of the three items that can influence the decision-making process

Criteria. In order to understand how parents made their decisions with regards to school choice, one must understand the criteria that parents value when they made their decisions. Analyses of the data parents used to select a school gives insight into how parents define school quality. However, for the purpose of this study, it was not necessary to understand whether the criteria that parents used truly reflect the quality of a school and its academic performance. Research has identified certain criteria that parents used when making school choice decisions, including student demographics, school environment, and academic rigor. Issues of school environment included, but were not limited to, safety, discipline, religious affiliation, academic focus, location, size, and teacher quality (Goldhaber, 1999; Maddaus, 1990; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014). Parents used these criteria to decide if their school choice options were better than their local school. If parents were not happy with the characteristics of the local school, they

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could use school choice to enroll their child into a school with more favorable characteristics (Armor & Peiser, 1997). For the purposes of this study, based upon the relevant literature, the following criteria were explored as they directly relate to the MP4M&S: student demographics, school environment, and academic rigor. Student demographics was chosen because the demographic makeup of the MP4M&S was not similar to the demographic makeup of Morris Hills High School. School environment was chosen because Morris Hills High School takes great pride in its school environment. Many believe that the school environment was an important reason people choose the MP4M&S over their local school district. Finally, academic rigor was chosen because the MP4M&S was a rigorous program that attracts high performing students. There was a tremendous push from our business and political leaders to focus on STEM related fields as they relate to the success of our economy. This can be used as an important selling point when attracting students and their parents to the MP4M&S.

Student-body demographics. A school's demographic makeup was an important factor that parents considered when choosing a school for their students (Hamilton & Guinn, 2006). Parents tended to pick schools with higher proportions of their own ethnicity (Holme, 2002). The reasons for this have not been studied in depth, though one would reason that this phenomenon had to do with comfort level and not academic performance of different ethnic groups. If parents desired to send their children to schools based on academic performances among various ethnicities, they would not make decisions based upon homogenizing ethnicities within choice schools

This trend towards choosing schools with one's own ethnicity has led to increased segregation within our schools (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Goyette, 2008; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matlin, 2000; Rosa & Wells, 2013). This led to an academic system that indirectly promoted

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segregation because the parents were choosing schools based upon their own ethnicity. White parents were choosing schools with larger white student concentrations. African American parents were choosing schools with larger African American student populations. This was despite the fact that the original intent of creating magnet schools, an early focus for reform efforts tied to school choice, was to ensure equal opportunities through ethnically balanced schools (Blank, 1984; Goldring, 2009; Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Maddaus, 1990).

School environment. Various characteristics combine to make a school environment. The school environment helped parents and students to develop their first impressions about a school and whether it would be a good fit based upon the needs and desires of the family. These characteristics included, but were not limited to, safety, discipline, learning environment, religious affiliation, location, students, size, and school quality. The parents in these studies chose academics, discipline, and safety as the main reasons why they wanted school choice (Goldhaber, 1999; Goldring & Philips, 2008; Hamilton & Guinn, 2006; Kleitz, et al., 2000; Maddaus, 1990; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014).

Academic rigor. It has been documented that parents want the best for their child. Parents who use school choice volunteer to use the program and therefore had the interests of their children during the decision-making progress (Archibald, 2004; Bell, 2009; Black, 1999; Gill & Rand Education, 2001). Parents who valued academic rigor used school choice if they felt that their local schools did not provide their students with the appropriate level of academic challenges. Some might also choose to send their child to a choice school if they felt that an advantage existed based upon the academic focus of the school. Students who took more academic rigorous courses achieved at a higher level (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

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In 2015-2016, Morris Hills High School required its students to complete 140 High School credits in order to graduate. The NJDOE only required 120 credits. The MP4M&S required its students to complete 155 credits, take at least 5 AP courses, and two honors or AP courses outside of Math and Science

In the era of NCLB, academic success was often measured in standardized test scores (Figlio & Kenny, 2009). These test scores were readily available to the public through schools, various media outlets, and the NJDOE. Parents may have used a school's standardized test performance to determine if the school was academically rigorous enough to meet the needs of their child (Beal & Hendry, 2012). Choice schools could use this to their advantage and attract students of high academic standing. Since parents chose schools based upon their students' academic performance (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Jacobsen, Snyder, & Saultz, 2014; Teske & Schneider, 2001), it was important for the MP4M&S to have high levels of student performance. It is also necessary to note that other factors were important to parents and these factors vary among different types of parents (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014; Neild, 2015).

Sources of Information. Parents could have used a variety of information sources when they decided to send their students to a choice school. It was important to determine what information parents used to determine the attractiveness of the school. How parents were able to take the information that was available to them and make decisions was important to their child's success (Neild, 2005). This information should be used to inform the marketing strategies that the school uses to attract students; especially those that might either leave the district or might choose another school choice program. How parents used these sources to find schools that they view as "better" was much debated. The quantity of the information that parents actually used to

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make their decisions was often limited (Buckley & Schneider, 2003). It was important that schools provided parents with enough information to choose their program.

In this study, the researcher focused on those sources that were important to the parents, as self-reported by the parents in the interview process, and the reasons why these sources were important.

Social networks. Social networks were constructed through the interactions that people have at work, at school, within their extended families, and within their community. These social networks were important factors that influence parents and the choices they make regarding the schools that their children attended (Bell, 2009; Goldring & Philips, 2008; Maddaus, 1990; Neild, 2005). Parents gained an increased sense of social status from attending a school that was deemed better than their local school (Holme, 2002). Parents who seek the increased social status may have made school choice decisions based upon their social desires as opposed to their academic wishes for their children.

Social networks were usually developed according to the social interests of the various social groups to which the parent belonged. At times, parents felt that their networks were more reliable and trustworthy than the other information that was available to them (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014). Using their social networks, parents felt that they were making decisions that were strong. The strength of these decisions was based upon the approval that parents received from others and not necessarily the academic successes of their children (Ball & Vincent, 1998).

In some cases, parents that use social networks have been shown to use other information when making school choice decisions (Hamilton & Guin, 2006). These parents combine data sources that were available to them with the information that they got from their networks. They

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often used information related to the reputation of a school and not the student achievement data that was readily available (Bell, 2009).

In other cases, parents used the social networks and did not rely on any other information about the school (Holme, 2002). These parents did not utilize the various sources of information that schools, media outlets, and the NJDOE provide. Instead, these parents relied on the beliefs of others to make their decisions.

In certain cases, parents relied solely on social networks because they had no access to other information (Neild, 2005). Parents used these networks to gain information about schools, based primarily on hearsay, and then formed their own judgments about the schools they were investigating (Bell, 2005). Those that lack information were at a distinct educational disadvantage as they were solely dependent upon their social network.

Measures of school quality. Parents used various accountability measures when deciding upon a school. These included, but were not limited to, standardized testing, graduation rates, the number of students enrolled in advanced courses, the number of students who take AP & IB exams, drop-out rate, retention rate, student suspension rate, college entrance exam scores, college acceptances, school crime rate, and staff mobility (Figlio and Ladd, 2008). The MHRD must focus its efforts towards promoting those measures that prospective parents find most important.

Test proficiency was the most accepted measure of school quality when families were looking to purchase a house (Brasington & Haurin, 2006) and parents stated that academic quality, as measured by test scores, was a very important characteristic when looking at a school (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Beal & Hendry, 2012; Black, 1999; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014; Teske & Schneider, 2001). Policy makers have attached school accountability to

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student performance on standardized tests (Wei, 2012). When choosing the best schools for their children, some parents relied on accountability measures, mostly based upon standardized tests. (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Black, 1999; Figlio & Ladd, 2008).

NCLB has mandated an increase in the accountability data that was available to parents. Studies have shown that parents used this data to make decisions about the schools their children attend (Hastings & Weinstein, 2007; Jacobsen, Snyder, & Saultz, 2014; Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Roch, 1998). In New Jersey, school performance data for every public school in the state was made available on the NJDOE website on an annual basis. Various media outlets, such as the Star Ledger and NJ Monthly, also provided this data to the public.

Parental Background. Ultimately, parents had to make the decision to send their students to a choice school (Gill & Rand Education, 2001; Jacobs, 2013). In order for a school choice program to get students to enroll, the parents of the students must have gathered enough information to make a choice (Archibald, 2004). Parental background had an impact on the schools that parents selected for their students and their student's success in school (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Goldring & Philips, 2008; Hanushek, 1986; Teske & Schneider, 2001).

Parents of higher socioeconomic status, whether economically, and/or educationally, were more likely to use the school choice program when deciding on a school (Teske & Schneider, 2001). Research has identified and studied several background characteristics, including but not limited to level of education, income, ethnicity, parental involvement, and home learning tools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Goldring & Philips, 2008; Schneider, et al., 2002; Teske & Schneider, 2001). Opponents of school choice believe that higher-level socioeconomic parents used school choice to better position their students to succeed because they were more aware of the options available to their children (Maddaus, 1990). Choice could

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only help students if their parents had the information they need to make the decision to use school choice (Teske, et al., 2006).

Education and socioeconomic status. The level of education that a child's parents have completed had an effect on their child's success in education. As the level of parental education increased, the parent placed a bigger emphasis on achievement in education for their children (Goldring & Philips, 2008). This emphasis influenced how the parent made their decisions. Highly educated parents relied on other highly educated members of their social networks to help them make decisions (Schneider, et al., 2002). This led to parents relying on members of their social network who have the similar values about education.

In theory, school choice should alleviate some of the issues related to poverty and school quality. With school choice, parents no longer had to move to a new town in order to attend its schools. This allowed parents to send their students to a school in a town that they cannot afford to live in (Armor & Peiser, 1997). This changes the dynamics of Tiebout's (1956) theory that parents who were unhappy with their schools can vote with their feet and move out of the district. Parents can "vote with their feet" and send their child to a choice school without having to move. This enabled parents to send their children to schools that were outside their home value threshold. The two downsides to this were that out-of-district choice seat had to be available and parents needed to determine how to transport their child to their choice school.

Parents who sent their students to magnet schools usually come from a higher socioeconomic status (Goyette, 2008; Teske, & Schneider, 2001). Parents from lower socioeconomic income levels had less accurate information about the school choice options that were available to their children. Students from lower socioeconomic status were thus at a disadvantage for choosing a good school (Schneider, et al., 1998; Teske, et al, 2008). This

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allowed school choice programs to benefit those students who needed the program least and not those it was intended to serve. Advantaged students left poor performing schools for higher achieving choice schools, thus leaving the poor performing schools worse off (Armor & Peiser, 1997).

In making the decisions that they do, parental use of school choice increased parental satisfaction with their children's schools (Dauber, 2013; Goldring & Philips, 2008). This can be due to the added sense of control that parents have in directing their students' education, even if they had to send their child to a school that was located in a zone outside their economic means, or the increased status parents get from their peers. Parents used school choice to increase their social status among their peers and within their social network. This shifted the parents, as a decision-maker, from ones who were seeking the best interests of their child to ones who were using school choice to satisfy their own needs for acceptance and status (Holme, 2002).

Student success in school was closely related to the educational attainment level of their parents. Students of parents with a lower educational attainment had lower overall test scores (Brasington & Haurin, 2005). Parents who completed higher levels of education were more likely to search out school choice options for their child (Teske & Schneider, 2001). As the children of the higher educated parents were exposed to various options, they were exposed to more school options and opportunities. Parents of students with lower levels of educational attainment were exposed to fewer resources (Smrekar, 2009). Therefore, students with parents of lower educational attainment had limited information to make a school choice decision. The effects that parental education attainment level had on both student test scores and the likelihood of utilizing more school choice information leads to a system where school choice was utilized by high performing students.

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Parents from lower socioeconomic income levels were less likely to have the information needed to make a decision about school choice (Armor & Peiser, 1997). These parents lacked the access to information available about their school choice options. These parents may also have less informed social networks from which to rely on for decision-making information (Schneider, et al., 2000). The effects of this should be studied, not only in urban situations, but in suburban situations as well.

School demographics. Parents may choose schools based upon the ethnic makeup of the student body (Hamilton & Guinn, 2006; Schneider, et al., 1998). This led to increased levels of segregation as White students pick schools with higher levels of White students and Black students pick choice schools with higher levels of Black students. Schools that had higher levels of Black and Hispanic populations tended to have lower overall test scores (Brasington & Haurin, 2005). Research has also shown that White parents used school choice to keep their students out of schools with ethnic minorities. This increased the segregation in schools (Teske & Schneider, 2001). Instead of solving the problems created by school segregation, magnet schools were propagating these problems.

White parents were more likely to use their social networks when choosing a school (Teske, et al., 2006). This promotes the idea that White students were going to have greater access to school choice options and therefore better educational opportunities. This led to greater ethnic segregation in our schools. Again this goes against the original intentions of school choice (Blank, 1984; Goldring, 2009; Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Maddaus, 1990).

Contextual Background

New Jersey funded a public school version of a school choice program, on a per pupil basis, that included 132 school districts throughout the state, many of which were located in

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suburban settings. These schools received additional funding for any out-of-district students that enroll (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015c). The number of out-of-district students that each school could accept was limited to the number of out-of-district students attending the school in the previous academic year. It was incumbent upon school districts that were chosen to participate in the Interdistrict School Choice Program to ensure that they were attracting enough students to fill up their allocated seats. If a seat was not filled, the school lost state funding for that seat and may not regain funding for that seat in subsequent school years. This loss of funding was especially important in NJ where school budget increases were capped at 2% annually unless a special school budget vote was held. Such a budget vote had to first be approved by the county superintendent and then passed by a majority vote of the voters who lived in the school district. Since this cap was enacted, the MHRD has never requested a vote to increase the budget over the 2% cap.

Policy Context – State of New Jersey

Montclair, New Jersey was the first district in the state to offer intradistrict school choice. The intention was to close economic and social disparities between the different schools within the specific school districts (Teske & Schneider, 2001). New Jersey's present model for the school choice program began in the early 1990s. Governor Jim Florio endorsed a program that introduced publicly funded charter schools to the state. Governor Florio did not have time to pass the proposal before he lost his bid for reelection. Florio's successor, Governor Christine Todd Whitman proposed a voucher system that would allow families in Jersey City to pick the school that their children attended (public or private). As with most political promises, this particular program was scaled back and eventually eliminated. However, in 1996, Governor Whitman signed the Charter School Program Act into Law (Abernathy, 2005).

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The first interdistrict school choice program was introduced in 1998. In this version of school choice, only 21 schools, one per county, could participate and students had to be admitted via a lottery. At the time, six schools participated in the program. These schools did little to challenge local high school districts and encourage their improvement (Abernathy, 2005).

In 2010, Governor Chris Christie signed the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program Act. Under this act, schools had to apply, and then be authorized, to become interdistrict choice schools. In the application process, schools had to request the number of seats that they could offer in the program, as well as describe the program(s) that they offer to choice students, the outreach plan, and the selection process (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015c)

The NJDOE ultimately decided how many of the available seats they would fund at each choice school. Within a school, choice students could not exceed 10% of the current grade student population or 15% of the entire school population (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015d). Once students were accepted into the school choice program, they did not have to reapply on a yearly basis. Once a school belongs to the school choice program, the school was not allowed to accept any students for tuition (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015b).

Due to the growth of the program and the costs incurred by the state, the program's growth was limited to 5% per year. The state provided the tuition for the choice student. In the 2014-2015 school year, school choice districts received \$14,400 for each inter-district choice student they educate (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015c). This money came directly from the state. The local (sending) school was not forced to reimburse the state for their lost student. The local taxpayer did not fund school choice students, through their local property taxes, who either chose to leave the taxpayer's district or who chose to attend a choice school in the taxpayer's district. However, the sending school district received less state aid based upon

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their enrollment figures of those students who decide to attend the local school. The state put limits on the program by determining how many seats each qualifying school can offer to students who live outside their geographic boundaries. In part, this was based on the number of seats filled in the previous academic year.

A choice school can only have an admissions process for out-of-district students if they have one for in-district students. It must be exactly the same for both out-of-district and in-district students. For example, the MP4M&S had an admissions process for all students who wanted to apply to the program and also lived in the district. The district, when accepting out-of-district students, was required to use the exact same admissions, including the tests, cut scores, and score weighting (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015e). If the school had an admissions process, all in-district students who qualify must first be offered a seat. After all of the qualified in district students were offered seats in the program, seats can go out to those Tier 1 students who qualified and then the Tier 2 students who qualified (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015e).

Students who applied for interdistrict school choice fell into one of two tiers or categories. Tier 1 students were those students who attended their local school district for the entire school year before entering a school choice school. Tier 2 students were students who did not attend their local school district for the entire school year prior to entering a choice school. Students who attended charter schools were considered Tier 1 students. Students who attended choice schools were considered Tier 2 students. Schools are required to accept Tier 1 students first. In choice schools that do not have an admissions process, if more Tier 1 students applied to a school than the available number of seats, the school was required to hold a lottery to determine who gets the school choice seat. Tier 2 students may be admitted once all of the Tier 1

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students were offered seats. Exceptions were made if a Tier 2 student has a sibling in the same school choice school that they were applying (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015a).

In addition to the two-tier system that the MP4M&S admissions team must adhere to, there were two additional considerations that had to be taken into account when considering out-of-district students applications, as per NJDOE guidelines. First, qualifying students who have siblings enrolled in the district's school choice program were admitted before Tier 1 students. These students were labeled Tier 0 students during the selection process. Second, qualifying students who attended the school choice program in Wharton, one of the MHRD's four sending schools and the only one to have a school choice program at the time of the study, as out-of-district choice students were admitted before Tier One students. These students were also labeled Tier 0 students during the admissions process (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015a).

In order to apply for school choice, regardless of Tier status, parents had to complete an "Intent to Participate" form prior to the state-determined deadline. In the past, the deadline was the first school day in December prior to attending the choice school. This form went to the student's local school superintendent (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015a). This gave the local school superintendents and their staff nine months to try and convince their students to stay in district and not attend a choice school.

