10-2018

Parent Experiences with Student Mobility Through School Choice Participation: A Phenomenological Study

Deanna M. Coleman-Weathersbee
Concordia University - Portland

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.cu-portland.edu/edudissertations

Part of the Education Commons

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Deanna M. Coleman-Weathersbee

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Chad A. Becker, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committttee

Consuella Lewis, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Charles Bindig, Ed.D., Content Reader

Parent Experiences With Student Mobility Through School Choice Participation:

A Phenomenological Study

Deanna M. Coleman-Weathersbee

Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Instructional Leadership

Chad A. Becker, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committtee

Consuella Lewis, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Charles Bindig, Ed.D., Content Reader

Concordia University-Portland

2018

Abstract

A phenomenon of student mobility exists under Michigan's school choice policies. School leaders must identify ways to attract and retain students for the survival of their school and the academic success of children. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of parents who have utilized school choice policy in a way that has resulted in multiple moves for their children. The central research question for this study was: What are the experiences of parents whose children have been mobile students, through participation in the state's school choice policy? Data was collected during a series of three face-to-face interviews with 12 participants. Three central themes and corresponding subthemes emerged from the interviews: (a) parents have feelings of empowerment and freedom in regard to the opportunities school choice provides; (b) parents experience feelings of being limited and helpless; (c) parents feel a lack of connectedness to school communities. Parents experience significant changes in school communities over short periods of time, and practitioners must continually adapt to the academic and social needs of an ever-changing population. Implications of this study include a need for policy changes; Michigan leaders should rewrite the state's open enrollment rules to ensure access and equity.

Keywords: school choice, student mobility, equity of opportunity, sense of community

ii

Dedication

For Tiffany, Jaiden, and Kaiden

Acknowledgments

Dr. Becker, thank you for your support of this research, and for sharing my belief in its significance. Your expertise and calm guidance gave me encouragement throughout the process. Dr. Bindig and Dr. Lewis, you were both pivotal in my academic growth during this process. Your ideas and feedback challenged me to do my very best work.

Mom and Dad, thank your for the constant encouragement. With each new path I've taken, you've given me unwavering and steadfast support. I feel it every day.

Tiffany, this was a joint effort from the start, and it's now our shared achievement. Through the unexpected growth of our family and your own professional accomplishments, you've kept me focused, calmed my spirit, and supported my commitment. All my love and thanks.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

In Michigan, high levels of student mobility and unstable student populations encumber the work of educators. The state's open enrollment policy has parents and students assuming the role of consumers. To tackle inconsistent enrollment patterns, school leaders must identify ways to attract and retain students for the survival of their school and the academic success of children (Lake, Jochim, & DeArmond 2015; Powers, Topper, & Silver, 2010). Existing literature highlights enrollment instability in Michigan's choice-centered education marketplace. Cowen, Creed, and Keesler (2015) illustrated a phenomenon of mobility in Michigan, in which student migration patterns reflected high levels of mobility among families who use the school choice policy, rather than the permanency one would hope families could find for their students. Schools facing enrollment uncertainty often also encounter funding instabilities that result in unstable programs for students, loss of teachers, school closures, and other adverse consequences (Militello, Metzger, & Bowers, 2008; Scott & Quinn, 2014). High-turnover environments can thus affect the academic growth of all students, not just the most mobile (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999; Scherrer, 2012).

Carlson, Lavery, and Witte (2011) conducted similar studies in Colorado with parallel findings. Other quantitative studies have helped to characterize the students who leave their assigned schools, what types of schools they leave behind or seek, and how academic success is affected (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2009; Jacobs, 2013). Hence, instability in the choice marketplace calls for research about why families are moving on from one school to another. With this study, I explored the experiences of parents who have utilized school choice programs in Michigan, and the circumstances from which they made enrollment decisions.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

The problem of enrollment instability and student mobility prompted by school choice varies by state and other contexts. States have differing policies in regard to school vouchers and open enrollment. In Michigan, which is the location of this study, students can attend a public charter school or any public school that has chosen to offer open enrollment. The per-pupil funding dollars allocated by the state are transferred to the student's elected district (Cullen & Loeb, 2004; Lockwood, Haas, & Heideman, 2002; Militello & Metzger, 2008).

Parents who have utilized school choice options instead of their assigned schools undoubtedly had experiences that affected their enrollment decisions. The Sense of Community theory offered a lens to examine their experiences. Sense of community is "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Four elements comprise a Sense of Community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection. Parents seek schools that nurture community bonds (Hill, 2016; Lareau & Goyette, 2014). Often though, they must weigh the importance of community against other factors, such as student discipline. Student discipline and behavior management approaches can profoundly impact the experiences children have during their educational careers. The use of zero-tolerance policies, suspensions, expulsions, and other punitive measures can result in anti-social behaviors, truancy, vandalism, drop-outs, and other adverse consequences. Many schools have sought new approaches that are attractive to parents, such as positive behavior programs and social-emotional education (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009; Docksai, 2010; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Osher, Bear, Sprague, &

Doyle, 2010). As parents navigate their school choices, behavior management approaches may influence their decisions.

In addition to community and behavior management, I considered that extracurricular programs would be a factor as families made enrollment decisions. Demand for after-school programs is exceptionally high in areas of concentrated poverty, but families often face barriers to participation, such as accessibility and affordability ("America After 3PM," 2016). More than 71% of African American children would enroll in an after-school program if it were available to them. Socioeconomic status is also a factor in access to quality programs; 61% of parents reported that cost is a problem when it comes to their child's participation in an after-school program. Cross-curricular offerings strengthen each of the multiple intelligences, especially those that may not receive sufficient attention during a typical school day. Further, they promote feelings of connectedness to the school, and qualities such as initiative and leadership (Cooper, 2011; Gardner, 1983; Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball, 2012; Penner & Wallin, 2012).

Equity of opportunity is an important concept related to the problem of student mobility and school choice. Throughout the nation, students face varying levels of access, resources, and quality in their educational experiences. While politicians and ideological groups disagree about how to approach the problem, it continues to be a reality for children. Schools lose per-pupil funding dollars when families leave their assigned schools. Resources are allocated unequally in areas of concentrated poverty, and officials place high-credentialed teachers in preferred schools. A lack of universal preschool, science programs, and Advanced Placement courses has left some groups at a clear disadvantage, and the achievement gap continues to grow.

The experiences that parents have before and during the school choice process have ultimately impacted their decisions about where to enroll their children, and how long they will

remain before moving on or heading back to their original school. Sense of Community, student discipline, extracurricular activities, and equity of opportunity are some key concepts that frame the problem and help define its context.

Statement of the Problem

Enrollment instability and student mobility plague Michigan's choice-fueled education arena. Families have become "shoppers" or "customers," leading to attrition and instability (Lake et al., 2015; Powers et al., 2010). Cowen et al. (2015) conducted a study of more than 3,000,000 Michigan students and their enrollment patterns. On average, students who attended an out-of-district school only remained for three years, and among students who enrolled in a school of choice in kindergarten, less than 40% were still utilizing school choice opportunities by fourth grade (2015). High rates of mobility exist beyond high poverty areas. Ann Arbor Public Schools, in a city home to the University of Michigan, loses more students to school choice policy than it brings in. Enrollment increases from 2016 illustrate the inconsistencies districts face; the district enrolled 317 new resident students who had enrolled outside the district in previous years ("MI School Data," 2017) while losing many to eight other districts within the county. High mobility rates negatively impact the academic achievement of students (Scherrer, 2012), and result in financial instability for schools, because in Michigan, per-pupil funding dollars follow the student to the public or charter school of their choice (Lockwood et al., 2002). Thus, it is essential to identify the shared experiences of parents who utilize school choice policy, so school and district leaders can help provide quality education and permanency for students.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

I designed this study to explore the experiences of parents who have utilized school choice policy in a way that has resulted in multiple moves for their children, either from one open enrollment school to another or a return to their assigned neighborhood school. For schools and districts that face inconsistent enrollment patterns from year to year, this research offers educators and school leaders insight so they can provide incoming families an educational experience that results in permanency for students. Stabilized student populations offer consistency for practitioners and improved achievement levels for students.

Research Question

The central research question for this study was: What are the experiences of parents whose children have been mobile students, through participation in the state's school choice policy? I defined mobile students as those who have moved from their home district to at least twice. Moves may have been between schools of choice (public, private, or charter), or to a school of choice and back to their original school within three years.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Proposed Study

This study's significance is that it extends the literature surrounding student mobility in school choice environments. The study illuminates parent perspectives and experiences through in-depth interviews. For schools and districts that face inconsistent enrollment patterns from year to year, the study offers direct insight so student populations can be stabilized.

Definition of Terms

Student mobility: In this study, student mobility was defined for purposes of sampling. A mobile student exhibited at least two moves: a move away from their home district to another using Michigan's school choice policy; a move to a second new school district within three

years of enrollment, still as a participant in school choice or a re-enrollment back in the home district within three years of first changing schools.

School choice: In the context of this study, the phrase refers to Michigan's education policy; the state permits students to attend a public charter school or a public school that offers open enrollment, rather than their assigned school. According to the Michigan Department of Education (2017), open enrollment opportunities allow families to choose a school within their resident district, or to enroll in a district other than their own. Each district must make their own choices with regard to whether or not they will offer open enrollment, and to what degree. For example, it must be decided at the local level what grade levels will be accepting applicants, which schools, and what the enrollment period will be. Also, public charter schools are free and open to any Michigan student. The state pays per-pupil funding dollars to the district or charter school that a student enrolls in. Schools submit enrollment data after statewide "count days."

Delimitations and Limitations

Certain limitations and delimitations impacted this study. Since this is a phenomenological study, bracketing was necessary; I extracted my own lived experiences, but personal bias and experience can never be entirely removed or avoided (Snelgrove, 2014). I kept a reflexive diary throughout the process, to help extract and take note of personal biases. The subjectivity and sample size of 15 participants may bring criticism, since the results are not generalizable; this is typical of phenomenology. The three-interview structure offered the possibility that there will be participant bias. The self-described experiences of participants may include bias in the form of selective memory or exaggeration (University of Southern California, 2016).

There are delimitations that may have impacted this study, including the choice of questions that I asked interviewees. The phrasing, order, and complexity of the questions has impacted data collection; since no other instruments were utilized it was vital that I design questions that would elicit in-depth responses.

The decision to target parents of mobile students who use Michigan's open enrollment policy was perhaps limiting in terms of a possible sample population, but it was an important distinction in regard to mobility. Parents who use open enrollment, but then return to the home district or move on to yet another school are making choices in the act of changing schools. If the study focused on any parents of mobile students, it is possible that the circumstances of those moves would be too broad.

The choice to conduct a three-interview structure was not limiting, but did present a few minor challenges. No participants dropped out of the study before the series was complete, but I confronted the possibility of attrition by maintaining high levels of communication throughout the process, and by offering flexibility when scheduling interviews (Abshire et al., 2017).

Summary

The current education marketplace, defined by choice, is also characterized by mobility and enrollment inconsistencies. As parents consider what school their children will attend, they take on the role of consumers. Consequently, schools look to stabilize their student populations and funding dollars. It was not only important to identify the mobility trends in school choice environments, but also to determine the experiences of parents who lead their children from school to school. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of parents who have utilized school choice policy in a way that has resulted in multiple moves for their children, either from one open enrollment school to another or a return to their assigned neighborhood

school. I utilized the Sense of Community theory, as well as concepts such as equity of opportunity, student discipline, and extracurricular activities to consider how participants might describe lived experiences. This research illuminates parent perspectives and offers information for school leaders so they can boost enrollment and stabilize it for the future.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature, beginning with a defined conceptual framework. I present the literature surrounding four areas of focus for this study. First of all, I identify what researchers say are the impacts of inconsistent enrollment and student mobility. Thereafter, I examine the research surrounding school choice and the factors that are at play when families make enrollment decisions, and I present the literature in regard to constraints in the education marketplace. Finally, I examine research that exists on the Sense of Community theory and school connectedness. The chapter concludes with a review of methodological issues, a critique of previous literature, and a synthesis.

Chapter 3 contains the methodology of this study, including the research question and purpose of the study, as well as an explanation of the design, population and sampling methods, and instrumentation. The chapter also includes a detailed description of how I collected data and data analysis procedures. Validation methods are addressed, as well as expected findings. The chapter concluded with an examination of ethical issues. I included the three interview protocols in the appendices of this dissertation.

Introduction to the Literature Review

Inconsistent enrollment hampers the competitive education marketplace in Michigan, and unstable student populations impede the work of educators in school communities. But for most districts, it is necessary to offer open enrollment; the education landscape across the United States has become choice-oriented. School communities have found themselves opening their doors to boost their student population, or to compensate for losing students to surrounding districts.

In the following review, I will address the topic of unstable enrollment in a choice-filled education marketplace. Some argue that families have become empowered through choice, but inconsistent enrollment and student mobility pose a real challenge. In most states, some form of school choice exists. For some, voucher programs exist that allow students to attend the public, charter, or even private school of their choice. Others are limited to open enrollment within the larger district. Advocates for school choice claim that not only are parents empowered, but that competition among schools will spark improvement and quality in education. However, an unanticipated consequence of such policy is that as families become "shoppers," or "customers;" attrition and instability impact student enrollment data (Lake et al., 2015; Powers et al., 2010). Decreasing enrollment has been devastating for many: in financially unstable districts, funding insecurities may result in the loss of programs, staff, or even a school's closing (Militello et al., 2008; Scott & Quinn, 2014). In some places, enrollment may not be decreasing consistently, but due to unknown levels of school choice participation from year to year, instability exists (Jimerson, 2002).

In the context of the state of Michigan, the geographic setting for this study, school choice participation is dynamic. Michigan offers a school choice program that gives families the option to attend their assigned school or another public school that offers open enrollment, or a public charter school at no cost to the family. The per-pupil funding dollars are transferred to the district of enrollment (Cullen & Loeb, 2004; Lockwood et al., 2002; Militello & Metzger, 2008). These funding dollars are not transferable to a private school, nor are they transferable to schools that choose not to offer open enrollment. Cowen et al. (2015) examined Michigan's choice program, and discovered that "to choose is not necessarily to stay" (p.12). Michigan's per-pupil funding allowance and choice policy provide an opportunity for the most vulnerable students to leave their neighborhood school to find a quality learning environment. Still, those most at-risk students, the ones who face achievement gaps due to income and race, are not attaining a long-term solution through transferring.

This study holds significance for education leaders and practitioners at the classroom level. Choice policy is not going away, and it is essential to gain some perspective from parents with regard to the choices they make for their children, and how a Sense of Community might play a part in that. New understandings acquired from this study might inform and mobilize school personnel to connect with parents and find out how to stabilize student populations.

Education practitioners and policymakers must address the problem of inconsistent enrollment in Michigan's choice-filled education environment. High student mobility rates affect the academic growth for all students in high-turnover environments (Rumberger et al., 1999; Scherrer, 2012). After two decades of choice policy, education leaders are still not instituting significant changes to recruit and retain students (Jabbar, 2015). Though open enrollment policies are used to spark school quality, parents may choose or remain in schools

based on factors other than academic programs. School leaders must take on the role of advertising and marketing directors (Howe, Eisenhart, & Betebenner, 2001; Richardson, 2013), in an attempt to maintain neighborhood students, and to bring in out-of-district transfers. It is no longer enough for an administrator to support and nurture the community within district boundaries; these leaders must connect with new demographic populations and students from diverse environments.

Within this literature review, I will first describe the conceptual framework, and how the Sense of Community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) provided an appropriate lens to examine parent perspectives. Next, I present previous studies in four main areas: Impacts of student mobility; how families choose; constraints in the education marketplace; and school community, connectedness, and sense of belonging. In the third section of this review, I will address the methodological issues that exist within the relevant literature. I will then provide a synthesis of the existing research, identifying common themes and conclusions in the current state of research. Finally, I will critique the literature based on claims, limitations of studies, and on the data and methods that researchers utilized.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I examined the problem of inconsistent enrollment. The issue has particular relevance for public school educators in Michigan, where students and families can choose to attend another public school that offers open enrollment, or a public charter school at no cost (Cullen & Loeb, 2004; Lockwood et al., 2002; Militello & Metzger, 2008). I wanted to understand what parents experience when they move their child using school choice policy. I examined several fundamental concepts, including student discipline, extracurricular activities, equity of opportunity, and Sense of Community to frame the problem of student mobility.