Interdistrict school choice students are required to receive transportation or aid in lieu from their local district if they live between 2.5 miles and 20 miles of the interdistrict choice school. The aid in lieu was capped at \$840 per year in 2015-2016. This value may not have covered the cost of transportation, thus making it difficult for choice students to travel to their interdistrict school (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015b).

School Context

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MHRD is a 9-12 school district consisting of two high schools, Morris Hills and Morris Knolls. The two schools are located 1.8 miles away from each other and they are the local high schools for 2865¹ students who live in Denville, Rockaway Borough, Rockaway Township, and Wharton. Students who live in Wharton, Rockaway Borough, and the White Meadow Lake section of Rockaway Township attend Morris Hills High School. The district is located in Northwest New Jersey and is approximately 45 minutes from New York City by car. This area of New Jersey is an affluent suburban section of New Jersey.

In 2015-2016, the MHRD hosted four distinct programs in addition to its comprehensive general education curriculum: The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program at Morris Hills, the Academy for Mathematics, Science, and Engineering (MSE) at Morris Hills, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Morris Knolls, and the MP4M&S at Morris Hills. The MSE is funded and administered by the Morris County Vocational School System and is hosted at Morris Hills. MSE students attended classes that were taught by Morris Hills' teachers, participated in clubs, sports, and activities at Morris Hills High School, and graduated from both Morris Hills and the Morris County Vocational School System. The MSE was not part of the Interdistrict School Choice Program. The other two programs were primarily funded by the MHRD.

The MHRD was a member of the state's interdistrict school choice program at the time of the study. The district had a limited number of seats that were made available to students in either the general education program, the IB Program, or the MP4M&S. The total number of seats was capped each year by the NJDOE. Each interdistrict student was funded by the NJDOE. In 2014-2015, the district had 122 seats filled by interdistrict choice students. Because of an

¹ Based upon the enrollment figures for the 2015-2016 school year.

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agreement between the Wharton School District, a K-8 school choice district that feeds into MHRD, and the NJDOE, MHRD had 128 seats in 2015 – 2016 to accommodate Wharton's interdistrict school choice students

The MP4M&S was a valued income source for the MHRD. The program's ability to attract qualified out-of-district students was important to its financial future. Morris Hills High School, which hosts the program, was one of the last comprehensive high schools in Morris County, offering over 160 academic, performing arts, and technical courses. Each year, the school lost no more than a handful of students to other choice schools. In 2015-2016, out of 1326 students, the school lost 1 student to Public-Choice schools and 16 students to private or parochial schools and pays aid in lieu as per state statute. Those students who decide to attend parochial or private schools usually attended these types of schools before they reached their freshman year of school. These students were already outside of the reach and influence of the district before they can attend school in the district.

Each out-of-district student brought in an additional \$14,400 in state funds to the district per year (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015c). In the past, these funds helped the district maintain its staffing levels in a time when budgets were shrinking. If the MP4M&S stopped bringing in out-of-district students, staff members would be released and programs would be cut. Due to a budget shortfall for the 2015-2016 school year, four teachers did not have their contracts renewed. The MHRD competed against other school choice high schools, regular public high schools, Vo-Tech academies, parochial, and private schools for the same students. To develop a successful recruiting and retention program, the reasons why families pick MP4M&S must be understood by the MHRD.

MP4M&S Demographics

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The MP4M&S was a diverse program with 137 students. Of that number, 57 (42%) of the students were female. This value was higher than found in STEM careers and STEM graduate education (Leaper, et al., 2012). Students came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The student body was comprised of 63 White students, 43 Asian students, 23 Asian/Pacific Islander students, 3 African American students, and 5 Hispanic students. This data was self-reported by the students' families upon entering the school district. Two students qualified for free lunch and two for reduced lunch. None of the students in the Magnet Program were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Finally, 22 of the students in the program spoke a language other than English at home

Demographic Comparisons. Out-of-District students who attended the MP4M&S primarily came from schools that have higher percentages of White students. Only Dover High School had a smaller percentage of White students enrolled. There was a higher percentage of Asian students in the MP4M&S than all of the schools except for both Parsippany Hills and Parsippany High School. These two schools were part of the same school district. These two schools had a demographic make-up that most closely resembles the demographic makeup of the MP4M&S. The MP4M&S had a higher percentage of Asian-Pacific Islanders than all of the other local schools in the study. The percentage of Black students who attended the MP4M&S was lower than all but five schools in the study. Finally, the demographic analysis of Hispanic students shows that the percentage of Hispanic students who attended the MP4M&S was less than all of the local schools in the study (See Table 1).

The demographic analysis also shows that fewer students who qualified for free and reduced lunch attended the MP4M&S. Continuing the analysis, there was a lower percentage of female students who attended the program than any of the local schools (See Table 1).

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There are differences between the general demographic and socioeconomic makeup of the MP4M&S and the local schools that the students in the program would have attended based upon their residence (See Tables 1&2). The implications of the demographic comparisons will be discussed in the discussion section.

Table 1

Demographic Data for each Local School District that MP4M&S Students Reside

School	Race White (%)	Race Asian (%)	Race A/PI (%)	Race Black (%)	Race Hispanic (%)	Free & Reduced Lunch (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)
MORRIS HILLS	56.60	10.70	0.10	4.40	28.30	23.7	47.60	52.40
BUTLER	85.80	2.90	0.00	2.20	8.80	17.2	51.00	49.00
DOVER	15.70	2.40	0.00	8.20	73.70	65.7	47.70	52.30
HACKETTSTOWN	80.60	5.10	0.10	1.60	10.80	12.4	51.10	48.90
HANOVER PARK	83.30	7.60	0.00	3.60	5.40	3.0	52.00	48.00
JEFFERSON	86.10	4.00	0.00	1.80	6.70	12.0	49.00	51.00
LENAPE VALLEY	85.90	3.40	0.10	3.00	7.00	11.9	52.20	47.80
MADISON	81.10	6.30	0.10	2.60	8.60	7.2	47.70	52.30
MONTVILLE	71.00	22.40	0.20	1.50	3.70	3.6	48.80	51.20
MORRIS KNOLLS	81.10	0.00	0.20	3.50	7.80	9.5	49.70	50.30
MOUNT OLIVE	81.10	8.00	0.10	6.90	12.10	11.7	47.90	52.10
PARSIPPANY	49.40	32.50	0.10	5.30	11.10	18.5	49.50	50.50
PARSIPPANY HILLS	52.00	33.80	0.00	3.00	9.70	12.5	50.00	50.00
POMPTON LAKES	79.70	4.90	0.90	0.60	13.90	11.2	47.60	52.40
RANDOLPH	77.00	8.90	0.20	2.70	11.20	6.1	49.20	50.80
ROXBURY	80.20	5.90	0.10	3.80	9.50	7.9	51.00	49.00
WHIPPANY PARK	81.80	10.70	0.00	1.90	5.40	1.9	50.90	49.10
MP4M&S	44.90	31.60	17.70	2.20	3.70	0.0	41.10	58.90

Data from NJDOE 2013-2014 School Performance Reports at <https://education.state.nj.us/pr/>

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Table 2

Socioeconomic Data for each Local School District that MP4M&S Students Reside

	Less than HS Grad (%)	HS Grad (%)	Some College or Associate's Degree (%)	Bachelor's Degree (%)	Graduate Degree (%)	Median House- hold Income (\$)	Civilian Employed, 16 years and Over, Computer, Engineering, and Science Occupations (%)
Bloomington	8.50	37.80	26.10	18.80	8.30	71526	4.33
Boonton	3.70	23.70	21.00	27.50	23.40	114722	8.2
Budd Lake	5.20	28.80	24.30	25.80	15.90	90221	13.7
Cedar Knolls	7.30	23.30	16.70	31.60	21.10	101125	10.3
Dover	29.80	35.50	21.00	10.60	3.00	56755	1.7
Flanders	2.70	20.90	25.30	34.80	16.50	100529	7.4
Florham Park	2.00	17.50	19.20	61.30	31.50	106424	7.5
Randolph	3.40	13.30	16.80	37.60	29.00	123578	12.7
Hackettstown	16.10	32.00	25.70	17.60	8.20	69094	6.5
Lake Hiawatha	5.70	34.20	20.60	24.90	14.70	80283	12.3
Lake Hopatcong	4.70	28.00	30.00	27.90	9.50	90505	9.6
Ledgewood	7.10	30.00	21.30	28.90	12.80	93065	5.7
Madison	6.10	15.30	13.80	32.20	32.30	111134	8
Montville	2.70	19.60	15.70	34.00	27.80	114417	12.2
Mt Arlington	5.20	31.70	25.20	37.90	14.80	83191	9.3
Netcong	11.10	48.00	24.40	10.30	6.30	51475	8.5
Parsippany	7.80	23.50	17.60	31.20	20.40	86329	17.5
Riverdale	4.90	33.90	20.00	25.30	15.70	84924	7.2
Stanhope	8.30	29.00	30.00	32.70	8.00	86477	5.3
Succasunna	4.00	38.40	40.10	28.70	17.90	117473	9.1
Towaco	1.40	19.50	13.30	40.30	25.50	129432	9.2
Denville	2.70	24.50	25.00	30.00	17.70	105597	8.50
Rockaway	6.50	26.70	24.20	28.25	14.40	98939	6.20
Wharton	12.00	37.30	23.00	19.00	8.20	79732	5.40

Data from 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates at
<http://www.census.gov/surveys/acs/guidance/estimates.html>

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The findings from this study were intended to help the MHRD attract out-of-district students and their families to apply to and, if qualified, chose to attend the MP4M&S. The MP4M&S was chosen as the primary program to be studied for various reasons. First, STEM education had become a prominent topic in education. Many schools in New Jersey focused on STEM related curriculum. Many of these schools had a strong reputation for success. Many highly regarded schools across the country had a STEM focus. Second, the researcher was the coordinator of the MP4M&S. His interest in improving the program starts with attracting those students who would benefit most from the program. Lastly, competing districts had implemented new strategies to convince students to stay in their local schools and not attend the MP4M&S as interdistrict choice students.

A mixed methods protocol was utilized to conduct this study. The research was divided into three stages. During the first stage, demographic data was collected about both the in-district and out-of-district students enrolled in the MP4M&S. The second stage included eight semi-structured interviews with an equal number of out-of-district and in-district parents of MP4M&S students. The third stage included a survey given to all of the parents of students in the MP4M&S.

Stage 1 Data

The demographic data was obtained from two different sources, the school information system at Morris Hills High School and the NJDOE's School Performance Reports from 2013-2014 (See Table 3). The data were analyzed and the students' families were grouped by their out-of-district status for the interviews.

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Table 3

Stage 1 Data Collection – Demographic Data & Sources

MHRD School Information System (All MP4M&S Students)	NJ School Performance Report (All MP4M&S Students)
Year of Graduation (YoG)	Academic Achievement (Statewide Percentile)
Race (White, Asian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, & Hispanic)	College & Career Readiness (Statewide Percentile)
Free & Reduced Lunch	Combined SAT Scores
LEP status	Percentage of Students in Grades 11 & 12 who take at least 1 AP/IB course
Home Address/Distance to Morris Hills High School	Percentage of AB/IB test passed by 11 & 12 graders

Student Information System

The MHRD student information system was used to collect data and develop an understanding of the demographic makeup of the students in the study. This information was readily available to any administrator in the district. The collected data included the following: each student's year of graduation, street address, race, free and reduced lunch status, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) status. One's hometown can be different than one's home district as a district can encompass multiple towns. For example, students who attend Butler High School can live in either Borough of Butler or in the Borough of Bloomingdale. The shortest distance from each student's residence to Morris Hills High School was determined using Google Maps. The data from this stage informed the rest of the Stage 1 data collection as it identified which towns' census information and which high school's School Performance Reports had to be collected.

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After collecting the data, it was determined that some of the characteristics had populations that were too small to study. The students' free and reduced lunch status, home language, and LEP status were removed and not studied further.

New Jersey School Performance Report

Once each student's home district had been determined, the researcher verified the local high school for each student in the study. The 2013-2014 School Performance Report was obtained for each of the out-of-district schools in this study from the NJ DOE's website (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015f). The following data was collected from the reports: Academic Achievement as a statewide percentile, Career and College Readiness as a statewide percentile, average SAT Math score, average SAT Critical Reading score, combined SAT score, percentage of students in grades 11 & 12 who take at least one AP/IB course, percentage of AP/IB tests passed by grades 11 & 12 students (See Table 4). This data gave the researcher a better understanding of the local schools that the students chose not to attend.

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Table 4

NJDOE School Performance by Local School District

School	Academic Achievement (Statewide Percentile)	Career & College Readiness (Statewide Percentile)	SAT Math	SAT Critical Reading	SAT Comb- ined	Percentage of Grade 11 & 12 Students taking at least 1 AP/IB course (%)	Percentage of Grade 11 & 12 Students passing AP/IB assess- ments (%)
Butler	37	61	500	493	1482	32.7	78.9
Dover	65	49	504	472	1449	36.6	62.0
Hackettstown	57	39	516	502	1517	31.5	62.7
Hanover Park	70	69	543	523	1598	84.1	77.6
Jefferson	58	58	498	491	1474	21.6	86.6
Lenape Valley	67	50	501	492	1495	20.3	77.6
Madison	84	80	562	559	1689	49.9	86.1
Montville	73	69	581	548	1683	42.1	84.5
Morris Hills	53	72	535	494	1529	25.7	93.1
Morris Knolls	75	71	549	527	1605	36.8	84.7
Mount Olive	77	65	564	526	1615	36.7	90.5
MP4M&S	N/A	N/A	708	637	1997	100.0	88.0
Parsippany	58	64	566	522	1626	36.8	87.3
Parsippany Hills	64	62	580	533	1659	35.7	81.8
Pompton Lakes	77	60	529	492	1529	27.5	69.0
Randolph	75	71	573	540	1660	43.9	89.0
Roxbury	77	55	527	522	1563	25.2	92.0
Whippany Park	66	73	559	539	1646	67.4	75.0

Data from NJDOE 2013-2014 School Performance Reports at <https://education.state.nj.us/pr/>

Limitations of Stage 1 Data

There were several limitations to the data being collected in the first stage. The data that was collected from the MHRD school information system was self-reported. The district did not check this data for accuracy. Parents were free to input the data and answer the prompts for the data as they see fit. Different families can interpret categories differently. For example, one family might consider their ethnicity as Asian while another family from the same ethnic

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background might consider their ethnicity to be Asian/Pacific Islander. Those collecting the data did not give parents guidance as to the meaning of the different categories. The inconsistencies in the self-reported data could lead to unintended biases in the data.

The NJ School Performance Reports have several limitations. First, the most recent NJ School Performance Report, at the time of this study, was for the 2013-2014 school year. The next school performance report will be released after the Stage 1 data was collected and analyzed. The second limitation was that student ACT scores were not included in the performance report. The performance reports detail the percentage of students who take the ACT or the SAT assessment but only report the SAT scores. Numerous students enrolled in the MP4M&S take the ACT assessment. The third was that not all AP courses were included in the performance report. School Performance reports, by design, only include those students who took an AP class in English, math, social studies, and science (Ehrlichson, 2015). The next limitation was that students, both at Morris Hills High School and the MP4M&S take AP courses during their sophomore year. These students were not included in the school performance report. The last limitation was that the data found in the report was self-reported by each school or school district. Most of the demographic data that was gathered from the performance reports was self-reported to the schools by the parents of the students in the schools.

Stage 2 Data

The second stage of the data collection included eight semi-structured interviews with parents of students in the MP4M&S. Four out-of-district and four in-district parents were interviewed. The data analysis from Stage 1 was used to categorize out-of-district MP4M&S families into two equal sized groups based upon the distance they live from the school. The two groups consisted of those who lived closer than 9.3 miles and those who lived farther than 9.3

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miles from the MP4M&S. Two sets of parents from each group were interviewed. A group of in-district parents, one from each of the four sending districts, were also interviewed. The data from the interviews was compared to see if the different groups of parents send their children to the MP4M&S for different reasons.

The interviews were used to determine why the interviewees chose to send their students to the MP4M&S, the criteria they used to make their decision, and what sources they consulted in their decision-making process. Based upon the literature review and the Stage 1 data collection, it was believed that social networks, the academic focus of the MP4M&S, and the fact that parents may be unhappy with their local school influenced parents when they chose to send their students to the program.

Two of the reasons that parents might be happier with the MP4M&S than their local school were the school environment and the quality of the school. For the purposes of this study, the school environment included the academic focus of the MP4M&S, the academic rigor of the program, the location of the school, the size of the school, the safety record of the school, the ethnic makeup of the student body, and the discipline of the school, as seen in the behavior of the students.

The standardized test performances, the graduation rate, students in advance, AP, and/or IB courses, college acceptance, school crime rate, and staff mobility were often used by the parent or guardians to measure the quality of the school (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Beal & Hendry, 2012; Black, 1999; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014; Teske & Schneider, 2001). Several of these factors were used to attract students to the program during the recruiting process. First, the MP4M&S students' average combined SAT scores were 308 points higher than the next highest combined SAT score for a school that sends at least one student to the

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program (See Table 4). Second, in last year's graduating class, 3 of the 18 graduates matriculated into Ivy League schools. These factors were important to the Magnet Steering Committee. The interviews were used to determine if these factors were also important to the parents in the program.

The interview questions were divided up into six different categories. The first category, Introductory Questions, asked the parents or guardians, with little guidance, how and why they chose the MP4M&S. These questions allowed the researcher to see if the parents' responses were aligned with prior research. The second category, sources of information, asked parents to focus on the sources of information that they used to make the decision and how they found the sources. The researcher used follow-up questions that focused on social networks, print media, and internet sources, i.e. NJ School Performance Reports. The third category asked parents about their local high school to see if the parents were trying to flee an unfavorable situation. The fourth category included the criteria that the parents used to make the decision. This category allowed the researcher to gain a better perspective into the roles that school environment and school quality played in the decision-making process. The fifth category included probing questions to allow the researcher to learn more about the process used to make the decision, including whether the students were involved in the decision-making process, if transportation was an issue in making the decision-making process, and whether the parents felt that they had access to enough information to make their decision. The last category included the wrap up questions, asking the parents specific demographic information, including their race, their level of educational attainment, and their household income range (See Appendix A).