Student discipline and behavior management. Student discipline is an issue that impacts many families in the United States. Chronic use of disciplinary actions by public school leaders result in absences (Dinkes et al., 2009). These include out of school suspensions, expulsions, and even student transfers. Students who experience these measures may begin to show antisocial behaviors, vandalize, become disengaged, and even drop out of school. Such problems are compounded if the student feels that their punishment is unfair, or unwarranted (Osher et al., 2010). Even in clear-cut cases of wrong-doing, consequences from zero-tolerance policies are at odds with adolescent development, according to some experts (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). Administrators often partner such practices with the implementation of school security measures such as campus security guards and bag searches. Such actions are associated with crime, and may not do much to impact the most common types of student infractions, which are minor (Gerlinger & Wo, 2016). The appropriate, and most effective behavior management strategy depends on the school district, school climate, role expectations, student socioeconomic status, and other factors. While punitive approaches to discipline are widespread, three methods have become common among school administrators.

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS), or a similar program, Positive Behavior Support (PBS) are behavior management strategies that have been embraced by large numbers of districts. This approach is based on role-playing and instruction in which teachers model appropriate behaviors, rewarding that behavior, and the use of consistent, established consequences for inappropriate behaviors (Osher et al., 2010). SWPBS and PBS are teacher-centered since they focus on the management of student behavior.

The second approach to student discipline is a student-centered strategy, known as Social Emotional Learning (SEL). This approach includes strategies to help students manage their

behavior, through the mastery of five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. Students work toward each of these competencies throughout the school day, as teachers embed them into curriculum and planning of academic subjects, as well as into the school climate. Such an approach may increase student test scores, and help them feel safe at school because they have built positive relationships with others in the school community (Docksai, 2010).

Finally, authoritative discipline is an approach that offers high levels of structure, and high levels of support for students (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). This combination requires flexibility that is often not found in schools with zero-tolerance policies or punitive discipline programs. Firm structure, high expectations, consistent adherence to school rules, but also a sense of justice and fairness are all part of disciplinary considerations. Administrators must partner those elements with the types of support that will help students feel a sense of mutual respect, as well as care and concern from teachers. Proponents claim that such an approach will result in positive relationships, and a fair balance; when students are disciplined, they fall back to their understandings that teachers and administrators care for them, and they may not become disengaged from school, as otherwise often happens (2009). Critics claim that the flexibility of authoritative discipline is a security risk for students, but Gerlinger and Wo (2016) found that schools practicing authoritative discipline, having created favorable school climates, exhibited fewer claims of physical, verbal, and relational bullying, while those using security measures showed no decrease in bullying.

Schools utilize various approaches to behavior management, so it is entirely possible that parents make decisions about enrollment based on their experiences with discipline. The

personality, behavior, and role of a student in the school community will all impact how the student experiences misbehaviors, and how they perceive their sense of belonging in that school.

Extracurricular activities. The act of choosing a school for children is significantly impacted by the extracurricular activities that are available (Prichard & Swezey, 2016; Prothero, 2015). Demand for after-school programs is exceptionally high in areas of concentrated poverty, but students face obstacles to participation, including accessibility and affordability ("America After 3PM," 2016; Cooper, 2011; Holt et al., Newton, & Ball, 2012). However, the integration of such programs in a school-wide format offers multiple benefits. Gardner (1983) defined multiple intelligences that operate concurrently for people; these intelligences can be engaged and developed in children through activities found in after-school clubs and organizations, as well as music and art programs that are part of the curriculum. Such activities promote life skills for students such as empathy and social connections, as well as a sense of connectedness to the school (Holt et al., 2012; Penner & Wallin, 2012). In one study, participants in extra-curricular activities developed in the areas of initiative, respect, and teamwork/leadership, even though adults and coaches who were never explicitly taught those values. Instead, it was the experiences of the players and participants who helped them grow in these areas (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008).

These value of such programs is especially true for Hispanic and other minority students. Farrell (2008) concluded that Hispanic students who participated in extracurricular activities found a sense of connectedness and belonging to the school and community, and had a positive emotional experience. Becoming connected to the school culture through participation in activities could be especially helpful for minority students, since they may feel that they do not belong, and cannot find where they fit in the school culture (Booker, 2006). Extracurricular

activities reduce the inequality gap; they bring more benefits for at-risk students than for advantaged students (Cooper, 2011).

Though after-school activities may be available, there are barriers to participation through ineligibility rules and pay-to-play requirements. In some schools, the policies in regard to eligibility may lead to continued non-participation by students. In many cases, these students begin to get in trouble in and out of school, and this disconnect may even lead to dropout (Cooper, 2011). Parents are confronted with these factors in their experience with choosing and enrolling their children in various school settings. Parents of elementary students might prioritize extracurricular programs if they are looking for a long-term school or district for their child.

Equity of opportunity. Millions of students in the United States lack equitable access to a quality education. Stone (2011) identified equity as more complex than equality. Equity is not merely the equal treatment of all; instead, equity refers to different ways people or groups are treated so that they might receive equal opportunities and results. This complexity results in policy disagreements over how to achieve equity (McDermott, Frankenberg, & Williams, 2013), slowing progress for students who require access to opportunity. Kozol (1992) argued that many conservatives fear that a movement toward equity in education is a leveling down, in which the best will sink, whereas proponents of equity call it a leveling up to increase access and opportunities for the most. In a report comparing expenditures among schools within districts, researchers found that more than 40% of schools that receive federal Title I money spent less state and local money on resources such as teachers and other personnel than the schools in the district that do not receive such funds. The same study revealed that between 39 and 47% of Title I districts spent less per pupil in their Title I schools than in their non-Title I schools at the

same grade level (Heuer & Stullich, 2011). Inequities go far beyond funding dollars; local school districts that allocate resources unequally widen the existing opportunity gap (Darden & Cavendish, 2012). Within the same district, some students may "have better-paid, better-credentialed, and more experienced principals and teachers, learn in better-maintained environments, are the preferred recipients of exciting experimental programs and advanced curriculum" (p. 62).

A lack of universal, publicly funded, quality preschool has widened the opportunity gap as well (Wright, 2011). Staggering differences in curriculum exist, and enrollment varies significantly among racial and ethnic groups, as well as income levels. In particular, Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs through college and career levels, and this can be improved by high school preparatory courses that provide a strong background in these fields (NSF, 2010; Palmer et al., 2011). Rigorous high school preparation represents inequity for students from many backgrounds. Schools in rural areas are less likely to offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses, for example, than others (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016). The benefits of AP courses is widely known; for at-risk students, enrollment in AP courses leads to perseverance in college (Klepfer & Hull, 2012). AP courses offer students an opportunity to get college credit early, and such courses boost one's academic competitiveness on college applications. Without such courses, even the most advanced students may lose out on higher education opportunities (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016). This inequity is often the case in urban areas. While students in some urban areas have seen increased access to AP courses, those same schools must improve achievement by hiring qualified teachers and high-quality curriculum content (Hallett & Venegas, 2011).

16

Parents in the education marketplace face varying levels of education access and opportunity for their children.

Sense of Community. The Sense of Community theory provides a helpful framework from which to examine parent perspectives about open enrollment and school choice since community connectedness and social capital are essential elements of any school. Sense of Community is "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Parents desire schools that nurture a connection to the community and must weigh that desire among other factors, such as academic achievement (Hill, 2016; Lareau & Goyette, 2014). Four elements comprise a Sense of Community: membership, influence, integration, and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection.

An individual's membership in a group is supported by a feelings of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Membership requires boundaries, which are often created by members for protection, and to promote emotional safety. These boundaries are often abstract and help to identify who is in, who is out. In neighborhood schools, boundaries are sometimes clear and based on geography. In a choice market, those geographic boundary lines are less significant. Feelings of belonging and emotional safety strengthen one's sense of membership. There are indeed issues with membership and inclusion in American schools; Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, and Siegel-Hawley (2016) identified patterns of double segregation that continue to emerge in the United States, in which students are separated based on race and poverty.

Personal investment is the concept within the Sense of Community theory that individuals feel an earned right to belong. Personal investment makes membership more meaningful. As an example, home ownership is an investment that earns one the right to be part of a community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Such an example may prove to be helpful in the examination of school communities that are not defined by residency. Finally, symbols or a system of symbols often support the element of membership. These may exist through something as basic as a logo, or in more complex examples like rites and traditions.

A second element that contributes to a sense of community is influence. Members must feel that they can influence the community, and that the community in turn has influence on them. In schools with diverse populations, students may perceive that there is a strained sense of community unless campuses make an effort to embed diversity and cultural awareness into the curriculum. Students should have opportunities for informal interactions with others (Gurin, 1999; Muthuswamy, Levine, & Gazel, 2006). Without meaningful interactions, students may socially segregate themselves, and subgroups will be disengaged from the community as they feel little influence as members (Yates, 2000). Schools must deliberately nourish connectedness, particularly as the diversity of a school increases (Chapman, 2007; Walton, 2013). Experiencing diversity within the community can undoubtedly promote a sense of connectedness among its members. In a study of one school that attempted to build community, researchers discovered that for students, new experiences with diversity helped build social relationships, and find a sense of shared humanity in discovering that everyone has shared needs and practices (Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2015).

Individual influence on a community can be witnessed in classrooms where students have some ownership over their learning, or in committee work that empowers parents through

their input and participation. Influence may also be evident in decision making such as voter initiatives, such as technology or building and site bonds. Conformity both validates and brings a sense of closeness. As schools welcome diverse student populations, this may prove to be a challenge. Schools may hope to maintain policies, traditions, and organizational structures that are uninfluenced by newcomers, and newcomers may be hesitant to conform to the established culture.

If any community hopes to maintain connectedness, it must meet the needs of all members. Rewards and benefits of membership reinforce a desire to remain in the community. Sometimes, the reward is membership itself, as a status symbol. Other times, the reward comes through the benefits received from other members. An individual's needs are based on their values, and healthy communities have a shared set of values. If members feel that their needs are unaligned with the group, or are not a priority, then the connection grows weak (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

A shared emotional connection is a fourth element of community. Emotional connections are enhanced through positive interactions, completed tasks, and shared events. High levels of personal investment and personal risk affect the level of intimacy between members and the group. In strong school communities, the bonding of families will occur as preparations take place for a major school event, or administrators make open attempts to have positive interactions with families beyond members of the parent group. Districts that have encouraged parents to take ownership through participation strengthen the community, as its members see themselves reflected in the group.

A qualitative study can be built from the sense of community theory's framework of elements. It offers many points of inquiry for the researcher hoping to elicit in-depth

19

responses. This research seeks to illuminate parent perspectives about school choice and student mobility. Framing the inquiry within the elements of community will inform school leaders as they seek to retain students and stabilize enrollment.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

In this section, I will review the literature surrounding four areas of focus for this study. First of all, I will identify what researchers say are the impacts of inconsistent enrollment and student mobility. Next, I will examine the research surrounding school choice and the factors that are at play when families make enrollment decisions. Thirdly, I will review the existing literature surrounding constraints in the education marketplace, which may limit a family's access to choice. Finally, I will examine research that exists on Sense of Community and school connectedness.

Impacts of inconsistent enrollment and student mobility. In a choice-filled education market, school leaders can expect some inconsistency when it comes to student enrollment from year to year. Competitive pressures vary; some districts and schools are affected more than others, but all must identify solutions to stabilize student populations. Inconsistent enrollment has a negative impact on schools and districts, but high turnover within a school can also negatively affect students, transient and nontransient alike.

The driving force behind a school's desire to compete for students is funding. In Michigan, the setting for this study, per-pupil funding follows students to the public or charter school of their choice (Lockwood et al., 2002). Schools must compete, and districts with small or medium size populations may be impacted dramatically by inconsistent enrollment. The risk is worthwhile, though; among California districts that participate in the state's choice program, the majority are made up of less than 5,000 students, and they depend on the enrollment funding

(Duim, 2013). According to superintendents who participated through surveys and interviews, the funding accrued through the District of Choice program accounts for an average of 25% of their overall revenue. Similarly, an Ohio study found that a district's current cash flow, as well as their ability to obtain more funding as needed from local sources, was a large determinate in their decision to offer open enrollment (Brasington, Flores-Lagunes, & Guci, 2016). The authors utilized a spatial autoregressive lag multinomial logit model to find out what factors determined district decisions when it comes to how or if they will take part in open enrollment. In states like Michigan, Ohio, and California, it seems that a small neighborhood district has strong motivations to become a choice district, if only to maintain stability after losing residential families (Brasington et al., 2016).

Jimerson (2002) described how the impact of interdistrict open enrollment is not always survivable by those who are not competitive. For some, consolidation or even closures may result. For others, a loss of per-pupil funds leads to the slimming down of expenditures through the elimination of academic and non-academic programs. It is not only the small districts that need to be concerned with funding; two Michigan cities serve as examples of what is at stake. Militello et al. (2008) learned that Lansing, Michigan, a large urban district, became unable to compete with surrounding suburban districts, since they had so many more buildings to maintain, and administrative costs to bear. The student population plummeted, and at times was damaged even when a student returned; many waited until after count day to enroll, and the district lost out on the foundation allowance dollars for that year.

Detroit has faced economic devastation and population decreases, resulting in financial ruin. These challenges, partnered with Michigan's choice policies, have resulted in problems for Detroit Public Schools; the city's residents have the third highest rate of charter schools in the

nation, and 14% of Detroit families send their children to other public districts, in the surrounding suburbs (Lake et al. 2015). Such losses have led to the state's appointment of an emergency manager, legislative action, and interference from the state. Michigan's urban areas are not the only ones impacted; in Philadelphia, teachers were laid off, schools were closed, and the district borrowed money to support operations (Scott & Quinn, 2014) after choice.

To maintain consistent enrollment and funding, teachers and school leaders face the reality of economic competition. Many districts take on this new policy without understanding their customers or their competitors (Hill, 2005). Schools and districts must determine the competitive pressure that they face, and develop a response. Jabbar (2015) studied the impact of choice policy on school-level changes and found that only about one-third of school leaders had instituted a major change, such as an academic program, to attract and maintain students. Most, however, had begun to market and promote their school. Other researchers have identified this trend; Richardson (2013) interviewed school administrators and discovered some of their new responsibilities which have often been expanded to marketing and promoting the school. Traditional public school administrators worked to advertise their school to retain neighborhood students. Administrative work time is not the only opportunity cost; Lansing schools used marketing to compete for students with surrounding suburban districts. In one year, the advertising budget was over $60,000 (Militello et al., 2008). School officials in Detroit report that marketing is a significant problem, even over school quality (Lake et al., 2015). There is an awareness among parents that the need for marketing reroutes both resources and work efforts that are necessary for a school's success (Howe et al., 2001).

As some parents exercise their right to choose, those who stay in their home districts may feel the impact. In schools with high mobility rates, achievement levels decline (Scherrer, 2012),

and a sort of "chaos" element may develop. Instruction is affected, morale drops, and increasing

administrative duties result in a poor learning environment (Rumberger et al., 1999). Students

tend to suffer psychologically, socially, and academically from mobility, especially due to the

challenges that come with adjusting and making new friends. This impact occurs most often in

neighborhood schools with high percentages of low-income and minority students (1999). Over

the years, the effects of high turnover combine with achievement gaps that already exist for

minorities and the poor (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 2004). School choice often results in

achievement gains for some schools, at the expense of those that lose high performing students

(Howe et al., 2001). These "hollowed out" schools are often left for the most at-risk students and

families (Ledwith, 2010, p. 258). Enrollment losses are often felt most in districts with low-

income populations, so the schools with the most to lose are those that are already facing the

most challenging populations (Ni & Arsen, 2011).

     While research supports the idea that transience, student mobility, and inconsistent

enrollment are detrimental to schools and children, these do seem to be features of the school

choice movement. Powers et al. (2010) referred to school choice enrollment patterns as

mirroring a "revolving door" between districts, rather than competition. The authors researched

"patterns of nonpromotional student movement" (p. 217) among students in the city of

Metropolitan Phoenix. Instead of finding that competition had created districts that were either

losing many students or gaining them, many exhibited comparable gains and losses. Districts

that had an above-average number of students leave for another district or charter school also had

an above average number enroll from another school. While the numbers were comparable, it is

true that for those districts with the highest rates of mobility, there was a net loss of students. So

while the "revolving door" metaphor is applicable, districts must be concerned with mobility that results a loss of students; each one counts for thousands of dollars.