Stage 2 Data Collection

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After this study was approved by the IRB committee, a letter of consent was electronically sent to each family with a student in the MP4M&S (See Appendix C). The letters that were returned were grouped by distance away from the school for out-of-district families and sending district for in-district families. In each group, the families that returned letters were randomly assigned a number and the lowest value in each group was contacted for an interview. Parents were contacted by the researcher electronically. When a parent/guardian did not respond with a yes, the parent in the group with the next lowest number was contacted. This was repeated until eight parents agreed to be interviewed. Of the 11 parents that were invited to take part in the survey, 8 said yes.

The interviews were conducted at the location that was convenient to the interviewees, four were conducted over the phone and four were conducted on the MHRD campuses. The interviews were conducted using a semi-scripted interview protocol (See Appendix A). The interviews were recorded using GarageBand '14. The researcher transcribed the interviews and copied the recordings into two separate files. The transcriptions were uploaded to DeDoose and analyzed according to the coding scheme (See Appendix E). Descriptors were assigned to each transcription. The first descriptor labeled whether the interviewees lived in-district (ID) or out-of-district (OD). Interviews from in-district parents were given a second descriptor indicating the sending district that they live in, Denville, Rockaway Borough, Rockaway Township, or Wharton. Interviews from out-of-district parents were given a second descriptor indicating their distance from school. Interviewees that lived within 9.3 miles of the MP4M&S were labeled as close and those who lived greater than 9.3 miles from school were labeled as far. For example, if an interviewee was from out-district and lived 11.2 miles from the MP4M&S, their interview transcript was labeled OD Far.

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The data from the one-on-one interviews will be provided to the MHRD to better market its programs and make the district more attractive to those who may be thinking of leaving their local school district. The data obtained in the interviews was used to focus the survey and contribute to the findings of the research project.

Upon completion of the interview, the survey was revised, submitted to and approved by IRB, and sent to all the parents in the MP4M&S during the 2015-2016 school year. The survey was sent out in September of 2016 and the parents were originally given two weeks to complete the survey.

Limitations of Stage 2 Data

There were two limitations with the stage 2 data. First, parents were asked to remember a process that took place between one to four years prior to the interview. For some families, the decision process could have started before their student was in eighth grade and eligible to apply to the MP4M&S. Over time, their recollections could be influenced by the successes or failures that the students were having in the MP4M&S. Second, the families were self-reporting the data for a study being conducted by the coordinator of the program. The position of the researcher as the Coordinator of the MP4M&S could have influenced how the parents answered the questions.

Stage 3 Data

The third stage of the data collection used a survey to study why and how parents chose to send their children to the MP4M&S. Information from the interviews guided the final version of the survey. Input from the parents in the interview group was used to ensure that the parents' beliefs, and not just those of the researcher, influenced the survey.

The preliminary version of the survey, developed before the Stage 1 Data Analysis, asked parents about the following information when deciding to send their child to the MP4M&S: what

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educational outcomes were important, what school attributes were important, which sources of information were important, if they had enough information about the MP4M&S, and if the student applied to the Morris County Academy for Mathematics, Science, and Engineering, and if so, was the MP4M&S a safety school? The parents were also asked for the following demographic information that could not be gathered from the school information system: the annual household income and the highest level of education for the parents.

Stage 3 Data Collection

Surveys were sent electronically, using Google Forms, to the families of all 137 students in the MP4M&S. The participants were instructed to complete one survey per family. In the 2015-2016 school year, there were nine sets of siblings in the program, therefore a 100% response rate would yield 128 survey responses. Each family was asked to respond once to the survey, as the decision to attend the MP4M&S was believed to be a family decision.

To simplify the survey, each survey was pre-labeled with a numeric code that informed the researcher of the demographics of the survey participants. Multiple families can have the same code; therefore the study maintained the anonymity of the respondents. The code was based upon the following demographic data, School Choice Status (Y or N), Home Language - English (Y or N), and out-of-district students closer than 9.3 miles or farther than 9.3 miles from Morris Hills (NA, 00, or 93) (See Appendix B). Because of low response rates, Home Language, 9 non-English speakers at home, and distance away from the MP4M&S, 6 closer than 9.3 miles and 16 farther than 9.3 miles, were not analyzed in the survey. This information relieved the parents of having to enter demographic data that was readily available from the Stage 1 Data Collection.

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All parents, both in district and out of district, in the MP4M&S were invited to take the survey. The surveys was sent electronically via the school information system and parents had two weeks to complete the surveys and return them electronically. Follow up emails were sent, at the end of the first week and the day before the surveys were due. Because of the low response rate, 39 responses at the end of two weeks, the survey was opened for an additional week and two more reminder emails were sent out.

Limitations of the Stage 3 Data

As with the other stages of the study, the data retrieved from the survey was based on self-reported input from the parents. There was no way to confirm the answers in the survey without giving up the anonymity of the parents. Since the survey was administered via an online format, it was also impossible to determine whether the parents provided the answers on their own or if their children assisted them with the survey. This can be problematic as 15.4% of the families in the MP4M&S speak a language other than English at home. Parents might have needed the support of their children to interpret the questions. Finally, the answers to the survey could have been based upon one parent responding to the survey or by both parents responding to the survey. If both parents responded to the survey, there was no way to determine how they handled any disputes that may have arisen while completing the survey.

Sample

In the 2015-2016 school year, the MHRD had 128 out-of-district students enrolled in its three educational programs, the general education program, the IB program, and the MP4M&S. The MP4M&S had 137 total students, 39 of which were out-of-district, school choice students.

Second Stage

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The interview participants were well educated. Each of the parents had completed at least one post-secondary degree with four parents having completed graduate-level work (See Table 5). These results agree with the literature's findings that parents who have completed higher levels of education were more likely to search out school choice options for their child (Teske & Schneider, 2001).

Table 5

Educational Attainment Frequency

College Degree	Number of Interviewees
Associate's Degree	1
Bachelor's Degree	3
Some Graduate Work	1
Master's Degree	2
Doctorate	1

The data were self-reported by the interviewees during the interview

Third Stage

Out of the 137 students in the program during the 2015-2016 school year, there were 8 sets of siblings. Since only one response was collected per family, there was a maximum of 129 possible responses. There were 58 recorded survey responses, which is a 44.9% response rate. Two of the results were thrown out as the participant did not answer any of the survey questions before the survey results were entered and recorded. Therefore, there were 56 recorded survey responses, or a 43.4% response rate.

Demographic information. The survey data were collected and analyzed according to the student's out-of-district status (See Table 6).

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Table 6

Response Rate by District Status

District Status	Total	Responses	Percentage (%)
Out-of-District	39	22	56.0
In-district	90	34	37.8

The following data was also obtained during the interviews: Income Level (See Table 7) and Educational Attainment Level (See Table 8).

Table 7

Respondent Income Level Frequency

Income Level	Frequency	Percentage
Less than or equal to \$44,000	1	2.1
\$44,001 to \$88,000	2	4.2
\$88,001 to \$132,000	17	35.4
\$132,001 to \$176,000	9	18.8
\$176,001 to \$220,000	8	18.7
Greater than \$220,000	11	22.9
Did not answer	8	18.7

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Table 8

Respondent Educational Attainment Level Frequency

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Completed Some College	2	3.6
Associate's Degree	1	1.8
Bachelor's Degree	12	21.4
Completed some Postgraduate Studies	4	7.1
Master's Degree	26	46.4
Professional Degree (i.e. D.D.C, J.D., M.D. etc.)	8	14.3
Doctoral Degree (i.e. Ph.D., Ed.D.)	3	5.4

Location

In the first stage, data collection, MP4M&S student demographics were obtained using the MHRD student information system. The second stage, interview, was conducted in person or over the phone. The location was driven by the interviewee's comfort level. In the third stage, an electronic survey was sent to all 137 sets of parents with children at the MHRD. The parents were allowed to complete the survey where they felt was appropriate and comfortable.

How the Interview Influences the Survey

The purpose of the interview was to gather qualitative information from a small sample of parents and to inform the survey. Prior to the interviews, a survey was developed by the researcher. At the conclusion of the interviews, the survey was edited and submitted to IRB.

The interviews influenced the survey and helped to minimize the researcher's bias. A primary reason for this bias was that the researcher acts as an administrator in the program. The

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researcher does not have a student in the MP4M&S and did not go through the admissions/decision-making process as a parent. His lens was that of the coordinator of the program. It was important to the researcher to make sure that the parents' interests were represented in the survey.

Data Analysis

The stage 1 data was analyzed and the students were sorted by their out-of-district status (See Table 6). The data from this stage was used to separate families into different groups for the interview selection process. The data was also used to inform the survey data and to provide context for the researcher.

The qualitative data from the stage 2 data was organized and sorted using DeDoose. The transcripts were coded using themes that were deemed important, by the researcher and according to the literature, to the parental decision-making process (See Appendix E). After the initial interview analysis was completed, the research added themes and recoded the transcripts when necessary. The analysis separated common themes that indicated whether the interviewees wanted to flee the local school district from those that show that the interviewees were attracted to the MP4M&S. The transcripts were analyzed so that the researcher developed a firm understanding of why and how the parents decided to send their student to the MP4M&S. The researcher looked for differences between the responses from the in-district and the out-of-district parents. Identifying those themes that were important allowed the researcher to focus the survey towards the sample being studied and to make sure that the important themes were not errantly omitted.

The results of the interview provided the researcher with insights about certain criteria and sources that were not in the original survey. The student outcomes that were important to the

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parents, but not included in the original survey, included the capacity for self-motivation and developing a deeper interest in math and/or science. It was also evident that the survey should separate the friends and neighbors from the participants' family members when asking about the importance that social networks played in the decision-making process. The interview results also guided the researcher to combine HSPA scores, NJBCT scores, and other student test scores to state test scores. The interviewees were not concerned about the students' performances on specific standardized tests, but rather focused on test results as a whole. Finally, it was determined that it would be too difficult to accurately determine the number of hours that parents spent researching the program. Instead of asking for the number of hours, the survey was changed to ask the parents what grade their student was in when they started to research the MP4M&S. These changes were included in the updated survey before it was resubmitted to IRB for approval.

Coding Key

A unique coding key was developed for the interviews based upon the relevant topics found in the literature. The topics chosen were based upon the answers parents may give for why and how they decided to send the child to the MP4M&S. The first code was used to gather information about the interviewees and if they applied to the MP4M&S because they were they were attracted to the MP4M&S. This information was broken down into nine sub categories; academic focus, academic rigor, activities, college acceptances, economics, location, school environment, social networks, extra-curricular opportunities, and student input-decision. The second code was used to gather information about the interviewees and if they applied to the MP4M&S because they were fleeing their local high school. This information has a single sub category, academic rigor. The third code was used to gather information about the interviewees

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and determine if they were influenced by the presence of the MCAMSE. The fourth code was used to gather information about the methods and research parents used to gather information. The fifth code was used to gather information about the sources of information that parents used to gather information about the MP4M&S. This information was broken down into 10 subcategories; information nights, the internet, local school, print media, school report cards, school officials, school materials, social networks-family, social networks-friends & neighbors, students in the MP4M&S. (See Appendix E). At the end of the interview, demographic data were collected.

Certain themes were determined after the interviews were analyzed. These themes shifted the survey from one that is based upon the literature and the researcher's involvement in the program. Some of the themes went against what the interviewer expected while other themes were not anticipated by the researcher.

There were three themes that went against the expectations of the interviewer. First the parents did not regard the specific state testing and school report cards as important attributes during the decision making process. Second the parents did not rely on their social networks to provide approval when they chose to send their child to the MP4M&S. Third the parents did feel that college acceptances were important as an outcome for their child.

There were also three themes that the parents mentioned in the interviews that were not expected by the interviewer. First, the parents felt that the interactions that they had with teachers, administrators and students in the MP4M&S helped them decide to attend the program. Throughout the interviews, it was evident that the parents included their students in the decision-making process. Finally, the out-of-district parents were influenced by the fact that they could

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attend the MP4M&S without having to pay tuition. These themes were included in the survey and used to develop the study's conclusions.

Survey Analysis

The survey responses were collected electronically. The data were transferred to a spreadsheet for analysis. A descriptive statistical analysis analyzed response frequencies. This analysis was used to determine what factors were important to the parental decision-making process and what information they used to make their decisions.

The survey was divided into two parts. The first part was also divided into three subsections, important student outcomes, school attributes, and importance of sources. The second part consisted of miscellaneous information that was useful to the study (See Appendix D).

Part one. The data analysis for the first part of the survey looked to determine what was important to the parents and if there was a difference between in-district and out-of-district parents' responses. There were 37 different sources, attributes, and outcomes that were analyzed in this part of the survey.

Important Outcomes. Participants used a Likert Scale ranging from 1 through 5 to measure the importance of 13 different items that parents may have considered during the application process (See Appendix D). These items included educational outcomes, items that their student(s) should excel at, or items they wanted developed while attending the MP4M&S. A 1 on the Likert scale represented Not Important at All, a 2 on the scale represented Slightly Important, a 3 on the scale represented Somewhat Important, a 4 on the scale represented Very Important, and a 5 on the scale represented Extremely Important. The participant's responses

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were compiled for the entire population. Chi-squared tests were run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between in-district and out-of-district parents.

School Attributes. In this section, participants used a Likert Scale of 1 through 5 to measure the importance of 11 different items that parents may have considered as an important school attribute when choosing a school for their student(s) (See Appendix D). A 1 on the Likert scale represented Not Important at All, a 2 on the scale represented Slightly Important, a 3 on the scale represented Somewhat Important, a 4 on the scale represented Very Important, and a 5 on the scale represented Extremely Important. The participant's responses were compiled for the entire population. Chi-squared tests were run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between in-district and out-of-district parents.

Importance of Sources. Participants used a Likert Scale of 1 through 5 to measure the importance of 13 different items that that parents may have utilized as sources of information when choosing a school for their student(s) (See Appendix D). A 1 on the Likert scale represented Not Important at All, a 2 on the scale represented Slightly Important, a 3 on the scale represented Somewhat Important, a 4 on the scale represented Very Important, and a 5 on the scale represented Extremely Important. The participant's responses were compiled for the entire population. Chi-squared tests were run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between in-district and out-of-district parents.

Part two. Additional Information was gathered through the survey. The participants were asked the following:

1. If they had enough information to make their decision with regards to their local school and the MP4M&S?
2. What grade was their student in when they started to research the MP4M&S?

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3. If their child felt pressure from their social networks to not attend the MP4M&S?
4. If their child would have attended a parochial or a private school if they did not get into the MP4M&S?
5. If their child applied to Morris County Academy for Mathematics, Science, and Engineering?
 - If they respond yes, they were asked if the MP4M&S was their safety school.
6. If their child applied to the MP4M&S to get an advantage while applying to Colleges?
 - If they respond yes, they were asked what was the advantage that they were seeking.
7. Participants were then given the opportunity to add anything that they wanted like to add to their responses.
8. Finally, participants were asked for previously unattainable demographic information, their household income range and the highest level of educational attainment among the two parents.

All of the data in the second part of the survey were recorded and Chi-squared tests were run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between in-district and out-of-district parents.

The data from the survey was used to test the following hypotheses:

- The factors that influenced parents to send their students to the MP4M&S was different for parents based upon their school choice status.

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- The sources that influenced parents to send their students to the MP4M&S was different for parents based upon their school choice status

At the end of the survey, parents had the opportunity to add any other thoughts they had about why and how they chose the MP4M&S. These responses were transcribed and coded using the same coding key as the stage 2 interviews.

The following table correlates the research questions to the Interview and survey.

Table 9

Research Questions vs. Data Collection Methodology

Research Questions	Demographics	Interview	Survey
Why do parents choose to send their students to the MP4M&S?			
Follow Up Questions	Demographics	Interview	Survey
1. What criteria do parents use when picking a school to send their children?		What criteria do parents do a sample of parents say they use to choose MP4M&S? (Common themes, themes based on variation)	Using the criteria from the interviews and the literature review, what criteria do the parents use? (Stat analysis: Rank order, frequency, & Chi ² Test for in-district v. out-of-district)
2. What data sources do parents use when picking a school to send their children?		What data sources does a sample of parents use to choose MP4M&S? (Common themes, themes based on variation)	Using a set of criteria from the interviews and the literature review, what sources of information do the population of MP4M&S parents use? (Stat Analysis: Rank order, frequency, & Chi ² Test for in-district v. out-of-district)

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The findings in this study suggest two important conclusions. First, the attractors that influenced parents to choose the MP4M&S were similar, for the most part, for both the in-district and the out-of-district parents. These attractors included academic focus, academic rigor, college acceptances, original research, attractiveness compared to the local school, activity offerings, school culture, social networks, test scores, the status of the program, and the economics of attending the program. The importance placed on two of the attractors that were studied, status of the program and the economics of attending the program, were not the same for the two groups of parents. The parents also reported a major challenge that they had to overcome, transporting their student to the school, in order to send their child to the MP4M&S. This was beyond the control of the MP4M&S. Second, the types of information sources that parents used in the decision-making process were the Information Nights, the Internet, interactions with the staff and students, the MCAMSE, social networks family, friends, and neighbors, school resources, and print media. The last three, social networks, school resources, and print media were less important sources during the decision-making process. An additional section, differences, reviews the findings with respect to the different groups' access to the information.

I explain the findings, both qualitative and quantitative in the following two sections: what factors influence parents and what sources of information the parents used in the decision-making process. The first section is broken down into similarities and differences. The similarities subsection has the following subsections: academic focus, academic rigor, college acceptances, an original research project, attractiveness compared to the local school, activity offerings, school culture, social networks, and test scores. The differences subsection discusses

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the attractions, status and economics, while the challenge subsection discusses the transportation issues.