In the early years of open enrollment policies, Rumberger et al. (1999) interviewed school personnel in high-mobility areas and concluded that open enrollment was a factor that drove instability. Several studies support the idea that participation in choice programs is unstable, especially for those that need them. Lavery and Carlson (2015) examined the characteristics of those who participate in open enrollment, and those who stop utilizing the program. The authors conclude that participation of African-American and economically disadvantaged students is unstable. In a New York voucher program, researchers found that only 60% of voucher recipients were still enrolled in a private school only three years later (Howell, 2004). In Michigan, school choice participation is dynamic, and families who take advantage of interdistrict open enrollment are most often African-American, low-income, and low-performing on state assessments (Cowen et al., 2015). However, students who exit the school choice program represent those same demographics, suggesting that those who most need choice are not benefiting from it. Among voucher recipients in a Milwaukee program, low-achieving and African-American students were the most likely to leave the chosen private school, and return to public institutions (Cowen, Fleming, Witte, & Wolf, 2012). A third group that exited Milwaukee private schools most often were those who attended a school populated by many other "voucher" students. Schools offering open enrollment may often only be a temporary site for choosing families (2012). In that case, officials must identify what facets of a school community could entice enrollees to stay.

Factors that impact enrollment decisions. As choice policies empower parents, schools must gain a competitive edge, to meet the needs of a marketplace that is filled with

potential customers. Egalite (2016) argued that small schools of choice have the potential to positively impact students whose family backgrounds might include parental incarceration, family instability, and a lack of life experiences. The author claimed that a shared vision that draws families in, on a voluntary basis, would help improve their achievement and overall well-being. However, there is a lack of research to support the idea that parents generally choose schools based on their "shared vision." When it comes to the factors at play for in the minds of parents, the research is complicated.

Choice advocates argue that open enrollment drives competition and school quality, but it is not clear that parents select a school or district based on academic performance. While most parents want an education that is of high academic standing for their child (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2009), a school's educational features and effectiveness are not predictors in determining which school will be chosen (Jacobs, 2013; Ni & Arsen, 2011). Howell (2006) discovered that parents eligible for choice under the No Child Left Behind Act are often unfamiliar with a school's academic performance data, even though they are more likely to be aware of the choice provisions in the law itself. In a survey of parents in Massachusetts, most parents were unaware that their child's current school was underperforming, and those interested in participating in the choice program did not base their reasons for leaving on low academic performance.

One particular study partly opposes the idea that academic performance does not matter to parents; Rabovsky (2011) utilized enrollment data, academic performance data, and student demographic data to determine that performance data does matter to families when they are choosing a school, at least at the high school level. Racial makeup, however, is a significant determinate of choice for elementary families. The study highlighted one other facet of mobility

not found in other research; high levels of student transfers out correlated with high numbers of suspensions. The author concluded that discipline is a primary driving factor for parents who have chosen to leave a school (2011).

If test scores and academic performance seem to hold little power for "choosers," the same can be said for home buyers investigating schools in a residential area. Since 2001, the impact of a district's test scores has had less influence over home prices in Connecticut than its racial makeup (Dougherty et al., 2009). Howell (2006) concluded that if choice advocates hope to see participation in the program grow, they must address parent perceptions.

Camille (2005) completed 14 in-depth interviews with African-American poor and working-class mothers and discovered that choice is often "positional." Mothers were the target population for this study since they are the primary decision-makers in their child's schooling. The 14 participants self-identified as working class, and their children attended various types of middle schools. The author used a feminist lens to elicit information from these mothers about how they chose schools for their children and concluded that in many cases, the mother's own experiences as a low-income, female minority are what drove their decisions. Mothers sought equity and empowerment for their students, and even utilized school choice as a form of social protest (2005).

Past research indicates that social networks can profoundly influence the way families across social classes choose a school or district. Condliffe, Boyd, and Deluca (2015) interviewed 118 low-income African-American students to discover how they made school choice decisions. Like Howell (2006), the authors found that parents had access to far too little information about school quality to make informed choices and families often relied on their social networks for information about open enrollment. These social networks were often

limited to the friend groups of the student, and information was derived from conversations

about what schools they attend. In a separate study, Holme (2002) interviewed 42 mostly white

parents from middle to upper-class families, in regard to the choices they made about schools

through the purchase of a home. Most interviewees indicated that they relied upon their social

network for information; a school's reputation in social circles was boosted or tarnished based on

whether or not high-status parents sent their students there. Like other researchers, Holme

(2002) learned that these parents were armed with little information about curriculum,

performance, or available programs. Instead, they had developed status ideologies, basing

assumptions about schools on their population demographics, or even the enrollment of a

specific family. Similarly, Reay and Lucey (2004) determined that schools are understood and

assigned status through the imaginings of people within society; those assigned meanings can

impact the education marketplace. After meanings, statuses, and rankings are assigned, there

will be schools that are demonized; this impacts the students who are stuck attending those

schools.

The parents Holme (2002) interviewed had created symbolic boundaries around specific

school communities, to make distinctions, assign status, and legitimize their own choices. These

boundaries are perceived based on race, income, and other factors. The resulting segregation, in

which middle to high-income white students flock together, is also reflected in Jacobs' (2013)

study, which found that segregated housing patterns of urban areas mirrored the enrollment

patterns of the open marketplace of schools. Jacobs (2013) utilized a regression analysis using a

proximity framework, and approved the hypothesis that parents choose schools for their children

who are near their own homes; even though schools in Washington, D.C. could be integrated

through choice, they were quite segregated despite it. Bifulco et al. (2009) examined enrollment

data for Durham schools and found that segregation is more common than it would be if students attended their neighborhood schools. This segregation was even more pronounced by social class than by race. These trends have become the norm. Thompson Dorsey (2013) found that Black and Latino students are more segregated now than before desegregation efforts took hold around the country decades ago. The author explained that this pattern is attributed to several factors, including court decisions that ended desegregation oversight, school choice, private school enrollment among whites, and residential segregation patterns (as illustrated by Jacobs, 2013).

Geography does play a decisive role in the decisions parents make about schools, in that parents assign meaning to both neighborhoods and schools. Bell (2009) conducted a longitudinal, comparative study about how geography influences parents' school choices. Set in the city of Detroit, the author interviewed a random, diverse sampling of families from various neighborhood types and income levels. This rich interview data was combined with geographic data to help investigate the complexities of school choice. Early interviews were very open, then over time the author began to use structured questioning to develop grounded theory. Parental actions and words were analyzed to identify how and when geography played a role in their decision. For most families, geography became important at some point, either in a spatial or place-based sense. Proximity and convenience were not priorities, but for some, were considered at some point in their decision process. Families with fewer children, or with flexible work schedules and social networks to assist in transporting students to school, geography played less of a role than it did for others. While some families were willing to travel long distances to transport, it was true that if the inconvenience of a school's distance outweighed the other

factors, then it was no longer considered. Bell (2009) discovered parents often made decisions based upon firmly held beliefs and inaccurate information.

Boundaries, both physical and perceived, are an essential aspect of the Sense of Community theory, which is the framework of this study (McMillan & Chavis, 1996). More research is needed to determine how parents perceive boundaries and community membership, and how it impacts their choice of schools. Schools to be culturally responsive; one that celebrates or accepts its diversity is not necessarily responding to racial issues and inequities. Walton (2013) interviewed students of color and discovered that many became just as isolated in their new buildings as they were in their previous, underperforming schools.

School communities have historically been places of student growth that is well-rounded. Districts offer programs to develop the whole child, including music, drama, athletics, and more. Parents may look to extracurricular programs in other districts; Welsch, Statz, & Skidmore (2010) studied interdistrict transfers in Wisconsin and found that students were likely to transfer from districts with fewer extracurricular opportunities.

Constraints in the education marketplace. Some researchers argue that merely giving families choices about schools may not open them up to more desirable schools; there are often constraints such as transportation, travel distance, or even the application process (Bell, 2009; Plank & Sykes, 1999). A lack of transportation to districts outside of one's neighborhood both limits choice, and results in increased segregation for open enrollment districts (Koedel, Betts, Rice, & Zau, 2009; Lake et al., 2015; Scott & Quinn, 2014). Transportation barriers do not pose the same problem for advantaged families as they do for families of low socioeconomic status (Phillips, Hausmen, & Larsen, 2012). In programs that provide transportation, there is an

increased participation rate and a wider variety of schools to choose from, especially for these families.