The second section, sources of information, is broken down into two sections, similarities and difference. The similarities section has the following subsections: Information Nights, Internet, interactions with students and staff, school resources, social networks, MCAMSE, and print media. The interactions subsection includes the following sub subsections: staff and students. The social networks subsection has the following sub subsections: family and neighbors. The difference section includes access to information.

After the findings are reviewed, the chapter ends with a short discussion of the take-aways and the conclusions of the study.

What Influenced Parents

When making the decision to send their child to the MP4M&S the parents found attractors and challenges that influenced their decision-making process. The attractors had to be important enough for the parents to leave their local school, overcome any challenges, and attend the program. The following sections go through those factors that influenced the participants during the decision-making process.

Similarities between the In-District and Out-of-District Parents

There were numerous attractors that the two groups of parents reported similar levels of importance. These were attractors that influenced parents to send their students to the MP4M&S. These items included academic focus, academic rigor, the original research project, the activity offerings, attractiveness compared to the local school system, the parents' social networks the school culture and test scores.

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Academic Focus. The interview data shows that parents were strongly attracted to the program because of their students' love for math and science. In-District Parent ID #4 said, "I knew that [my student's] strengths were in math and science and I thought that this was a great opportunity." Most of the interviewees, 7 out of 8, mentioned that their child loved math and/or science, or both, that they were very good in the either or both of the two subjects, or that they wanted to study them on the post-secondary level. Parent, ID #2, stated,

I think that to me, whatever [my student] does, being scientifically literate is an essential skill or a set of skills, or bank of knowledge, or however you want to think about it. But it is not negotiable and I really feel that the Magnet Program offers that and [my student] won't get it anywhere else.

For students who were interested in STEM fields, especially with the focus on STEM education throughout the country, the MP4M&S was an attractive offer.

The survey responses showed that the larger sample of parents were also attracted to the program because of its academic focus, thus supporting the interview data. When parents were asked how important it was that their student develop a deeper understanding of math and/or science, 88.2%, 30 out of 34, of the in-district parents and all 22 of the out-of-district parents responded that it was either very important or extremely important. Though both groups of parents rated this school attribute highly, the results of the Chi² test were statistically significant, showing that there was difference between in-district and out-of-district parents (See Table 10). Thus while both groups of parents felt that the academic focus of the school was important, more out-of-district parents felt that the academic focus was important.

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Table 10

School Choice and Developing a Deeper Interest in Math and/or Science

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	4	12	18	34
	0.00	0.00	11.76	35.29	52.94	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	0	3	19	22
	0.00	0.00	0.00	13.64	86.36	100.00
Total	0	0	4	15	37	56
	0.00	0.00	7.14	26.79	66.07	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 7.1855$ Pr = 0.028* Statistically Significant at <0.05

When parents were asked about the importance of math literacy, 85.3%, 29 out of 34, of the in-district parents and 87.5%, 20 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents rated it as either very important or extremely important (See Table 11). When parents were asked about the importance of science literacy, 97.1%, 33 out of 34, of the in-district parents and all 22 of the out-of-district parents rated it as either very important or extremely important (See Table 12). When parents were asked about the importance of school environment, specifically academic focus, all 34 of the in-district parents and 95.4%, 21 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents rated it as either very important or extremely important (See Table 13). Though both groups of parents rated this school attribute highly, the results of the χ^2 test were statistically significant, showing that more in-district parents rated school environment as important. When parents were asked about the importance of the STEM focus in the MP4M&S, 85.2% of in-district and 95.4% of out-of-district parents rated it as either very important or extremely important (See Table 14).

School Choice and Math Literacy

Table 12

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	1	13	20	34
	0.00	0.00	2.94	38.24	58.82	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	0	8	14	22
	0.00	0.00	0.00	36.36	63.64	100.00
Total	0	0	1	21	34	56
	0.00	0.00	1.79	37.50	60.71	100.00

Pearson Chi²(2) = 0.7105 Pr = 0.701

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Table 13

School Choice and School Environment – Academic Focus

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	0	16	18	34
	0.00	0.00	0.00	47.06	52.94	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	1	2	19	22
	0.00	0.00	4.55	9.09	86.36	100.00
Total	0	0	1	18	37	56
	0.00	0.00	1.79	32.14	66.07	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 9.7942$ Pr = 0.007** Statistically Significant at <0.01

Table 14

School Choice and STEM Focus

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	1	1	3	11	18	34
	2.94	2.94	8.82	32.35	52.94	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	1	8	13	22
	0.00	0.00	4.55	36.36	59.09	100.00
Total	1	1	4	19	31	56
	1.79	1.79	7.14	33.93	55.36	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 1.7909$ Pr = 0.774

Even though two of the results from the χ^2 Tests were statistically significant, showing that there was a difference between the in-district parents and the out-of-district parents, the data shows that most parents from both groups felt very strongly that the academic focus of the

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MP4M&S was important in the decision-making process. The out-of-district parents felt that the academic focus was more important in terms of the intended outcomes while the in-district parents felt that the school environment – academic focus was a more important school attribute.

Several of the survey write-in responses also mentioned the importance of the academic focus. One parent stated, “I like the focus on the Sciences...”, while another parent stated, “Excellent focus of biology and science.”, and a third parent stated, “We liked the focus on math and science.” These responses corroborate the other data points as to the importance of the academic focus of the school and that both groups of parents find the academic focus to be important.

Academic Rigor. According to parents, the rigor of the MP4M&S, along with its STEM focus, set it apart from other high school programs. Three out of four parents from both the in- and out-of-school groups indicated that the rigor of the program was important to them. Parent ID #3 stated, “For my [student], I wanted something that was more challenging.” Parents were attracted to the school because students were required to be in honors level math and science courses. Students were also required to take two honors or AP level courses in subjects outside of math and science. Students enrolled in the program were automatically placed into honors-level math and science courses. To some out-of-district parents, there were no assurances that their child would be in an honors class in their local high school. Two out-of-district parents felt that it was easier to get their student into the more academic rigorous courses in the MP4M&S than they could in their local high school. Parent OD Close #1 stated “The other thing that influenced us was that it is an all honors program and it is not guaranteed that you will get into an Honors program in [our local school].” Parents wanted their students to be in an environment

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where they will be pushed to succeed by both the students in their classes and the structure of the program. Parent ID #1 stated,

I think that the environment of the Magnet Program pushes kids to pull out the best of themselves that they might not get in a regular AP class because there is always this little extra subgroup of Magnet students that give each other, that push each other in a positive way.

According to all of the out-of-district interviewees, the academic rigor of some of the local high schools did not compare to the MP4M&S. This included schools that were both close to and far from the MP4M&S. Parent OD Far #2 stated,

“To be honest, it is because our local high school was not, does not have a reputation for being a real challenging school, and my feelings were I wanted [my student] to be challenged. If [my student] was at [local high school], [my student] would probably be the valedictorian and there would be no question as to who is the top of the class. But my feeling has always been that you rise to the level of your peers and I think that [my student] is getting a better education than at his local high school. No doubt about it.”

Parent OD Far#1 stated, “And we just said that we are not going to just sit back and accept what was just OK. Our biggest concern with the resident school district was that OK was just OK and that was good enough [for them].” Parent OD Close#2 stated,

My [older child] had gone through high school before my [Magnet student] did so we were not entirely satisfied by the local high school and we did not want to move and so we looked at some private schools and this [MP4M&S] just literally popped in the paper one day.

Three out of four in-district parents stated that they wanted their students exposed to high-levels of academic rigor. Parent ID #3 stated “I wanted something more challenging.” This program was appealing to in-district parents as it allows their child to attend an in-district while enrolled in a more academic rigorous program than the general high school program.

The parents in the survey sample also felt that the academic rigor was important when choosing the MP4M&S. This rigor was measured through the academic offerings that the MP4M&S offered its students. In- and out-of-district parents were strongly attracted to the

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academic offerings at the MP4M&S. Almost all of the parents in the study, 97%, 33 out of 34, of the in-district parents and all 22 out-of-district parents, rated the academic offerings as either very important or extremely important (See Table 15).

Table 15

School Choice and Academic Offerings

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	1	13	20	34
	0.00	0.00	2.94	38.24	58.82	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	0	4	18	22
	0.00	0.00	0.00	18.18	81.82	100.00
Total	0	0	1	17	38	56
	0.00	0.00	1.79	30.36	67.86	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 3.4573$ Pr = 0.178

Several of the survey write-in responses mentioned academic rigor. One parent stated, “We needed my child to learn how to research topics as well as be challenged, explore topics not offered in a regular curriculum.” Another parent stated, “It looked challenging.” A third parent went on to say, “We choose the program because we needed to challenge our child...” These responses corroborate the data gathered in the interviews and in the quantitative portion of the survey.

College Acceptances. There was a strong desire among students and their families in the MP4M&S to attend the best colleges possible. The class of 2016 was the MP4M&S’s 4th graduating class. For most of the parents in the study, there was little, if any, information available to them as to which colleges accepted students from the MP4M&S. While choosing to attend the MP4M&S, parents had to determine whether the program would help their student

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attend a better college. Some parents, three out-of-district and one in-district, had no information about the colleges that MP4M&S graduates attended while others in the study had minimal information. Parent ID #2 stated, "... theoretically, attending a Magnet Program should be good for college acceptance." Attending the MP4M&S was seen by the parents as an opportunity to give their competitive students an advantage over other students vying for the same college acceptances.

The survey participants were asked five questions pertaining to college acceptances. The first three focused on college acceptances as an important outcome. With regards to AP credits for college, 64.6%, 22 out of 34, of the in-district parents and 77.6%, 17 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents thought that it was either very important or extremely important (See Table 16). With regards to college acceptances, the credentials of the college, 97.1%, 33 out 34, of the in-district parents and 95.4%, 21 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents thought that it was either very important or extremely important (See Table 17). With regards to college acceptances, prepared for college, all 56 of the parents, both in- and out-of-district, thought that it was either very important or extremely important when choosing the MP4M&S (See Table 18).

Table 16

School Choice and AP Credits for College

District						
Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	2	2	8	15	7	34
	5.88	5.88	23.53	44.12	20.59	100.00
Out-of-	0	3	2	10	7	22
District	0.00	13.64	9.09	45.45	31.82	100.00
Total	2	5	10	25	14	56
	3.57	8.93	17.86	44.64	25.00	100.00
Pearson Chi ² (4) =	4.4321	Pr = 0.351				

Table 17

School Choice and College Acceptances (Credentials of the College)

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	1	16	17	34
	0.00	0.00	2.94	47.06	50.00	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	1	5	16	22
	0.00	0.00	4.55	22.73	72.73	100.00
Total	0	0	2	21	33	56
	0.00	0.00	3.57	37.50	58.93	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 3.3758$ Pr = 0.185

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Table 18

School Choice and College Acceptances (Prepared for College)

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	0	8	26	34
	0.00	0.00	0.00	23.53	76.47	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	0	4	18	22
	0.00	0.00	0.00	18.18	81.82	100.00
Total	0	0	0	12	44	56
	0.00	0.00	0.00	21.43	78.57	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 0.2269$ Pr = 0.634

The last two questions in the survey that pertained to college acceptances focused on the acceptances as a school attribute. The first one, college acceptances, the credentials of the college, 94.1%, 32 out of 34, of the in-district parents and all 22 of the out-of-district parents thought that it was either very important or extremely important (See Table 19). The second one, college acceptances, prepared for college, 97.1%, 33 out of 34, of the in-district parents and all 22 of the out-of-district parents thought that it was either very important or extremely important (See Table 20). It is also noted that 90.1%, 17 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents thought that the school attribute was extremely important, compared to 50.0%, 17 out of 34, of the in-district parents.

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Table 19

School Choice and College Acceptances (Credentials of the College)

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	1	1	15	17	34
	0.00	2.94	2.94	44.12	50.00	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	0	5	17	22
	0.00	0.00	0.00	22.73	77.27	100.00
Total	0	1	1	20	34	56
	0.00	1.79	1.79	35.71	60.71	100.00
Pearson $\chi^2(3) = 4.6417$ Pr = 0.200						

Table 20

School Choice and College Acceptances (Prepared for College)

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	1	12	21	34
	0.00	0.00	2.94	35.29	61.76	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	0	2	20	22
	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.09	90.91	100.00
Total	0	0	1	14	41	56
	0.00	0.00	1.79	25.00	73.21	100.00
Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 5.8651$ Pr = 0.053						

In the survey, College Acceptances – Prepared for College was the most important influence on parents when choosing to send their child to the MP4M&S, as seen by the percentage of parents that rated its importance as either very important or extremely important.

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Parents were focusing on their student's preparation for post-secondary education while choosing which secondary school to send their child.

Original Research. Both in- and out-of-district parents, 6 out of 8, mentioned that they, or their student, were attracted to the research component of the program. Parents felt that the independent research project would give their students an advantage when they both apply to and attend college. OD Far #1 stated, "Really, the thing that came down to us was that our son had indicated a level of research interest early on and so it was that distinction that we actually chose the Magnet Program..." Parent ID #2 stated "... it [MP4M&S] seemed very promising in terms of the extra curriculum and the research opportunities." The parent went on to say,

The Magnet appealed to me because it offered an opportunity to experience research at a level you just wouldn't normally get at the high school level. And for my child, who was particularly interested in science, I thought that that was amazing and it was a great opportunity.

The interview data shows that the research component of the program was a unique experience for the students that was valued by the interviewees.

The survey data also showed that the parents in the study felt that opportunity to do original research was important during the decision-making process. However, the results show that the level of importance was different for the two groups. The out-of-district parents, 90.0%, 20 out of 22, placed greater levels of importance on the original research than the in-district parents, 79.4%, 27 out of 34 (See Table 21).

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Table 21

School Choice and Original Research Thesis

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	2	2	3	16	11	34
	5.88	5.88	8.82	47.06	32.35	100.00
Out-of-District	1	1	0	7	13	22
	4.55	4.55	0.00	31.82	59.09	100.00
Total	3	3	3	23	24	56
	5.36	5.36	5.36	41.07	42.86	100.00
Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 5.0139$ Pr = 0.286						

Several survey write-in responses mentioned the original research as an attractor. One parent stated, “We chose the Magnet School because there aren’t many research opportunities close to where we live.” Another parent stated, “At the time of applying to this school, it had a strong research focus with a thesis, again something highly valued by colleges.” Another parent stated, “We liked the opportunity to do original research and publish.” Several other write in responses also mentioned the original research project as an influence that attracted them to the program.

Attractive Compared to the Local School. The interview data shows that some of the families that send their students to the MP4M&S, the opportunities presented by the program allowed them to flee a local school that they did not want to send their students. This was expected for the out-of-district families in the program. The researcher also found that two of the in-district parents wanted their child to go to the MP4M&S because they liked Morris Hills High School better than Morris Knolls High School, their local school, which was also located in the MHRD.

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The main factor for all of the parents who were fleeing their local school was the academic rigor of their school. They felt that their students needed to be in a school that had higher expectations than their local school. They believed that the MP4M&S provided their students with the opportunities and the focus needed to be successful. Parent OD Close #1 stated “I am not sure that [my student] would have found an opportunity to excel [at the local high school] because I think it is more formulaic and traditional when you are in that type of school system [local school].”

Parents from both interview groups, 3 out-of-district and 1 in-district, stated that they were fleeing their local high school. This included an in-district family whose child would have attended Morris Knolls High School if their child did not attend the MP4M&S. Parent ID #3 stated, “There is no way my [student] would have attended Morris Knolls.” Both in-district interviewees whose students’ local school is Morris Knolls High School felt that they would have better teachers and better opportunities by attending Morris Hills High School. Parent ID #3 went on to state that, “I felt honestly that Morris Hills had the better teachers because of the program.” Parent ID #3 did not like the perceived mentality that being good was enough to get through high school and stated that “[My student] understood that if [they] wanted to go to Morris Knolls, and the people that [my student] would surround [one’s] self with are C students.” Parent ID #1 stated. “I think the environment of the Magnet Program pushes kids to pull out the best in themselves that they might not get in a regular AP class.” These parents wanted their children to experience a more rigorous high school environment.

The out-of-district parents were also fleeing their local schools. OD Close #1 stated “I am not sure that our son would have found the opportunity to excel there [local high school] because it is more formulaic and traditional.” Parent OD Far #2 stated, “If [my student] was at [local

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school], they would probably be valedictorian... but my feeling has always been that you rise to the level of your peers and I think that he is getting a better education than he would at [local school].” Parent OD Close #2 stated “I had already pulled my children out of the [local school] system in the first place and so that was not our first or second, or third choice.” Finally, OD Far #1 stated, “My [other child] had gone through the [local school] before my [magnet student] did so we were not entirely satisfied by the local high school.” All of the out-of-district parents wanted a better school for their child and decided to attend the MP4M&S.

The survey participants were asked if they applied to a private or parochial school, in which six indicated that they did. Only five of the six parents answered the follow-up question whether they would have attended the private or parochial school if they did not get into the MP4M&S, in which three, all were out-of-district parents, said they would have attended a private/parochial school. This data does not show if parents were fleeing their local schools totally or if they would have settled for their local school if they did not get into the MP4M&S.

Activity Offerings. The MHRD has offered many activities for its students, including mechanisms for students to propose new clubs, organizations, and activities in the district. In some cases, the offerings and the level of the offerings attracted parents to the program. In one case, an in-district parent was attracted to the MP4M&S at Morris Hills because of the perceived difference in the activities at Morris Hills compared to Morris Knolls.