An obstacle like one's geographic distance from a school might be an obvious one, and to some parents, it might be the first consideration when eliminating options. However, other challenges keep families from making fully informed decisions. Stein and Nagro (2015) studied the readability and complexity of school choice guides and pamphlets for parents; none of the guides that school districts had provided would be readable by all adults seeking information. This problem would be especially relevant for families in urban areas, where low-levels of adult literacy are common. Likewise, Garcia (2011) examined performance data that states released for families to utilize during their choice process. Most states provided complicated, unexplained information that only frustrated families.

Several states, like South Carolina, released vast, overwhelming amounts of data in regard to yearly progress, and others released explanations of performance that "required parents to have at least a basic knowledge of complex statistical concepts to process the results" (p. 80). This phenomenon may point to why in one study, almost no parents made use of the school-provided guides when choosing available high schools (Nield, 2005). The researcher interviewed 19 parents of eighth graders about their experiences when choosing and applying to schools. Most were African-American and low-income, but were not sampled randomly; instead, all respondents were utilized in the study. They indicated that though they wanted specific information about schools, the provided pamphlets were vague, and lacking the necessary details. Instead, they referred to the sources they knew well; social networks made up of family and friends. In Camille's (2005) interviews with African American mothers, one commented that the district "sends a 'confusing' pamphlet to district parents each year that

describes various school choice options and reform policies. She asserted that the information

"is 'Greek' to most Black parents" (p. 184). In the city of Detroit, where Lake et al. (2015)

reported there are 20,000 to 30,000 more available seats than there are students, parents

described difficulties with finding information about schools, or available

transportation. Charter schools and public schools of choice abound in the city; many are

underperforming, and parents have difficulty navigating the market. The hypercompetitive

market in Detroit has been referred to by stakeholders as "snatch-and-grab" and "guerilla

warfare" (Lake et al., 2015, p.22). However, Hill (2016) found that as a group of Detroit parents

enhanced their knowledge of school characteristics, access and opportunities improved. In

addition, dialogue became more open and informed with regard to school choice. Parents

experienced this learning through organized efforts and sought the help of professional groups

that monitor school quality.

School choice, like other social programs, cannot reach the potential to be empowering if

leaders ignore the factors at play for families. As an example, Deluca and Rosenblatt (2010)

investigated why low-income students in a program called "Moving to Opportunity" did not see

expected education gains; they concluded that simply moving to a better school is not

enough. School officials and counselors must assist parents in the process of choosing schools,

explaining academic programs, and showing them how to help their child learn at home. Social

and economic constraints may reflect why some families opt to leave their home district, only to

return, or to choose a new one the following year. However, children are left with and are

responsible for the academic journey that their uninformed parents make (Colburn, 2012). For

school choices and open enrollment opportunities to work, parents must be able to learn about

their options, have an understanding of the quality of schools that are available (Hill, 2005).

Community, connectedness, and sense of belonging. The Sense of Community theory

serves as an appropriate framework for this study, since existing research indicates that there are

advantages for students who are bonded to their school community. While the reasons parents

choose new schools are complicated, elements of community might shed light on factors that

encourage families to remain committed to a school or district. This idea is not just a sentimental

one. In Scherrer's (2012) study of student mobility as a predictor of academic challenges, the

author described a concern with school connectedness and social capital, both of which

motivated the research. Concepts like community and connectedness matter when it comes to

the policies of our public institutions.

Schools can ensure survival in the choice-fueled marketplace if they find ways to keep

residential students around, and open their doors to newcomers. Rumberger et al. (1999) argued

that schools could lessen mobility rates; when a school's Sense of Community is strong and

features committed members who are bonded to the institution, more students will be attracted,

and will want to become members (Hill, 2016; Payne, 2002; Belenardo, 2001).

A Sense of Community does not naturally grow, or exist on its own; its members and

leaders must cultivate it. Leaders hoping to foster a strong connectedness in their environment

should examine perceptions of the existing school culture; obtaining information from all groups

within the community can help focus efforts (Keiser & Schulte, 2009). Practitioners must

nourish climate, connectedness, and community in a deliberate way (Chapman, 2007). As

schools experience changing demographics, work must be done to help members

integrate. Walton (2013) interviewed students of color that had transferred schools for a better

opportunity and discovered that schools must be strategic about building connectedness, or else

isolation will perpetuate. Among many students in the study, they experienced just as much

racial isolation in their new diverse school as they did in their old, low-performing schools.

For education practitioners this is not a new concept; as students transfer from elementary

to middle, or middle to high school, there are often mentorship programs to help students

become a "fit" for the new building; the same efforts are clearly needed in schools where student

mobility is prevalent (Waters, Cross, & Shaw, 2010). In a study of Montessori school attrition

rates, Walker (2011) discovered that to retain students and families, school community efforts,

including parent initiatives, were required. The study of a Montessori school elicited

perspectives from parents and personnel through what is called a "World Cafe" activity.

Through these in-depth conversations, Walker (2011) concluded that community events such as

volunteer activities and themed family nights encourage permanency among students and

families (p. 65).

Administrators and teachers should lead such efforts. Principals can create strong

relationships when they involve themselves in the broader community outside of the

school. Specific actions could include committing oneself to community causes and being

visible to members. Khalifa (2012) concluded that urban school principals with strong bonds to

the community were able to unite members of the school around building policy without

resistance. Also, relationships with disinterested and hostile parents improved, as did academic

progress. A principal's leadership style can impact the sense of community in a school through

their decision making, communication efforts, and technical skills (Belenardo, 2001). Epstein

(2006) named decision-making as one of the six types of involvement for schools that wish to

build partnerships with families. A collaborative leader should be democratic, encouraging

parental governance through organizations and committees.

Teachers are capable of promoting community as well. There are links between the support a teacher provides, student engagement, and academic performance at both the elementary and middle schools levels (Klem & Connell, 2004). Emotional security can be enhanced by teachers who build relationships with their students (Janson & King, 2006). Emotional engagement serves students well while they are at school. It helps to fill their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (2004). Active communication from teachers can help nurture a Sense of Community (Belenardo, 2001). Communication takes the form of updates on school programs, student progress, and regular conversation. Communication should not be just one way; home-to-school communication enhances the connection further (Epstein, 2006).

Extracurricular programs have been proven to promote a sense of belonging among community members. Students are engaged by school-sponsored athletics or clubs, as well as out-of-school activities, such as scouting or music lessons. Schools that offer activities and help reduce barriers to participation can begin to foster inclusion and belonging (Brown & Evans, 2002). Low participation rates may indicate a lack of connectedness to the community, or for subgroups within it.

Review of Methodological Issues

The diverse methods and techniques applied to school choice research have advanced the field of knowledge in the last two decades. Researchers have applied qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods techniques, and while advantages and disadvantages exist for each, the varied approaches found in the literature are illuminating. Theories and conceptual understandings surrounding school choice have been developed thanks to well-designed methodologies, despite some limitations.

Because of the varied nature of school choice policy, research designs and methodologies cannot be compared across the board; the variables at play are rarely comparable. States offer a myriad of components when it comes to open enrollment: combinations of vouchers, private schools, public schools, intradistrict and interdistrict open enrollment, charter schools, lottery systems, and more. Further, the research questions and areas of focus chosen by the authors call for a wide range of appropriate methodologies.

Mixed methods studies provide triangulated data from which to draw conclusions and contribute to the field of study. Duim (2013) sought to identify what strategies districts of choice used to make open enrollment work well in their district, including reasons for participating, and what superintendents see as being the drawbacks, or benefits to the program. Because the research questions sought to elicit perspectives, the author first applied survey research using Likert scales, then utilized that data to design the interviews that would follow. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed some consistency among all superintendents while remaining open to additional discussion with each.

Rabovsky (2011) harnessed the advantages of mixed-methods studies to illuminate the effects of school choice on administrators, as well as the drivers of choice decisions for families. Intrigued by the idea that students in Tulsa quite often transfer to failing and "unremarkable" schools, the author began by interviewing three administrators from such buildings. The interview results were somewhat surprising, in that the principals seemed undeterred by students transferring out of their building, and that they were unmotivated to recruit students who might exhibit behavior problems. The author also designed a survey to determine if other local principals supported the feelings from the interviewees, and though there were low levels of participation, they generally did. The third portion of the study was an

examination of the factors that drive transfer rates in Tulsa schools. The data included Academic Performance Indicators (API) that were examined in relation to the API of other neighboring schools. The API of a school was subtracted from the mean API from all schools within a grade level range (elementary, middle, and high schools). The academic performance data from one year prior to transfer data was utilized since the API was assumed to be the information parents use to inform their decision for their child's future enrollment. The total number of suspensions for each school was utilized to determine if discipline impacts choice. The total number for each school was subtracted from the mean, illustrating a school's relative state of discipline. Tulsa Public Schools provided transfer data from both in and out of each school, and racial demographics were provided by the Department of Education and represented the makeup of a school during fall enrollment. Just as academic performance from a previous year informs parents, so might the racial makeup of a school; the author lagged the data for that variable by one year as well.