Parents from both in-district, one, and out-of-district, two, mentioned that the music program at Morris Hills High School was a huge attraction for their students. These parents felt that there were more extra-curricular opportunities for their students at MP4M&S through Morris Hills compared to their local school. OD Far #1 said, “My daughter’s school never even provided her with a chance to get at the All-State [Choir] level. They [her school] stopped at the region

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level.” The parent later said, “My [student] is a much newer singer and was able to do that [All-State Choir].” The parent was so pleased with the musical activities available to his [Magnet student]. He went later stated that, “[My student] participated in the jazz band. [My student] participated in a different and further breath of AP classes that [my student] was able to take AP Music” The opportunities available for students at the MP4M&S through Morris Hills High School attracted students and their families to the program.

School Culture. The school culture was a source of pride at Morris Hills High School. Interviewees from both the in-district, two out of four, and out-of-district groups, three out of four, mentioned that the school’s culture was a factor in the decision-making process.

Some in-district interviewees’ children would have attended Morris Knolls High School if they did not choose the MP4M&S. The school environment played a role in their decision-making process, Parent ID #3 stated, “I honestly felt that Morris Hills had the better teachers because of the program [MP4M&S].” The same parent went on to say that “It [Morris Hills] is more appealing because of the Magnet Program, the teachers, and the resources.” Parent ID #2 stated, “I really like [Morris] Hills and the administration. I think that the communication that we get is strong and at the appropriate level.”

For most of the out-of-district parents, three out of four, the school culture was an important consideration. Parent OD Close #2 stated, “[My student] felt that [MP4M&S] was the best synergy for him, for what he was interested in. You know how you get a vibe about a place and he felt that he got the right vibe from that school.” The culture of the school was an important consideration when the parents chose a school for their students.

The survey data supported the interview data. The survey data for school environment, positive peer relations, showed that both the in-district, 91.1% either very important or extremely

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important, and the out-of-district, 95.4% either very important or extremely important, parents rated the school environment, positive peer relations, as an important school attribute (See Table 22). This category was one of the higher-rated school attributes in the survey as seen by the percentage of parents who rated its importance as either very important or extremely important.

Table 22

School Choice and School Environment – Positive Peer Relations

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	3	15	16	34
	0.00	0.00	8.82	44.12	47.06	100.00
Out-of-District	0	0	1	7	14	22
	0.00	0.00	4.55	31.82	63.64	100.00
Total	0	0	4	22	30	56
	0.00	0.00	7.14	39.29	53.57	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 1.5418$ Pr = 0.463

Social Networks. The interviewees' social networks did not have a large effect on the parents' decision-making process. Though the parents' social networks were a source of information about the program, none of the interviewees mentioned that their social networks were an influence to attend the MP4M&S. In some cases, the social networks tried to persuade the interviewees not to attend the program. Parent OD Far #2 stated, "So we talked to [a family member], who is actually on the Board of Education for [local school district]... [family member] was really trying to push the [local high school]." Later on, the parent expressed "We heard the argument that the worst high school in NJ is better than most high schools in the country."

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All of the interviewees mentioned that they had approval, or acceptance, from their social networks with regards to sending their student to the MP4M&S. No one indicated that this acceptance was important to the decision-making process.

Some of the interviewees, three out of eight, were not worried about the opinions of their social networks. Parent OD Far #1 state “We weren’t concerned about whether they [friends and neighbors] thought that was a good idea [attending the MP4M&S] or not.” Parent ID #2 stated “In our social network, we did not get any disapproval from anyone, and no one would dare to say that to us.” The social networks only had influence if the parents allowed it to have an influence on their decision-making process.

The interview asked the respondents two questions about their social networks. The first question asked if their social networks pressured them to stay in their local school. Two in-district and three out-of-district parents stated that they felt pressure from their social networks to not attend the MP4M&S. The second questions asked if their student felt pressure from their social network to attend their local school instead of the MP4M&S. Three in-district and two out-of-district parents responded that their children were pressured to stay in their local school.

The survey asked the parents two questions about being pressured to stay in their local school system instead of attending the MP4M&S. The first question asked the parents if they felt that their friends and neighbors, located in their local school district, pressured them to attend the local high school. Only 2 of the 32 in-district parents who answered the question, 6.25%, and 3 of the 22 out-of-district parents reported that they felt any pressure (See Table 23). The second question asked the parents if their students felt some pressure from their friends or their friends’ parents to attend their local school. Only 3 of the 30, 10.00% in-district parents who answered this question, and 2 of the 22, 9.09%, of the out-of-district parents reported that their students felt

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any pressure (See Table 24). The results show that both groups of parents and their students felt little pressure to attend their local school instead of the MP4M&S.

Table 23

School Choice and Do You Feel that Your Friends and Neighbors Located in Your Local School District Pressured you to Stay in the Local School

District Status	No	Yes	Total
In-District	30 93.75	2 6.25	32 100.00
Out-of-District	19 86.36	3 13.64	22 100.00
Total	49 90.74	5 9.26	54 100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 0.8466$ Pr = 0.358

Table 24

School Choice and Do You Feel that Your Student's Friends, or their Parents, Pressured Your Student to Stay in the Local School?

District Status	No	Yes	Total
In-District	27 90.00	3 10.00	30 100.00
Out-of-District	20 90.91	2 9.09	22 100.00
Total	47 90.38	5 9.62	52 100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 0.0121$ Pr = 0.913

Test scores. During the interviews, only one parent claimed that they were important. Parent ID #3 stated, "I think that test scores had a bearing because I think that more kids [in the MP4M&S] are smart and I wanted [my student] to be around those types of kids." The rest of the interviewees placed little or no emphasis on test scores as an influence. Parent OD Close #2 stated, "...I looked at it [test scores] as eh-whatever." Parent ID #2 stated, "I take them with a grain of salt".

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Some of the survey responses did support the interview data as both in-district and out-of-district parents did not report that scores on state tests were as important as other factors. Only 58.83%, 20 out of 34, of the in-district parents and 63.63%, 14 of 22, of the out-of-district parents rated scores on the state tests as either very important or extremely important (See Table 25).

Table 25

School Choice and Scores on State Tests

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	7	1	6	14	6	34
	20.59	2.94	17.65	41.18	17.65	100.00
Out-of-District	3	1	4	8	6	22
	13.64	4.55	18.18	36.36	27.27	100.00
Total	10	2	10	22	12	56
	17.86	3.57	17.86	39.29	212.43	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 1.1162$ Pr = 0.892

Some of the survey responses did not support the interview data as both in-district and out-of-district parents found the SAT or ACT test scores to be important. The survey respondents ranked SAT/ACT scores among the highest of the school attributes in the survey as seen in the percentage of parents who rated its importance as either very important or extremely important. Of the responses, 91.7%, 31 out of 34, of the in-district parents and 81.8%, 18 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents felt that the SAT/ACT scores associated with the MP4M&S were either very important or extremely important (See Table 26).

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Table 26

School Choice and SAT/ACT Scores

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	0	0	3	15	16	34
	0.00	0.00	8.82	44.12	47.06	100.00
Out-of-District	1	2	1	6	12	22
	4.55	9.09	4.55	27.27	54.55	100.00
Total	1	2	4	21	28	56
	1.79	3.57	7.14	37.50	50.00	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 6.1390$ Pr = 0.189

Student-Input/Decisions. All eight of the interviewees indicated that their students had the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. It was important to the success of the program that the students want to be in the MP4M&S and do the extra work required to be in the program.

Though the out-of-district parents have to make a commitment to find transportation to and from the MP4M&S, they were willing to let their students make the decision to attend the program. Parent OD Close #2 stated: "...at the end of the day, we were willing to go with what [our student] wanted to do." Parent OD Close #3 stated, "... and that is when he looked at himself and he knew that the MP4M&S was the one to go with."

The in-district parents also gave their students the opportunity to decide if they wanted to attend the program. Parent ID #2 stated "It was all [my student's] decision. We support it for our own reasons, but if she did not want to do it, we would not even consider it." Parent ID #4 stated

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[Our student] took it upon [him- or her-] self because we had said that if this is something that you really want, you are going to have to work hard at it. We were there every step of the way [decision-making process], but [my student] did everything himself.

The parents that were interviewed claimed that their students had a high level of support during the decision-making process. The parents incorporated their students in the decision-making process and allowed them to make the final decision. None of the parents indicated that they had to convince their students that it was in their best interest to attend the MP4M&S.

Differences between the In-District and Out-of-District Parents

There were three items where the in-district parents and the out-of-district parents had differing opinions. These items were status of the MP4M&S, the economics that influences parents to go to the MP4M&S, and the transportation challenges that parents face in order to send their student to the program. All three items were studied in the interview and transportation was also studied through the survey. These items were broken up into two categories: those that attracted parents to the program and those that challenged the parents when deciding to attend the MP4M&S.

Attraction. The two items that attracted the out-of-district parents to the MP4M&S were the status of the program and the economics involved with attending the program. In-district parents did not claim that these were influences to choose the MP4M&S during the interviews.

Status. The out-of-district parents were more enthusiastic about the MP4M&S. They saw the MP4M&S as an opportunity to improve their student's educational standing. One out-of-district parent stated, "... the fact that [our student] is going to be exposed to a practical program and what a choice program means is actually, well it felt like an honor." Out-of-district parents were keen about the status of the program and how the status could better influence their student's future than their local high school. Parent OD Far #2 stated, "I like that it was an

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academically challenging program and that, I hate to use the word elite, but it has some credibility if you are applying to colleges and we knew that would make a difference.”

Economics. One of the more important attractors, especially for out-of-district parents who were looking to flee their local school, was the limited economic commitment that they have to make to send their child to the MP4M&S. All of the out-of-district parents mentioned that economics was an important consideration. The tuition to attend the school choice program was paid for by the NJ DOE. Parents were only responsible for providing or arranging transportation for the student to and from the program. Parent OD Close #1 stated, “... the financial commitment was nothing, it was just too attractive.” The parent went on to say, “And financially, economics in the decision was definitely a factor as private school, you are talking about a significant amount of [money] out of pocket.” Parent OD Close #2 stated, “Obviously it is always attractive when you do not have to pay.” The financial requirements for sending a child to an out-of-district school was an important consideration. Parents were attracted to the MP4M&S because it was tuition free, allowing parents to send their student to a well-regarded program without having to pay private or parochial school tuition.

The NJDOE allocates the number of out-of-district school choice seats available each year in a choice school and provides tuition to the choice school for each out-of-district student that attends. Unlike a private or a parochial school, the parents were not required to pay tuition to attend a choice school outside of their local school district. The average cost to attend a private or parochial high school in the Morris County area in 2015-2016 was \$14,570 (“Morris County, NJ Private Schools | PrivateSchoolReview.com,”).

It was difficult for private or parochial schools to compete with the MP4M&S from an economic standpoint. Parent OD Far #2 claimed, “... it helped that it was technically free and we

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cannot afford a private school. But it had some of the qualities of a private school and I liked that.” In its short existence, the MP4M&S has established a solid reputation at a price point that private and parochial schools cannot compete against.

Challenge. In order for an out-of-district student to attend the MP4M&S, the attractive characteristics have to counter the characteristics that these parents find challenging. These challenges can influence a parent to choose another school, thus costing the MP4M&S and the MHRD revenue and possibly high test scores. One challenge in particular, transportation, was out of the district’s control.

Transportation. Each of the out-of-district interviewees mentioned that transportation was a challenge. Out-of-district parents were responsible for arranging transportation for their student to attend the MP4M&S. There were options that parents could pursue to ease the burden. Some out-of-district families live close enough to the school that driving their child to school that they did not see it as a burden. Families who live near each other have carpooled to and from the MP4M&S. The MHRD has recommended that students who live in districts that also send students to the MCAMSE ask their home district to allow their Magnet student to ride to school on the MCAMSE bus. The MCAMSE is a county run school and the local school district was required to provide transportation for all students who attend. If the home district agreed to allow the Magnet student to ride on the MCAMSE bus, the parents had to forego the aid in lieu and drop off their student at the nearest MCAMSE bus stop. This has not been the most ideal solution for the MP4M&S student as the MCAMSE begins 44 minutes before the normal school day. The MP4M&S students who take the MCAMSE bus had to wake up earlier to make the MCAMSE bus and arrived at school at least 44 minutes before the normal school day starts. Parent OD Close #2 stated, “Transportation was provided, but the Academy starts earlier... and what

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happens is that they give us a morning time [for the bus] that is so early that it is just not workable.” Parent OD Far#1 stated,

The Academy has this phenomenal reputation and it was a consideration that was negative to us. With where we were coming from and that the program starts so early in the morning, and knowing that with most [adolescents] morning is not their friend. We felt that would get a really bad start to the day and that was a factor as we also want [student] to enjoy the experience and not just feel he is in a labor camp. So the extra [MCAMSE required] class and the fact that it did not have the type of research program was a very important factor for us.

One of the interviewee’s students carpooled with another student to and from school. When this did not work out, this student’s parents drove the child to school and during the student’s senior year, the student drove to school. The time to travel to the MP4M&S for the other three students ranged from 10 minutes to 45 minutes. Out of these students, two students took the Academy school bus from the MP4M&S to their home prior to their senior year.

Transportation to the school was a factor for all four interviewees who live outside of the district. For two of the out-of-district interviewees, the school was close by and providing transportation was a minor challenge. Parent OD close #1 stated, “... one of the decisions that did not sway us was that it [MP4M&S] was close by”. The interviewee went on to say, “It [transportation] was a little bit of an inconvenience.” The program was favored by those who can provide their own transportation and it was easier to provide transportation when you live close to the school.

One of the interviewees commuted 45 minutes each way to drop off and pick up their student. All four of the out-of-district parents had to arrange and provide transportation for their child with little financial support. Parent OD Far #2 stated, “Travel was a concern, but one that we thought was a surmountable family effort to get the educational benefit.” This was an important issue in the decision-making process. The location of the school was not a factor for

The survey responses supported the interview data and showed that there was a difference between the out-of-district parents and the in-district parents with respect to location. Only 38.2%, 13 out of 34, of the in-district parents, compared to 54.5%, 12 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents, responded that the location of the school was either very important or extremely important (See Table 27). Though this data shows that there was a difference between the two groups, the data was not statistically significant. Location was the lowest rated variable in terms of importance both the important outcomes and school attributes sections of the survey. Though the location of the school might have been an issue while making the final decision, the parents who sent their students to the MP4M&S overcame this challenge. This bias may have led to parents rating location lower in importance than expected.

School Choice and Location

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	5	5	11	9	4	34
	14.71	14.71	32.35	26.47	11.76	100.00
Out-of-District	2	2	6	10	2	22
	9.09	9.09	27.27	45.45	9.09	100.00
Total	7	7	17	19	6	56
	12.50	12.50	30.36	33.93	10.71	100.00
Pearson Chi ² (4) =	2.2953 Pr = 0.682					

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Sources of Information

Parents used various methods to find out about the MP4M&S and the information needed to decide if the MP4M&S was the best option for their child varied. One parent went so far as to contact people she knew in California to find out more about the Magnet School system in California. All of the parents in the interviews were confident that they had done their homework and obtained the information that they needed. Parent ID #3 stated “I think that I am the type of parent who, if I do not have the information, I will get it.” Parent ID #2 stated

Well we definitely tracked the curriculum, very carefully, and looked at precisely what the cost benefits would be, what courses would [our student] take by virtue of being in the magnet program, what courses would that preclude her from taking. We’ve been tracking the various changes in the curriculum with interest.

When asked if they had any advice for a parent who was deciding whether or not to send their child to the MP4M&S, most of the parents, three out-of-district and two in-district, stated that parents need to do their research. Parent OD Close #2 stated “They [parents] need to do their homework and find out what the program consists of, what applies to you in terms of competitive advantage and the rigor.”

The information needed to make an informed decision was available to the parents. Two things influenced the parents’ access to the information. First, parents have to know to look for it. Several parents indicated that they heard about the program from a friend in casual conversation. Second, they have to decide that the information was meaningful to them. Most of the parents cited the Information Nights as an important source of information that led to even more information. Knowing what sources the parents used, and when they started to look for the resources, is vital to the future of the program.

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It was clear that the parents did their homework when making the decision to send their child to the MP4M&S. The methods and the extremes to which parents resorted were different. The grades that the parents started to do the research about the MP4M&S varied as well. The majority of the parents started researching the program during their student's 7th or 8th grade years. For in-district parents, 41.2%, 14 out of 34, started researching the program in their student's 7th grade and 47.1%, 16 out of 34, did so in their student's 8th grade. Out-of-district parents reported similar results as 45.5%, 10 out of 22, of the parents started researching the program in their student's 7th grade and 45.5%, 10 out of 22 do so in their student's 8th grade (See Table 28).

Table 28

School Choice and In Which Grade did you Start to Research the MP4M&S

District Status	Before 6 th Grade	6 th Grade	7 th Grade	8 th Grade	Total
In-District	2	2	14	16	34
	5.88	5.88	41.18	47.06	100.00
Out-of-District	2	0	10	10	22
	9.09	0.00	45.45	45.45	100.00
Total	4	2	24	26	56
	7.14	3.57	42.86	46.43	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(3) = 1.5511$ Pr = 0.671

Information Nights. The MP4M&S hosted two Information Nights, both in October, for the students in the program prior to the application process. These nights were geared towards prospective students and their parents. Information was given out about the MHRD, the two high schools, and the special programs that the district offers, including the MP4M&S. Attendees had

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the opportunity to interact with the staff, the students, and each other. Attendance at the Information Nights was voluntary and did not influence the program's admissions process.

All of the interviewees stated that the Information Nights were an important source of information about the MP4M&S. This was not only due to the actual information that they received, it was also because of the interactions they had with the staff and students from the MP4M&S. This was one of the chief sources of information as Parent OD Close #1 stated "... we did the open house of course."

For some of the parents, the Information Nights were an opportunity to ensure that they had all of the information available to them to make the correct decision. Parent ID #1 stated "I did get more information at the Information Night, but it really covered the stuff that was on the website." Later in the interview, the same parent said "So no, I can't say that any of the information at the Information Night was additional, it was more affirming that we were doing the right thing by applying. "I had already done my homework.

The survey data showed that the parents found the Information Nights important, but not as strongly as the interview data. For the in-district parents, 73.5%, felt that the Information Nights were either very important or extremely important. For the out-of-district parents, 63.6% thought the Information Nights were either very important or extremely important (See Table 29). During the open response section of the survey, one parent wrote, "Listening to the students speak at the information night was the thing that convinced our [student] to want to come to the program."

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Table 29

School Choice and Attend either/both schools' Information Nights

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	3	1	5	18	7	34
	8.82	2.94	14.71	52.94	20.59	100.00
Out-of-District	1	1	6	10	4	22
	4.55	4.55	27.27	45.45	18.18	100.00
Total	4	2	11	28	11	56
	4.55	4.55	27.27	45.45	18.18	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 1.7015$ Pr = 0.790

Every parent mentioned the Information Nights as a data source when they were making the decision to send their child to the MP4M&S. The importance of the night varied, mainly due to the amount of information that the parents had access to prior to attending the evening.

Internet. There were various resources for the parents on the internet. The first being the MHRD school website. Parents also mentioned the use of Google to find out more information about the MP4M&S or other magnet programs.

For most parents, seven out of eight, the school website was a welcome source of information about the program. Parent ID #2 stated “I think that [website] was the only written information that we had other than whatever was distributed at the information sessions.” In order to have accessed the information, you needed to know about the website and how to navigate your way to the website. Parent OD Far #2 stated “I think that [with respect to] the promotion of it [MP4M&S], you guys had the materials on your website, if you knew about it.” None of the parents mentioned the internet as being the source that actually made them aware about the MP4M&S. On the site, one found information about the Information Nights, the

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admissions process, timelines for applying, the school choice program, the district, and the high schools. Parent ID #4 stated,

We went to the school website. The Morris Hills' website and read more about it. [My student] had to download the papers to fill out and so on and so forth. He saw that he had a whole timeline that he had to follow. Yeah, just that it is very easy because it is all online and you just follow it online.

Some used the internet to get more information about Magnet schools in general, and the program at Morris Hills in specifics.

The level of importance that the internet played in the decision-making process varied from parent to parent. Parent OD Close #2 stated "I did a little bit of research online and I would say that would be about it." Parent ID #1 stated "I knew to go to the website... I did go online and I read every piece of information that was on the website."

By design, all of the information that was given to the prospective parents was found on the school website. This allows parents to start the decision-making process without having to wait for the Information Nights.

The out-of-district parents who participated in the survey placed more importance on the school website than the in-district parents. The survey data shows that 64.7% of the in-district parents, 22 out of 34, thought that the school website was either very important or extremely important while 81.8%, 18 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents thought that the school website was either very important or extremely important (See Table 30). The school website was one of the higher rated, according to the percentage of parents who reported its importance as either very important or extremely important.

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Table 30

School Choice and School Website

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	2	2	8	12	10	34
	5.88	5.88	23.53	35.29	29.41	100.00
Out-of-District	0	1	3	11	7	22
	0.00	4.55	13.64	50.00	31.82	100.00
Total	2	3	11	23	17	56
	3.57	5.36	19.64	41.07	30.36	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 2.7330$ Pr = 0.603

Interactions with Students and Staff. The interview data shows that the interaction between potential students and member of the MP4M&S community were important to the parents in the decision-making process. Potential students and their parents had the opportunity to interact with the MP4M&S, its staff, and its students at the Information Nights. This was an important opportunity for the MP4M&S to show off its culture to those from outside of the district. Six out of the eight interviewees, four out-of-district and two in-district, mentioned that the interactions between the parents, students, and the MP4M&S staff were important to the decision-making process.

This information and the opportunity to interact with the staff and students was important to the parents as it positively portrayed the school, the program, and the people associated with the program.

MP4M&S Staff. The Information Nights provided parents the opportunity to interact with staff members, both teachers and administrators, who were involved with the MP4M&S. Parent OD Close #2 stated that “We did talk to some teachers in the process and we were

The teachers and staff were entrusted with educating the students in the MP4M&S. The beliefs that prospective parents get about the MP4M&S, what it stands for, and the character of the people who were part of the program were based on these interactions.

Table 31

School Choice and Speak to an Administrator, Either in Person, on the Phone, or Via Email

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	5	2	5	10	12	34
	14.71	5.88	14.71	29.41	35.29	100.00
Out-of-District	1	0	9	7	5	22
	4.55	0.00	40.91	31.82	22.73	100.00
Total	6	2	14	17	17	56
	10.71	3.57	25.00	30.36	30.36	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 6.9699$ Pr = 0.137

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Students in MP4M&S. The students in the MP4M&S were a reflection of the school and a representation of what the program has to offer. They were a very important source of information for prospective parents and students. The MP4M&S formally invited students to interact with prospective families at the Information Nights. Parent OD Close #1 stated “We of course talked to a couple of kids in the [Information Night] who spoke that year. “ Most of the interviewees echoed these comments, five out of the remaining seven. They realized the value of interacting with students already in the program. The students left an impression on the interviewees and some could even recall the research that the students presented that evening.

Some parents were fortunate enough to know someone who was the program. It was harder to know students in the program when you live out of district, especially if you live far from the MP4M&S. Parent OD Far #2 stated “...since we are way up here, we didn’t know anybody.” Later on, the parent mentioned that they talked to a student at the Information Night.

His presentation really excited [my student] and really got him more interested in the program. Afterwards, the kid came over and talked to us and he was really friendly, really nice, and made [my student] feel really comfortable. He made [my student] feel like he is my type of guy and he is a kid I could be friends with.

The parents who live in-district had an easier time knowing someone who was in the MP4M&S. Parent ID #1 stated “I did talk to one set of friends with a student in the program.” Parent ID #4 stated “I did talk to one other person that their son is currently in the program to just find out some information about the program.”

By interacting with the students, parents were able to get information about the feel of the school. Parent OD Far #2 disclosed,

...when we went to the presentation, one of the kids, there were two who presented, and the one kid did the diving board [experiment] gave his presentation. This really excited my son and really got him more interested in the program. Afterwards, the kid came over and talked to us and he was really friendly and really nice and made my son feel very comfortable.

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The survey data showed that speaking with a student already in the MP4M&S was a valuable source of information. The in-district parents, 73.5%, 25 out of 34, rated it as either very important or extremely important, rated this category slightly higher than the out-of-district parents, 72.7%, 16 out of 22, rated it as either very important or extremely important (See Table 32).

Table 32:

School Choice and Speak to Other Students Already in the Program

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	3	1	5	14	11	34
	8.82	2.94	14.71	41.18	32.35	100.00
Out-of-District	3	1	2	11	5	22
	13.64	4.55	9.09	50.00	22.73	100.00
Total	6	2	7	25	16	56
	10.71	3.57	12.50	44.64	28.57	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 1.3880$ Pr = 0.846

Recruiting Materials. Since the MP4M&S was a newer program when the parents were applying to the program, there were few recruiting materials available to prospective parents besides what the program gives out at its Information Night. Parent OD Far #2 stated, “We used pretty much only what the school gave out.” Parent OD Close #2 stated “We collected the information, obviously from the sessions.” These resources, and the information that parents get from the internet and their various social networks, were the only materials that were available to them to make their decision.

The survey asked the parents the importance of the school brochure as a source of information. Both in-district, 73.5%, 25 out of 34, rated it as either very important or extremely

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important, and the out-of-district parents, 72.7%, 16 out of 22, rated it as either very important or extremely important, thought that the school brochure was an important source of information (See Table 33).

Table 33

School Choice and Read the Program Brochure

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	3	1	5	12	13	34
	8.82	2.94	14.71	35.29	38.24	100.00
Out-of-District	1	1	4	11	5	22
	4.55	4.55	18.18	50.00	22.73	100.00
Total	4	2	9	23	18	56
	7.14	3.57	16.07	41.07	32.14	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 2.2416$ Pr = 0.691

Social Networks. The social networks that parents associate can be an important source of information. The participants in the study did not feel that the social networks were as important as expected. The social networks were divided into two groups to determine if there were differences between the participants' family members and their friends and neighbors.

Social Network - Family. The interviewees who did talk about their social networks, five out of eight, only mentioned them as sources of information. However, the interviewees did not report that their social networks composed of outside family members, i.e. the child's aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc., as an important source of information about the MP4M&S.

The survey data supports the fact that the interviewees did not feel that their families were an important source of information. Less than 20% of both the in-district, 6 out of 34, and out-of-district 4 out of 22, parents rated families as a source of information either very important

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or extremely important. This category was the second lowest rated variable for sources of information (See Table 34).

Table 34

School Choice and Conversations with Extended Family

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	12	5	11	5	1	34
	35.29	14.71	32.35	14.71	2.94	100.00
Out-of-District	10	3	5	2	2	22
	45.45	13.64	22.73	9.09	9.09	100.00
Total	22	8	16	7	3	56
	39.29	14.29	28.57	12.50	5.36	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 2.0747$ Pr = 0.722

Social network - Friends and Neighbors. Most of the interviewee, 5 out of 8, mentioned friends and neighbors as a source of information about the MP4M&S. In the case of OD Far #2, it was their social network that made them aware of the program. This interaction led the parent to do more research about the program.

In-district parents, two out of four, were also influenced by their social networks. Parent ID #1, as well as ID #2, found out about the program through their social network. Parent ID #1 went on to say “By and large, anybody who knew about the Magnet Program, or knew that my student got accepted, or while [my student] was applying, all had positive things to say.” This parent’s child was in a social network that was excited about the program and had members whose students were also applying to the program at the same time.

The survey results show that the parents found their friends to be more important sources of information than their neighbors, and that the in-district parents relied more on their friends

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and neighbors than the out-of-district parents. Less than 30% of the parents, 9 out of 34 in-district and 4 out of 22 out-of-district, rated their neighbors as very important or extremely important sources of information (See Table 35). The results also showed that 55.9% of the in-district parents, 19 out of 34, and 40.9%, 9 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents rated their friends as very important or extremely important sources of information (See Table 36).

Table 35

School Choice and Conversations with Neighbors

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	11	5	9	8	1	34
	32.35	14.71	26.47	23.53	2.94	100.00
Out-of-District	9	5	4	3	1	22
	40.91	22.73	18.18	13.64	4.55	100.00
Total	20	10	13	11	2	56
	35.71	17.86	23.21	19.64	3.57	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 1.9122$ Pr = 0.752

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Table 36

School Choice and Conversations with Friends

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	6	3	6	15	4	34
	17.64	8.82	17.65	44.12	11.76	100.00
Out-of-District	3	7	3	6	3	22
	13.64	31.82	13.64	27.27	13.64	100.00
Total	9	10	9	21	7	56
	16.07	17.86	16.07	37.50	12.50	100.00
Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 5.2706$ Pr = 0.261						

MCAMSE. The MCAMSE and the MP4M&S often got confused. The MCAMSE has a strong reputation for academic excellence. This helped the MP4M&S attract high caliber students who know about the MCAMSE but were unfamiliar with the Magnet program. Parent OD Close #2 stated

Speaking outside of school, most people did not know about what is Morris Hills, what is the Magnet, and what is the Academy. Though most people knew of the Academy, they did not know about the Magnet. They thought it was the same thing.
The influence of the MCAMSE pushed students towards the MP4M&S.

The parents in the program were also the sources of information for potential future students and their families in their local community. Parent OD Close #1 was the source of information for the other parents in their social network. This parent shared information about the program and helped other parents learn of the differences between the MP4M&S and the MCAMSE.

In some cases, two out of eight, the social networks provided them with information about the MCAMSE, which the parents used to find out more about the MP4M&S. Parent OD

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Far #1 used their social network to find out more information about the program. This parent had friends with children in either the MP4M&S or the MCAMSE. The parent spent a lot of time asking a lot of questions trying to find out as much information as possible.

While parents searched for more information about prospective secondary school choices for their students, they came across information about the MP4M&S. Two out of the eight interviewees mentioned that they found out about the MP4M&S through their research about the MCAMSE. Though the MP4M&S competes for the students that were interested in the MCAMSE, the MCAMSE was an asset to the MP4M&S as a source of information for parents who do not already know about the program.

School Report Card. Every year, the NJDOE published a school performance report for each school in the state. The reports were published on the NJDOE website and reported through the Star Ledger and other media sources. Since the MP4M&S was not a separate school according to the NJDOE, the program did not get a school performance report. Parents seeking information about the program had to use the school performance report for Morris Hills High School.

The interviewees did not consider the school performance reports to be a major source of information. Only one out-of-district parent stated that they looked at the school performance reports. None of the interviewees made a claim that the reports were very important to the decision-making process.

The survey data supports the interview data. The data shows that 53.1%, 18 out of 34, of the in-district parents and 50.0%, 11 out of 22, of the out-of-district parents rated the NJDOE School Report Card as either very important or extremely important (See Table 37). Less than 30% of the parents in both groups, 9 out of 34 in-district and 6 out of 22 out-of-district, thought

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that the School Performance Data published in NJ Monthly was either very important or extremely important (See Table 38). The responses about NJ Monthly as a source of information were among the lowest in the entire survey.

Table 37

School Choice and NJDOE School Report Card

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	4	3	9	12	6	34
	11.76	8.82	26.47	35.29	17.65	100.00
Out-of-District	1	6	4	7	4	22
	4.55	27.27	18.18	31.82	18.18	100.00
Total	5	9	13	19	10	56
	8.93	16.07	23.21	33.93	17.86	100.00

Pearson Chi²(4) = 4.0536 Pr = 0.399

Table 38

School Choice and NJ Monthly

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	11	2	12	7	2	34
	32.35	5.88	35.29	20.59	5.88	100.00
Out-of-District	6	6	4	4	2	22
	27.27	27.27	18.18	18.18	9.09	100.00
Total	17	8	16	11	4	56
	30.36	14.29	28.57	19.64	7.14	100.00

Pearson Chi²(4) = 5.9925 Pr = 0.200

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Print Media. The MP4M&S stopped purchasing advertisements in the local news media. The cost of the advertisements could not be justified when the program had a large number of students already applying to the program. In the fall of 2014, 118 students applied for 48 spots in the MP4M&S. There were 43 in-district students and 75 out-of-district students who applied. By this point, print advertisement was no longer purchased by the school district.

One of the out-of-district interviewees mentioned that their spouse had seen a small ad in the local news. The parent went on to state, “We probably would not have known about it had it not been for the little blind add. It was not even a big ad. It was a quarter-sized ad in the corner of the local paper that could have easily been missed.”None of the other interviewees mentioned print media, unless you include the materials that were sent home to each in-district student through the middle schools, as a source of information.

The survey data supports the interviewees. The variable advertisements in local periodicals or mailings was the lowest rated variable in the survey. Less than 10% of the survey, 2 in-district and 4 out-of-district, participants rated this variable as either very important or extremely important (See Table 39).

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Table 39:

School Choice and Advertisements in Local Periodicals or Mailings

District Status	1	2	3	4	5	Total
In-District	13	5	14	1	1	34
	38.24	14.71	41.18	2.94	2.94	100.00
Out-of-District	8	3	7	3	1	22
	36.36	13.64	31.82	13.64	4.55	100.00
Total	21	8	21	4	2	56
	37.50	14.29	37.50	7.14	3.57	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 2.5704$ Pr = 0.632

Differences Between In- District and Out-of-District Parents

In- and out-of-district parents used similar sources when researching the MP4M&S. One area where there was a difference with respect to sources was the access that parents had to sources of information.

Access. In-district parents had easy access to information about the MP4M&S. The four in-district middle schools send information home to their seventh and eighth grade students. Two of the middle schools host evening events that promote the many offerings in the high school, including the MP4M&S. The guidance counselors, the science teachers, and both the building and central office administrators in each of the middle school also had access to information about the MP4M&S and were kept up-to-date with any changes to the program. The four sending districts and their middle schools provide the MP4M&S with a strong communications link to potential students and their families.

The out-of-district parents had a harder time finding out about the MP4M&S. For the most part, their local schools were not a good source of information. Only one parent stated that

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information about the MP4M&S was shared with her student by the local guidance counselor.

The four sending districts and their middle schools provide the MP4M&S with a strong communications link to potential students and their families. The other out-of-district parents said that their local schools were not a source of information. Parent OD Far #2 stated, “There wasn’t a lot of information [about our out-of-district options] from a guidance perspective.” The others found out about the MP4M&S when they were researching private/parochial schools and/or the Vo-Tech academies.

The survey data reports that parents felt that they had access to enough information about the MP4M&S. In-district parents, 88.2%, 30 out of 34, felt that they had enough information about the MP4M&S. The out-of-district parents, 90.2%, 20 out of 22, also felt that they had enough information about the MP4M&S (See Table 40). During the open response section of the survey, one parent wrote, “Better notification or promoting of the programs, perhaps presentation to parents.” This parent wanted easier access to the available information. Despite the challenges that the parents in the program at the time of the study had in getting the information that they needed about the MP4M&S, they were able to get it regardless of their in-district status.

Table 40

School Choice and Enough Information about the MP4M&S

District Status	No	Yes	
In-District	4	30	34
	11.76	88.24	100.00
Out-of-District	2	20	22
	9.09	90.91	100.00
Total	6	50	56
	10.71	89.29	100.00

Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 0.0998$ Pr = 0.752

Conclusion

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This study focused on the reasons why and how parents decided to send their children to the MP4M&S, and if there were differences between the in-district and the out-of-district parents in the MP4M&S. The study found that parents were attracted to the program for academic and non-academic reasons. The parents placed greater levels of importance on both the academic focus and the academic rigor of the program, the opportunity to conduct an original research project, and the activities offered to students who attend Morris Hills High School. The study also found that the most important sources of information during the decision-making process were the Information Nights, the Internet, interactions with the staff and students, and the MCAMSE. Finally the data showed that there were few items in the study where there was a difference between the in-district and out-of-district parents.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study helped identify two important items of interest to the MP4M&S. First, it helped the MP4M&S determine those attractors that parents find important. Second, the study helped the MP4M&S identify those sources of information that parents found important during the decision-making process. This section summarizes the attractors and the sources that were identified in the study and discuss if and how they related to previous research findings, discuss the implications for the MP4M&S, discuss the implications for Magnet Programs in New Jersey, and make suggestions for further research.