Researchers of school choice often have to make decisions with regard to private, charter, or magnet schools. Rabovsky (2011) focused on traditional public schools within Tulsa, so the five available magnet schools were left out of the study. Schools that lacked the necessary API data were excluded, resulting in 73 total schools in the sample. The author was able to conclude that parents at the elementary level are motivated by racial makeup, whereas parents at the high school level are motivated by academic achievement. The author did not utilize qualitative data sets to support or enhance conclusions from the descriptive analysis, and did not use isolated student data to examine the facts behind the opinions expressed by administrators during interviews.

Jabbar (2015) demonstrated the benefits of mixed-methods strategies in a case study of how school choice impacts school-level actions in New Orleans. The city's market pressure was determined to be an ideal for such a study since other locations do not have such high levels of charter school enrollment. The author concluded that while school leaders use a variety of strategies to compete in the market, few made substantial changes, but most utilized marketing and promoting at the very least. Semi-structured protocol interviews, surveys, and document analysis rounded out the research strategies. Not only did the author interview principals, but also board members, and charter-network leaders. Participants were asked which other schools they felt in competition with and were asked to describe their competitive strategies. To elicit more information, participants completed a survey and rated how competitive they were with every other school in New Orleans. Documents and interviews were analyzed by deductive coding; first broadly, then more specifically, to separate the strategies leaders used to either attract students, or to compete with other schools. While the case study method limits the application of findings, Jabbar's (2015) use of well-triangulated data left few questions unanswered.

Quantitative studies offer several advantages; methods can be replicated in different settings, and conclusions can be applied to large populations, for the most part. As an example, Carlson et al. (2011) conducted a study of school choice flows in Colorado and Minnesota. Quantitative methods are well-represented in the research; authors have traditionally utilized data sources such as performance assessments, statewide administrative data sets, census information, and surveys to calculate who chooses to change schools, the kinds of schools they choose, and how their academic success is impacted (Bifulco et al., 2009; Carlson et al., 2011; Jacobs, 2013).

One of the most critical quantitative studies informing this research was set in the state of Michigan (Cowen et al., 2015). The descriptive analysis pointed to notable instability in the state's school choice program and utilized data from the Michigan Department of Education to determine that student demographic groups most in need of choice policy do not consistently participate. The authors utilized an administrative dataset from the Michigan Department of Education, which contained statistics in regard to demographics, enrollment, and achievement information for the statewide assessment. The researchers excluded charter and vocational schools from the study. The authors were interested in students who switched into or out of the school of choice program; two different variables represented them. The authors then created variables for race, gender, income level, language proficiency, grade level, and special needs status. The authors conducted a bivariate descriptive analysis to identify the characteristics of students who most participate in the school choice program in Michigan, and then the types of students who switch out of the program. Also, the authors sought to discover how the types of schools attended by school of choice participants differed from the ones where the "stayers" remained. A multivariate analysis is conducted to determine how long a student is likely to participate in the school choice program based on gender, race, and income. The authors concluded that the most disadvantaged are the most likely to take advantage of the school choice program, but are also the most likely to exit the program.

Qualitative studies could help answer the question that remains. Why do parents, who have taken advantage of choice policy, only then a year or so later, return their students to what are often underperforming schools? Parent and student perspectives might illuminate some of the data. This information gap is one disadvantage of quantitative methods; they often leave the

researcher to conclude without explaining the meaning or experiences behind a set of phenomena.

Qualitative research goes beyond validating theories, or rejecting hypotheses; these studies may help describe the behaviors and experiences surrounding a phenomenon. The in-depth nature of this research is often most helpful to the education professional so that they might improve their daily practice. While quantitative studies can often be replicated and tested in a variety of contexts, qualitative research generalizations and conclusions might not apply to groups outside of the target population. However, qualitative research provides rich detail about a set of circumstances. Since school choice takes on many different shapes based on one's state, city, or even district, quantitative studies in the field are often difficult to apply across the board. For example, the variables at play in a study that includes charter schools or vouchers are not entirely useful when examining policy in a state that only offers public inter-district transfers. Qualitative researchers must carefully design techniques and methodologies appropriate to their research questions, but they also have the flexibility to change and adjust their methods during the research.

Camille (2005) conducted lengthy interviews with 14 African-American mothers, within the framework of feminist theory, to discover how their experiences and positions as working-class, minority females had shaped the way they make school choices for their children. These methodological choices allowed the researcher to elicit complex responses from the interviewees, but that study has sociological implications. In the same way, Bell (2009) interviewed 48 Detroit families to discover how Geography impacted their choice decisions over time. The author was able to observe the words and actions of parents, analyzing how geography impacts choice on a continuum, and in partnership with other considerations. Condliffe et al.

(2015) sought the perspectives of students and conducted interviews with 118 low-income, African American youth in the Baltimore area. Through the interviews and fieldwork, the authors were able to get to the heart of the complex issues at play when it comes to school decisions.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Much of the literature points to the idea that high student mobility has a negative impact on schools and students, and yet it is a feature of open enrollment programs. Both large and small schools rely on the per-pupil allowances to avoid downsizing or elimination of programs. Small schools that offer open enrollment may be dependent on a mobile and often uncommitted population, to boost their overall budgetary needs (Duim, 2013; Brasington et al., 2016), and large districts often have such large-scale expenditures that student losses, or unreliable enrollment could result in building closures, layoffs, or the elimination of essential programs (Militello et al., 2008; DeArmond et al., 2014; Scott & Quinn, 2014). As large districts face possible building closures, neighborhood schools are often spread further apart in urban areas. With these financial troubles, districts spend money on marketing, and administrators now devote time to advertising and promoting the school (Jabbar 2015; Richardson, 2013).

Students are negatively impacted by the financial struggles of these schools, and by mobility, whether they are the "movers" or not. Achievement rates slide in schools with high mobility (Hanushek et al., 2004), and as declining enrollment poses a challenge, schools may slim down expenditures and academic programs to combat that very issue. The resulting achievement gap in high-mobility schools is often compounded with existing race and income-based gaps (Hanushek et al., 2004). Thus, those schools that work with the most challenging, at-risk populations face even more challenges when enrollment is unstable (Ledwith, 2010; Ni &

Arsen, 2011; Rumberger et al., 1999). If at-risk populations are the most unstable when it comes to school choice participation, (Cowen et al., 2012; Cowen et al., 2015), and such instability is damaging for schools and students, then school leaders must find ways to stabilize enrollment, so choice policy can work for those that most need it.

Current literature highlights the idea that mobility in open enrollment environments could be high because parents choose schools in unpredictable ways. Parents do not rely on academic data when choosing schools, but instead, a complex set of factors are at play. Academic performance is not a predictor of school choice participation (Jacobs, 2013; Ni & Arsen, 2011), and parents are often unaware of whether their school is underperforming or not (Howell, 2006). Test scores in a district have a lessening impact not only for out-of-district choosers but also for home buyers deciding on a location (Dougherty et al., 2009). Often, parents often rely on social circles and status ideologies when selecting a school (Condliffe et al., 2015; Holme, 2002, Reay & Lucey, 2004, Walker, 2011). For some parents, geography is a strong motivator, while others prioritize family tradition or their own beliefs about a neighborhood or school (Bell, 2009). Rabovsky's (2011) findings from a Tulsa study led to the conclusion that students often transfer into a school based on academic performance and racial makeup, but that high numbers of students transferring out coincided with high numbers of disciplinary issues. This phenomenon contributes to a topic of limited study; if students enroll through choice, why don't they stay? (Cowen et al., 2015). The availability of extracurricular opportunities can also impact whether or not a child stays enrolled, or transfers (Welsch, Statz, & Skidmore, 2010).