Attractors

In this study, the attractors that were important to parents when they were deciding to send their child to the MP4M&S were central to the make-up of the program. The program was a STEM-based program that emphasizes mathematics, science, and research. The program's focus on math and science was favored by those who want their child to develop a deeper understanding of one or both of the subjects. Based upon this study, the student's development of a literacy in the two subjects was an important outcome to the parents. Their attraction to these criteria make the MP4M&S a good option for them to send their students.

Parents who sent their students to the MP4M&S liked the rigorous challenges that the students have to complete in order to graduate. Students take at least seven honors-level courses and five AP-level courses in the MP4M&S. Every student in the MP4M&S was automatically enrolled in these upper-level courses. Children who were enrolled in these types of higher level courses achieve at higher levels (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Parents did not have to advocate for their students to get into these high level courses. The program provided students with the

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structure needed to achieve at higher levels. This was an advantage that this program has over other schools that the parents were considering. It was important for the program to emphasize the academic rigor that the students experienced in the MP4M&S.

The parents believed that their students would achieve at higher levels in the MP4M&S because they were surrounded by other high achieving students in the program. This environment was fostered by the rigorous nature of the program that attracted high achieving students. The ease of getting into the rigorous classes and the environment created by the high achieving students helped to provide the program with an appeal that attracted parents.

Not many students have the opportunity to conduct an original research project while in high school. This was a unique opportunity for the students in the MP4M&S. Parents believed that this project was an excellent opportunity for their students. The original research project allowed students to develop skills that were important to post-secondary successes. One participant mentioned that their child's research project was a relevant factor to the college that the child was accepted to and attended. The challenges and uniqueness of the research project increased the rigor and the status of the program. This research project set the MP4M&S apart from other schools, including the MCAMSE. This was a deciding factor for some parents when choosing this program.

High school is a time for students to experience new things. Parents also found value in the fact that the MP4M&S offered students many opportunities to participate in activities. This was aligned with the research that showed that parents include academic and nonacademic factors when making their decisions about a school (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014). This was especially true with respect to opportunities available to our students in the music program. The music program offers students memorable experiences outside of the school day. These activities

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help students build their own self-confidences while developing pride in their school. These offerings contributed to the overall, and not just academic, development of the magnet students. The development of a well-rounded program, one that was rigorous, focused on STEM-related topics, and provided students with numerous opportunities in and out of the classroom, attracted parents to the program.

The development of the program through the New Jersey School Choice Program also made the MP4M&S economically attractive to parents. The tuition for the program was provided by the NJDOE. The MP4M&S was an educational option that allowed parents to find options outside of their local school system without having to move to a new school district. This was aligned with the research that showed that parents used school choice to enroll their child into a school with features that they wanted for their student (Armor & Peiser, 1997). This program was a relatively new opportunity for parents and their children that has become popular.

In order to attend the program, families have to make sacrifices and overcome challenges. The out-of-district parents found ways to overcome the transportation issues. Previous research did report that transportation could be a challenge for school choice students and their families (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Though these issues were due to the original design of the program by the NJDOE and cannot be fixed by the MP4M&S, parents were still attracted to the program. The sacrifices that the parents made to send their students to the MP4M&S showed their attraction to the program and the level of commitment that they made in order to send their students to the program.

Sources

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This section describes the four sources of information that were most important to the parents. This section concludes with a short discussion about the parents not using state test scores or relying on their social networks during the decision-making process.

The Information Nights, the interactions with students, staff, and administrators, and the school website were sources of information that were important to the parents. These were expected sources of information that have been an essential part of the program's recruitment process. The first two allowed the parents the opportunity to interact with members of the MP4M&S community members. This was their opportunity to get information about the school, ask questions, and judge the culture of the school based upon the collaborations that they had with the students and the staff. The two Information Nights were the only opportunities for the parents to visit the school before deciding to send their child to the program.

The internet, specifically the school website, was a means to share information about the program with those who were looking for it. Parents accessed the information from the internet at their leisure without having to travel to the school at a pre-arranged time. The program placed all of the information available at the Information Nights on the school website. This allowed parents to form opinions about the program before attending the Information Nights or to have access to the information even if they missed the Information nights.

The MCAMSE, which was a similar program focused on math and science that was also housed on the Morris Hills High School campus, turned out to be another important source of information that drew people to the MP4M&S. Many parents did not even know about the program before they attended an information session for the MCAMSE. This was an important discovery in the study that will be presented to the MP4M&S leadership committee. Though the

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schools compete for the same students, the similarities between the programs allowed parents to find out about the MCAMSE.

In an era of accountability, it was interesting that scores on state tests and the performance reports of Morris Hills High School and the MHRD were not important sources of information to the parents. This was not aligned with the research that showed that parents have used a school's standardized test performance to determine if the school was an acceptable choice for their child (Beal & Hendry, 2012). At the time of the decision-making process, there was limited information available to the parents about the standardized test performances for Magnet students. Even though student performance was an important consideration when determining the quality of a school or program (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Beal & Hendry, 2012; Black, 1999; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Jacobsen, Snyder, & Saultz, 2014; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014; Teske & Schneider, 2001), the parents were able to find other attractors that encouraged them to the MP4M&S.

Though the literature pointed to social networks being an important source of information about choice schools (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014; Hamilton & Guin, 2006; Holme, 2002; & Ball & Vincent, 1998), the participants in the study did not find their social networks to be important sources of information. This was an unexpected result. Some parents in the study heard about the program through their social networks, but they did not focus on these networks as an information source. This result could be due to the location of the program in a suburban setting or the fact that students come from many different geographic locations around the county. These results show that the sources of information that were prepared by the MP4M&S were more important than the prospective family's social network.

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The results of this study provided the leadership team of the MP4M&S with important information that was not readily available to them. The results can be used to make decisions that benefit all of the parents in the program, regardless of their in-district or out-of-district status. This should be used to open up more lines of communication between the parents and the MP4M&S leadership team.

Limitations

There were several limitations inherent to this study. Some of these limitations could not be overcome due to the design of the study, the researcher's role in the district, the small population size, and the socioeconomic status of the population. One further limitation, asking parents to recall the decision-making process that took place years earlier can be addressed in future studies.

This study lacked access to students who did not attend the MP4M&S. Out-of-district students who attend MP4M& left behind their home district. Future studies should use out-of-district students who were capable of succeeding in the MP4M&S but chose not to attend MP4M&S.

The researcher has strong interest in the data as he was the Coordinator of the MP4M&S, co-developed the MP4M&S, and was the District Supervisor of Instruction – Science at the MHRD. His status as an administrator in the district and the leader of the MP4M&S could have influenced parents during the interviews and the surveys. This influence would bias the data and skew the final results. This will be addressed in further detail at the end of this chapter.

The third limitation was the small sample size. Only 56 parents, 43.4% of the possible 128 parents who were invited, participated in the survey. The total MP4M&S population was small to begin with. Working with a larger group would better determine if the lack of statistical

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significance in the data was an accurate representation of the parents' beliefs or a result of the small sample size.

The next limitation is that the study focused on students who were from primarily wealthy districts. The results do not contribute to the large body of research that focuses on school choice in urban settings or the school choice options used by economically disadvantaged students. Only Dover, 73.7%, had a higher percentage of students who qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch than Morris Hills High School, 23.7% (See Table 1). Though a limitation, this study's focus on a choice program that mostly draws from wealthy school districts contributes to a much smaller collection of research. It is hoped that the questions raised by this study will encourage future studies of school choice in affluent regions.

The last limitation was the timing of the study. For some of the parents in the survey, the decision-making process started five years prior to the survey. Their student had almost completed high school. Both the students' and the parents' experiences in the MP4M&S could have biased their memory of the decision-making process. Efforts should be made to conduct future research while the parents were applying to the program

Implications for the MP4M&S

There are several implications from the research that the MP4M&S should address in its future marketing strategies. These implications address what the parents report to be important and in some cases differ from the thoughts and beliefs of the MP4M&S's leadership team.

The first implication is that the MP4M&S needs to provide out-of-district parents with easier access to the information. This implication is a correlation to the research that shows that access to information is a challenge for parents (Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan, 2006; Teske & Schneider, 2001; Schneider, et al., 2000). A cost-effective strategy needs to be developed that

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allows parents to find out about the district without relying on the out-of-district parents' local school system. The out-of-district parents' local school district does not want to lose their best students to the MP4M&S. Since the district no longer uses print media to advertise the program, alternative methods need to be explored.

The second implication is that the MP4M&S needs to better promote their college acceptances to prospective parents during the decision-making process. This information is important to the parents. Now that the district has graduated four classes of students, there is enough information to showcase the credentials of the colleges that students are attending, and in the near future, the colleges that the students graduate from and the degrees that they earn.

The MP4M&S needs to recognize the importance that parents place on several school attributes and sources of information. The sources of information, including the Information Nights and the school website, need to focus on those attributes that the parents find most important. These attributes include the academic focus of the program, the academic rigor of the program, and the original research opportunities that students experience in the program. The study's participants were not as concerned with some of the promotional emphases, such as state test scores or the school's ranking.

Even though the MP4M&S is a program that focuses heavily on math, science, and research, parents were attracted to the program for other attributes, including its music program. The various offerings that are available to the students should be promoted at the Information Nights and on the school website.

The MP4M&S should seek out a partnership with the MCAMSE to promote both programs together. Even though both programs are funded by different sources, they both attract the same type of students to their programs. Multiple members of the leadership team for the

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MP4M&S are also on the leadership team for the MCAMSE. The programs have a similar focus on math and science, but differ based on their focus of either engineering or research. Combining efforts during the decision-making process could allow the programs to share resources and attract even more qualified students.

There were two other implications that were important. First, teachers, staff members, and students need to realize that the interactions that they have with prospective parents are an important attractor. Efforts should be made to share this with the members of the MP4M&S community so that they continually represent the program in a manner that is true to the program and attractive to prospective candidates.

The other implication is that the MP4M&S should consider sharing their recruiting materials with parents of students already in the program. A panel of parents should be organized to meet periodically. During these meetings current promotional information and new recruiting methodologies can be shared and discussed with the parents. Their input can help the MP4M&S leadership team develop materials and strategies that are aligned to the interests of perspective parents and their students.

Implications for NJ Magnet Schools in General

Other Magnet Schools can benefit from this research study. Even though this study focuses on a STEM-based program in an affluent region, knowing what attracts parents to the program and what sources of information they use to make their decisions can help other schools grow their program. The themes covered in this section, challenges, focus and rigor of the program, opportunities outside of the classroom, and interactions with administrators, staff, and students are important to schools across socioeconomic levels. This results might not speak

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directly to schools from poor or urban communities, but the themes can inform and guide schools in various types of communities.

In order for parents to decide to send their child to a magnet school, the parents had to overcome challenges. The biggest challenge for out-of-district parents was transportation. It is important to identify those challenges for the parents and communicate the necessary information needed to overcome these challenges. There are challenges for parents of all socioeconomic levels. The challenges may be different, but identifying them is invaluable to the success of the program.

The focus and the rigor of the school or program were important to the parents. They want to know that the school was providing their child with education that interests their child and provides them with an advantage over their local school. Even if the parents are fleeing their local school, they have to be attracted to the school that they send their child. Knowing what focus the parents in the community want is essential to attracting parents and to the success of the program.

Parents were also attracted to the opportunities that their students had outside of the classroom. This may even be the deciding factor to send their child to a magnet school. Take efforts to make sure that the parents have an understanding of all of the opportunities, in and out of the classroom, available to their students.

The final implication is that magnet schools have to understand that parents value the interactions that they have with the staff, students, and teachers. These interactions gave the parents an understanding of the school culture while they developed relationships with other members of the program before their child even attended school for the first time.

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This study focused on a choice school that is located in a wealthy suburban section of New Jersey. The results of this study might not apply, in part or in whole, to choice schools in poor sections, as well as urban sections, of New Jersey. However, it is probable that some of the findings and themes from this survey are appropriate for varying settings within New Jersey. This study can be used as an initial guideline for choice schools as they determine what is important to the parents that they are trying to attract and serve.

The findings from this study have not been tested in mixed economic environments. A choice school that attracts parents from varying economic settings, poor, affluent, suburban, urban, etc., need to be cautious when using this study's findings. If the attractors and sources that parents use to make their school choice decisions vary depending on one's economic context, schools that use this study's findings can discriminate against students from lower socioeconomic standings. This can lead to a recruitment process that does not address the issues of equity in their communities.

Future Research Questions

Based on this study, there are several research questions that should be studied in the future. The first research question asks qualified students who were eligible to apply to the MP4M&S why they decided not to attend the program. This question could uncover if one's social networks and local school figures pressured them to stay in the local school. This question could also determine if the transportation challenge was bigger than reported in this study. The second research questions should focus on why the sample decided to attend the MP4M&S with the minimal information about college acceptances that was available to them. Even though college acceptances were an important criteria to the parents, there was little information available to the parents when they were applying with their children.

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Future studies can use the parent's educational attainment level and/or household income to group the parents and determine if there is statistical variations among the parents based upon these groupings as suggested by the literature (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Goldring & Philips, 2008; Hanushek, 1986; Teske & Schneider, 2001). This information would have to be determined before the interview process so that parents could be grouped accordingly.

The study raises additional questions with respect to the overall socioeconomic community structure of the parents who used school choice. These questions center around the fact that the participants in this study, who were mostly from middle and upper class backgrounds, had different views about the importance of test scores, the criteria they used to make their decisions, the sources of information that they used, and the influence their social networks had during the decision making process than the literature suggests. It is important for future research to study if, and how much, the community structure, from a socioeconomic perspective, influences the parents' views. Studies have shown that parental background influences one's use of school choice and the schools that they will pick for their children (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hanushek, 1986; Goldring & Philips, 2008; Schneider, et al., 2002; Teske & Schneider, 2001). Does the socioeconomic structure of the community also influence parental decision-making with respect to school choice? Does the socioeconomic structure of the community influence those parents in the same community with lower income levels or lower educational attainment levels to make their school choice decisions? These questions need to be studied to determine if school choice is influenced by the community structure, and if so, by how much.

The results of the study raise questions of equity with respect to the students who decide to attend the program. Do students who live in poorer communities, or other underrepresented

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students, including female, Black, and Hispanic, have equal access to the sources of information that are available to them? Do these students have access to the middle school academic programs, such as Algebra 1 in 7th or 8th grade, which they need to successfully gain admission into the program?

Research has shown that parental background has an influence on whether parents use their school choice options (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Goldring & Philips, 2008; Goyette, 2008; Hanushek, 1986; Teske, et al., 2006; Teske & Schneider, 2001). Based upon the results of the study, future research should explore the role that the MP4M&S in particular, and Magnet/Choice Schools in general, have in attracting and recruiting students from the underrepresented groups identified in this study.

These questions and studies can be used to add to the body of research that exists for magnet programs in suburban school settings.

Researcher Role

The researcher was a major user of the data. He has strong interest in the data as he is the Coordinator of the MP4M&S, co-developed the MP4M&S, and is the District Supervisor of Instruction – Science at MHRD. The information from this study is intended to inform the MP4M&S leadership team and refocus both its recruiting methods and use of available data. The study allowed the researcher to gather information from the parents whose children attend the program. Their insight as stakeholders in the program provide a fresh perspective to the researcher and the leadership team.

The researcher served as the data collector and interviewer during the study. The researcher recorded the interviews, transcribed the recordings, collected the survey data, and analyzed the data.

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At the beginning of the study, the researcher's role as the coordinator of the program influenced the design of both the interview and the survey protocols. Without a child in the program, it was impossible for the researcher to design a set of protocols that accurately reflected the parents' perspective. The original survey focused on criteria, sources, and attributes that were deemed important by the researcher as the coordinator of the program and emphasized in the literature. The purpose of the semi structured interview protocol was to ensure that the parents' perspectives were included in the survey. The researcher's pre-conceived beliefs about the program could have influenced the analysis of the data by ignoring the parents' point of view and focusing on the coordinator's point of view. Utilizing a mixed methods approach attempted to minimize the researcher's bias.

Each of the interviewees knew the researcher as the coordinator of the MP4M&S. Several of them had met with the researcher either during the admissions process or after their child decided to attend the program. These interactions, along with the researcher's role in the program, could have influenced the parents to provide answers that they thought the researcher wanted to hear. It was important to include the anonymous survey to check the answer given in the interview with the greater sample of parents in the survey.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol**Introductory Questions**

- 1) How did you find out about the MP4M&S?
- 2) Take me through the story of how you choose the MP4M&S as the high school for your child?
- 3) Why did you choose the MP4M&S for your child?

Sources of Information

- 4) When you were making the decision to send your child to MP4M&
 - a) Who did you talk to?
 - i. Social networks?
 - 1) Friends/Family?
 - 2) Students?
 - 3) Neighbors?
 - 4) School Officials?
 - b) What sources of information did you read?
 - i. How did you find these sources?
 - c) Did you look online for information
 - i. What sites?
 - ii. How did you find these sources?
- 5) What did you learn from each of the sources that you mentioned? (If interviewee misses a previous response, walk them through their previous responses)
- 6) Where you influenced by any outside sources to choose the MP4M&S?
 - a) Do you feel any pressure from your social networks to use the school choice

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program?

- b) Does your social network approve of you sending your child to the MP4M&S?
 - i) If yes, how so?

Local School

- 7) What is your local high school?
 - a) Would you be satisfied if your child attended the local school district?
 - b) Do you find the local school district more appealing or less appealing?
 - i) What factors influences your answer?

Criteria

- 8) Based upon the sources of information that you used to make your decision, what criteria did you use when making your decision to send your child to the MP4M&S?
 - a) Did you compare this data to your local school's data?
 - b) What qualities of the MP4M&S attracted you to the program?
 - i. After Parent Answers – Were any of the following important to the decision-making process?
 - 1) School Environment
 - 2) Safety
 - 3) Academic Focus and rigor
 - 4) Ethnic makeup of the student body
 - 5) Discipline (student behavior)
 - 6) Test scores (if available)
 - 7) College Acceptances (if available)
 - 8) Students in AP classes

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- 9) Graduation Rate
- 10) Staff Mobility
- 11) Location
- 12) Size of the school

Probing Questions

9) Did you feel that you had access to enough information to make an informed decision?

(For Question #4)

- a) Why or Why not?
 - b) What additional information do you wish you had?
- 10) Did your student have any input in the decision to attend the MP4M&S?
- a) Why or Why Not?
 - b) If Yes, what was the input?
 - c) If Yes, was this input influenced by his or her social network?
- 11) Were your students excited to attend the MP4M&S? (For Question #3)
- 12) What recommendations or advice, about the decision-making process, would you give to someone who was deciding whether to send their child to the MP4M&S? (Questions 3-6)
- 13) Was transportation an issue when making your final decision?
- a) How did you overcome the transportation issues of getting your child to school?
each morning since your district did not provide transportation and only provided Aide in Lieu?

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Wrap-up Questions

15) With what ethnicity do you identify yourself and your student as?

1 = Asian/Pacific Islander
2 = Black
3 = Hispanic
4 = Asian
5 = White

16) What is your highest level of education?

17) What household income range do you fall into?

- a. \$44,000 - \$88,000
- b. \$88,001 – \$132,000
- c. \$132,001 - \$176,000
- d. \$176,001 - \$220,000
- e. Greater than \$220,000

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Post Interview Cover Sheet

Date of Interview: _____

Name of interviewee(s): _____

Location of Interview: _____

Start Time: _____

End Time: _____

The interviewee was (i.e. relaxed, nervous, talkative) _____

New insights: _____

General Notes: _____

Date & Time: _____

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Appendix B**Survey**

1) Here are some items that parents have indicated were important considerations when choosing to apply and send their child to the Magnet Program for Math and Science. These items were either important outcomes, items that their students should excel at, or items that they wanted their children to develop while attending the Magnet Program for Math and Science. Please indicate the importance of each of the following items using the rating system below:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

- a) AP credit for college _____
- b) AP scores _____
- c) Capacity for self-motivation _____
- d) College acceptances (Credentials of the College) _____
- e) College acceptances (Prepared for College) _____
- f) Developing a deeper interest in and/or science _____
- g) Scores on state tests _____
- h) Math literacy _____
- i) Original research thesis _____
- j) SAT/ACT scores _____
- k) Science literacy _____
- l) High student GPA _____
- m) Student Rank _____

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2) Here are some of the *school attributes* that parents have indicated were important considerations when choosing to apply and send their child to the Magnet Program for Math and Science. Please indicate the importance of each of the following attributes using the rating system below:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

- _____ Academic Offerings
- _____ College Acceptances (Credentials of the College)
- _____ College Acceptances (Prepared for College)
- _____ Location
- _____ School Environment - Academic Focus
- _____ School Environment - Cleanliness
- _____ School Environment - Positive Peer Relations
- _____ School Rank as per NJ Monthly or NJ DOE School Performance Report Card
- _____ School Safety
- _____ STEM Focus
- _____ Teacher/staff/administrator quality

3) Please indicate how important each of the following sources of information were when choosing to apply and send your child to the Magnet Program for Math and Science. Please use the following rating system

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

- _____ Advertisements in local periodicals or mailings
- _____ Attend either/both school info nights

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- _____ Conversations with extended family
- _____ Conversations with friends
- _____ Conversations with neighbors
- _____ NJDOE School Report Card
- _____ NJ Monthly
- _____ Read the program brochure
- _____ School website
- _____ Speak to an administrator either in person, on the phone, or via Email
- _____ Speak to other parents with students in the Magnet Program for Math and Science
- _____ Speak to other students already in the program
- _____ Visit the school

4) Did you feel that you had enough information about each of the following schools to make your decision?

a) Local school (*Yes/No*)

b) Magnet Program for Math and Science (*Yes/No*)

5) In which grade did you start the research/decision-making process to attend the Magnet Program for Math and Science?

- _____ Before 6th grade
- _____ 6th grade
- _____ 7th grade
- _____ 8th grade

6) Do you feel that your friends and neighbors located in your local school district pressured you to stay in your local school? (*Yes/No*)

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Do you feel that your student's friends and neighbors or their parents pressured them to stay in their local school? *(Yes/No)*

7) Did you child apply to any private/parochial schools while applying to the Magnet Program for Math and Science? *(Yes/No)*

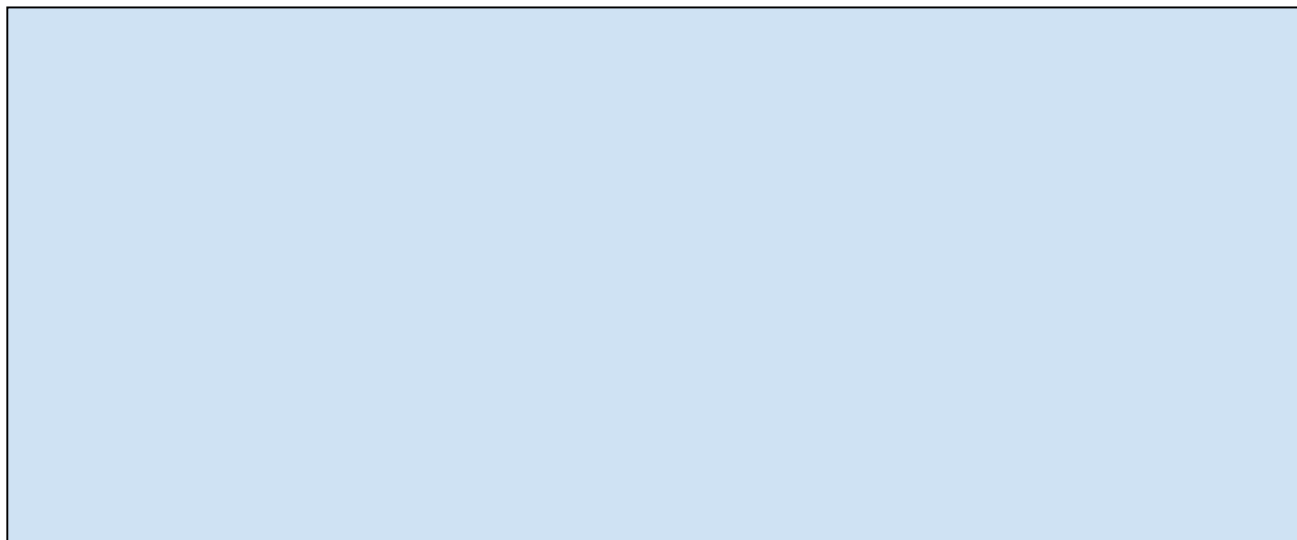
Would your child have attended a private/parochial school if not for their acceptance to the Magnet Program for Math and Science? *(Yes/No)*

8) Did you apply to the Academy for Mathematics, Science, and Engineering? *(Yes/No)*

If yes, was Magnet Program for Math and Science your safety school? *(Yes/No)*

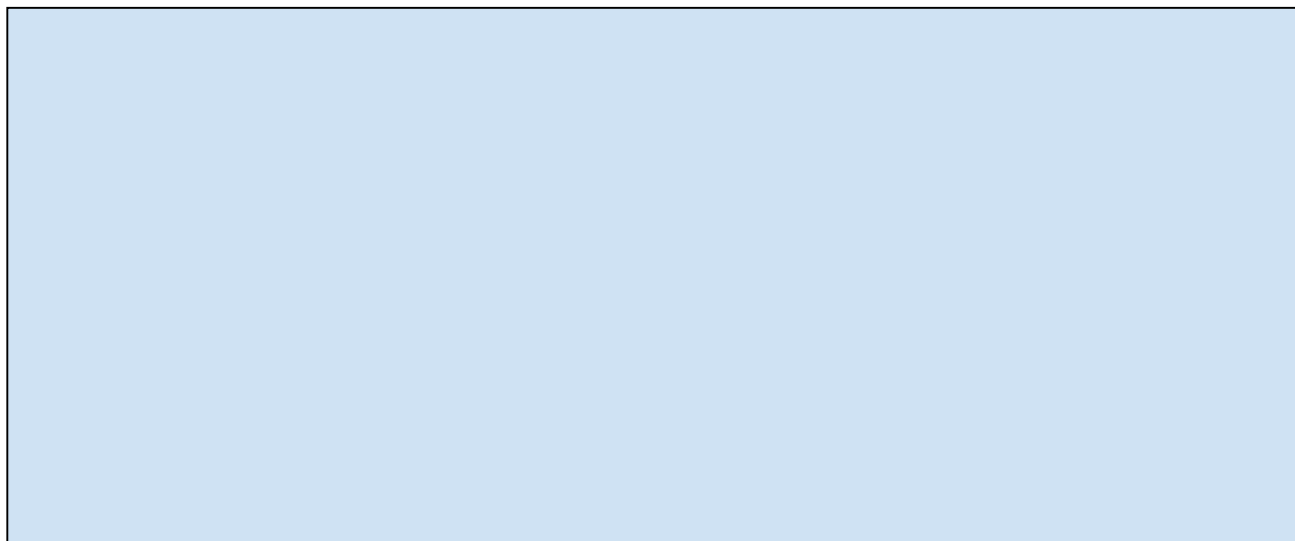
9) Did you choose the Magnet Program for Math and Science to get an advantage while applying to Colleges? *(Yes/No)*

What is the advantage that you are seeking?



10) If there is anything that you would like to add about why and/or how you chose the Magnet Program for Math and Science, please do so in the text box below?

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11.) What is your annual household income?

- a) Less than or equal to \$44,000²
- b) \$44,000 - \$88,000
- c) \$88,001 – \$132,000
- d) \$132,001 - \$176,000
- e) \$176,001 - \$220,000
- f) Greater than \$220,000

12) What is the highest level of educational attainment among the parent(s)/guardian(s)?

(One answer per household)

- a) Completed some high school
- b) High School graduate
- c) Completed some college
- d) Associate degree
- e) Bachelor's Degree

² Based on a family of four, rounded to the nearest thousand. Reduced lunch rate as per Federal Register/Vol. 79, No. 43, Wednesday March 5, 2014.

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- f) Completed some postgraduate studies
- g) Master's Degree
- h) Professional Degree (i.e. M.D., D.D.C., J.D.)³
- i) Doctoral Degree (i.e. Ph.D., Ed.D)

Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Kevin S Doyle at kdoyle@mhrd.org

³ Based on U.S. Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/about/> Retrieved on 5/30/2016

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Demographic Code

Each survey was be coded with the demographic information for the student whose parents are being surveyed. The code is made up of six Alphanumeric characters that describe the School Choice Status, whether English is the Home Language, and the whether the out-of-district student lives 9.3 miles or closer to Morris Hills or farther than 9.3 miles from Morris Hills. As an example, the researcher's demographic code is YY93

Table 41

Demographic Coding Table for MP4M&S

School Choice	Home Language English	Distance to School
Y = Yes	Y= Yes	ID
N = No	N=No	00 = between 0.0 and 9.3 miles
		93 = > than 9.3 miles

Table 41 was developed based upon the Student Information System at MHRD, accessed 1/21/16

All information was self-reported by the parents when registering their child for the MP4M&S

WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE ON SCHOOL CHOICE

Appendix C**Consent Form****Principal Investigator: Kevin S Doyle**_____ **Initials****Consent Form**

My name is Kevin Doyle. I am a student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. I am studying how and why parents choose to send their student(s) to the Magnet Program for Math and Science. The results will be used to understand how parents make their decisions based on the criteria and the data sources that they use. This research is being done as my dissertation.

This study will take place during the Winter of 2015 and the Spring of 2016. The study includes using student demographic data, including gender, free and reduced lunch status, race, language spoken at home, home district, and distance from Morris Hills High School. Through a semi-structured face-to-face interview protocol with a small sample of parents, I will be investigating why parents chose to send their students to the Magnet Program for Math and Science and what criteria and data sources are used in the decision-making process. The interview will last approximately one hour. This information will then be used to develop a survey that will be sent out to all of the parents of students in the Magnet Program. The survey will focus on the same the topics as the interview, but with the entire sample. The main focus is to understand why parents choose to send their students to the Magnet Program for Math and Science and what criteria and data sources do they use.

There are no risks involved in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time by informing Kevin Doyle at Kevin.doyle@gse.rutgers.edu. There is no cost to you for participating. A total of 8 parents will be interviewed. The primary benefit of participation in this study is a better understanding of why parents send their students to the Magnet Program for Math and Science, what criteria and data sources are used, and to develop the survey that will go out to all of the parents with students in the Magnet Program for Math and Science

All of the information you provide in this study will be kept confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored within an encrypted, password protected drive. In particular, all of the data you provide will be identified by number (e.g. Parent #1) rather than by name during analyses. Thus, all of your responses will be completely confidential and will only be available to Kevin S Doyle. Three years after publication of results, all the electronic data will be erased and wiped from hard drives, and paper data will be shredded. Should the results of this study be published,

_____ **Initials**

WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE ON SCHOOL CHOICE

you will be referred to by number only. If you wish, you may receive information about how you performed in the study.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Kevin S Doyle at Kevin.doyle@gse.rutgers.edu (email), or mailing address 48 Knoll Drive, Rockaway, NJ 07828.

The Rutgers University Institutional Review Board has _____ this project. You can contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: [732.235.9806](tel:732.235.9806)
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You can also contact my faculty advisor at:

Dr. William Firestone
Graduate School of Education, Room 337
Rutgers University
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1183
Tel: 848-932-0715
Email: william.firestone@gse.rutgers.edu

Consent Agreement

I have read this consent form, and I understand the procedures to be used in this study. I freely and voluntarily choose to participate. I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____
Printed Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____
Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____
Printed Name of Investigator: Kevin S Doyle Date: _____

AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE ON SCHOOL CHOICE

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Why and How do Parents Decide to Send Their Children to the Interdistrict School Choice Program at the Magnet Program for Math and Science conducted by Kevin S Doyle. I am asking for your permission to allow us to include recorded audiotape as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used to guide the development of a survey that will be given to the entire population in the study. This population will include parents and guardians of students in the Magnet Program for Math and Science. The recordings will be transcribed and coded as part of the research study. Those who participate in the interview will not be compensated for their time.

The recording(s) will include an identifier to determine who is speaking. The interviewees names will not be used during the recording or the transcription. In particular, all of the data you provide will be identified by number (e.g. Parent #1) rather than by name during analyses.

The recording(s) will be stored within an encrypted, password protected drive. In particular, all of the data you provide will be identified by number (e.g. Parent #1) rather than by name during analyses. Thus, all of your responses will be completely confidential and will only be available to Kevin S Doyle. Three years after publication of results, all the electronic data will be erased and wiped from hard drives, and paper data will be shredded. Should the results of this study be published, you will be referred to by number only.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

I understand that this interview will be recorded and agree to that recording on the condition that the recording and transcript only be seen by the investigator and the chair of his dissertation committee.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name of Investigator: Kevin S Doyle

CONSENT FORM FOR ANONYMOUS DATA COLLECTION

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Kevin S. Doyle , who is a graduate student at the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. The

WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE ON SCHOOL CHOICE

purpose of this research is to determine Why and How do Parents Decide to Send Their Children to the Interdistrict School Choice Program at the Magnet Program for Math and Science.

This research is anonymous. Anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. There will be no linkage between your identity and your response in the research. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a code number that will be used on each test and the questionnaire. Your name will appear only on a list of subjects, and will not be linked to the code number that is assigned to you. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. In addition, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Kevin S Doyle at Kevin.doyle@gse.rutgers.edu (email), or mailing address 48 Knoll Drive, Rockaway, NJ 07828.

You can also contact my faculty advisor at:

Dr. William Firestone

Graduate School of Education, Room 337

Rutgers University

10 Seminary Place

New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1183

Tel: 848-932-0715

Email: william.firestone@gse.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey

WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE ON SCHOOL CHOICE

Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-9806
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Please retain a copy of this form for your records. By participating in the above stated procedures, then you agree to participation in this study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and will consent to participate in the study, click on the "I Agree" button to begin the survey/experiment. If not, please click on the "I Do Not Agree" button which you will exit this program.

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Survey Data Type

Table 42

Survey Data Type and Analysis

Data # & Name	DV	Type	Tests
#1 - Educational Outcomes (Likert)	13 Variables	Ordinal	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#2 - School Attributes (Likert)	11 Variables	Ordinal	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#3 - Sources of Information (Likert)	13 variables	Ordinal	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#4 - Amount of Information	Yes/No	Dichotomous	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#5 What grade did research start	Multiple Choice	Categorical	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#6 Pressure from Social Networks	Yes/No	Dichotomous	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#7 - Parochial v. Private	Yes/No	Dichotomous	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#8 - MSE	Yes/No	Dichotomous	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#9- Text Box	Text	Qualitative Code	
#10 - Annual Household Income	Multiple Choice	Categorical	Chi ² : School Choice Status
#11 - Educational Attainment	Multiple Choice	Categorical	Chi ² : School Choice Status

Appendix E

WHY AND HOW DO PARENTS DECIDE ON SCHOOL CHOICE

Qualitative Coding

Table 43

Qualitative Coding Chart

Attracted	Fleeing	Great Quotes	MSE	Methods Research	Sources
Academic Focus	Academic Rigor				Info Nights
Academic Rigor					Internet
Activities					Local School
College Acceptances					Print Media
Economics					School Report Cards
Location					School Official
School Environment					School Resources
Social Networks					Social Networks - Family
Student Input - Decision					Social Networks - Friends & Neighbors
					Students in MP4M&S