A common theme that comes out of the research is that school choice populations might be mobile because parents face barriers to making informed choices that work for their children. School and state-provided guides are often unreliable for parents; they are often too

difficult for parents to understand, especially those with little education (Stein and Nagro, 2015). Likewise, state-provided performance explanations and yearly progress data are sometimes too complex for families to make sense of, and only adds frustration to the process (Garcia, 2011). Transportation, or a lack thereof, can limit a family's choices as well (Bell, 2009). For students who live in large urban areas, the ability to get to a school district in the suburbs is dependent on the availability of bussing or parent work schedules (Koedel et al., 2009; Scott & Quinn, 2014). Parents need guidance, or perhaps counseling services when making school choice decisions, since many are unprepared or lack the knowledge required (Deluca & Rosenblatt, 2010; Hill, 2005). Schools must partner with families for students to fully benefit. Assistance in choosing is a start, but parents could use help in understanding academic programs and learning how to help their student at home (2010).

The reviewed literature points to one element as a source of stabilization: community. A strong Sense of Community can bond current members to schools, and can draw in new ones (Belenardo, 2001; Payne, 2002). Education practitioners who are deliberate and strategic can begin to foster a strong Sense of Community (Chapman, 2007). By implementing the types of efforts that allow student transfers to fit in (Waters et al., 2010), a sense of belonging will begin to develop. Administrators and teachers can lead in these efforts through communication, relationship-building, community involvement, and shared decision-making (Belenardo, 2001; Epstein, 2006; Janson & King, 2006).

In the choice-filled marketplace, student enrollment is unstable, which can impact schools and students negatively. School leaders attempting to recruit students, or stabilize populations will find it difficult, since the ways parents choose are complex and unpredictable. For parents in the decision-making process, too many obstacles exist, and their

decision is likely to be an uninformed one. A school's Sense of Community may impact a family's decision to stay or go, when all other factors are unreliable.

Critique of Previous Research

Rabovsky's (2011) mixed-methods study of enrollment and the impacts of choice on administrators raises some questions. In the author's interviews with principals, there was a general feeling that though unstable enrollment could eventually impact a school, it is not worth trying to recruit students, or keep those who wish to leave, since many transfer students are "troublemakers."   One administrator was quite casual about the unstable enrollment: "a lot of times we get kids who have already been at several other schools and had the same problems over and over" (p. 89). The author went on to conclude that responses like these from administrators were supported by the study's quantitative results, which indicated that high numbers of students transfer out when discipline gets worse. The connection is questionable; the students who transferred out of schools with discipline problems were not necessarily the ones with high numbers of suspensions, at least based on the data provided. The author's argument seems unjustified: "Because many of the students who switch schools under the open transfer policy were troublemakers at their previous school, and because administrators cannot screen applicants under the transfer policy, school principals may not be as motivated to pursue transfers… " (p.90).

Rabovsky (2011) noted that a great deal of literature supports the idea that many transfer students are highly motivated academically, which led him to research whether any other local principals shared these general opinions. While only 31% of Rabovsky's surveys were returned, there was support for the feeling that transfer students were often motivated by their discipline issues. However, these were one-sided perspectives, and they were taken as fact. Since the

author's quantitative data does not give insight to the personal motivations of students who transferred in or out, the study might have been redesigned then to include some interviews with parents or students. Jabbar's (2015) elicited the perspectives of administrators in a well-triangulated study. The author examined the strategies that administrators were using to compete and collected documents that could provide evidence to some of the school-level actions. Both the interviews and the documents were analyzed by coding, to develop well-informed conclusions. It is possible that the administrators Rabovsky (2011) spoke with are wrong in their assumptions, and that those transferring out are families turned off by discipline problems in the school. An interesting aspect that went uninvestigated was whether the administrators who dismissed transfers as troublemakers were in charge of schools with high numbers of suspensions. A primary conclusion from this study was that school choice had not caused the types of changes in administrators that would increase school quality or competition for students. However, it is essential to understand that if administrators are uninformed, or maintain their own beliefs about transfer students, the enrollment patterns caused by school choice may not be effective as a driver of educational change and opportunity.

Research design for student mobility studies seems especially challenging. Specifically, it is challenging to obtain large-scale data sources that provide detailed specifics about why and when students move residences and change schools. A study on school choice participation in Michigan concluded that the most disadvantaged students utilizing school choice display the most dynamic levels of participation (Cowen et al., 2015). However, in an examination of the study, it seems that the argument may ignore vital factors about that demographic. Low-income families are already more mobile than other groups (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999). The authors tracked students to discover whether or not they moved schools, but the data

does not indicate whether or not those students changed residences. An already mobile

population may have inflated the results.

Further caution is necessary in regard to the idea that student mobility negatively impacts

achievement (Hanushek et al., 2004; Scherrer, 2012). Evidence of causality is not evident in the

studies examined in this review, since a drop in achievement may not be due to a change in

schools, but in a student's circumstances that led to mobility. There is no indication that

researchers have taken into account that students often move because of a life-changing event;

one that may be traumatic enough to affect their classroom success. Causes of mobility might

include a parental separation, loss of a job, or even a home.

Powers et al. (2012) examined student transfers in Metropolitan Phoenix and described

school choice as a revolving door. However, further examination of data led them to caution that

perhaps not all of the students were quite so mobile due to school choice; after all, around 50%

moved to districts adjacent to them, and that they often moved to districts with similar, instead of

higher achievement rates. The data did not indicate each student's reason for transferring, so the

authors considered that students could be just moving because of "household changes," rather

than being active choosers. However, the literature presented in this review has shown that just

because parents may not choose schools based on academic performance, they are still choosing

based on something. Parents may prioritize proximity, tradition, the racial makeup of the school,

social status, extracurricular activities, or other factors. So while the goal of this research was to

determine the effects of school choice on elementary students, the authors were hesitant to

conclude that school choice policies cause high mobility. Existing research, however, points to

the idea that school choice does give students the opportunity to be highly mobile. Alternative

methods would be necessary to determine causality.

Chapter 2 Summary

In this review of the literature, I presented the state of research surrounding enrollment instability in school choice environments. First, I provided a conceptual framework to describe four major education concepts that surround school choice, including student discipline and behavior management, extracurricular activities, equity of opportunity, and the Sense of Community theory. These concepts provided a framework for studying parent experiences with school choice and student mobility. Following the conceptual framework, the review of the literature presented existing knowledge in the field of research. An examination of methodological issues highlighted the wide-ranging techniques that authors have utilized in school choice research, along with their limitations and advantages. A synthesis of the literature highlighted some of the common themes that exist across the studies, and a brief critique examined a few of the claims made by the authors, and how their data or methodological choices may require the reader to examine conclusions with caution.

The combination of school choice policies and funding methods found in states like Michigan create what should be a competitive environment, where students can choose the school that best fits their academic and social needs. However, student participation in choice is dynamic, with enrollment patterns being likened to a "revolving door" (Powers et al., 2012). Student mobility takes a damaging toll on both schools and students. In both large and small districts, leaders face budgetary decisions when enrollment declines, resulting in the elimination of academic programs, large class sizes due to teacher layoffs, or even building closures. Administrative work time and as funding are dedicated to marketing and promoting a school, rather than paying for programs that benefit students (Militello et al., 2008; DeArmond et al., 2014; Scott & Quinn, 2014; Jabbar 2015; Richardson, 2013). When it comes to children,

high mobility rates result in declining achievement, for both the "stayers" and the movers. While some districts suffer from enrollment instability, some are left simply "hollowed out" (Ledwith, 2010). The students who suffer the most from these challenges are those that are already the most at-risk (Ledwith, 2010; Ni & Arsen, 2011; Rumberger et al., 1999).

The issue of student mobility raises questions. With so much instability in the system, how do parents make the school choice decision for their children? Why aren't they making choices that work? Studies indicate that parents do not necessarily choose a school based on academic performance, and even if they did, schools and states often provide information about achievement that is either too complex for parents, or generally uninformative. Instead, parents often rely on their social networks, or their own constructed beliefs about neighborhoods and schools when they make their choices (Condliffe et al., 2015; Holme, 2002, Reay & Lucey, 2004, Walker, 2011). Race, income, or even social status help families construct their list of options. Enrollment changes may occur because parents lack quality information about their choices. Transportation is an obstacle for families as they choose a school (Bell, 2009; Plank & Sykes, 1999). In general, parents find choice difficult because they lack the resources and guidance necessary to navigate the marketplace.

Schools that create and nurture a strong sense of community could successfully stabilize enrollment, by offering children and families those four elements they may be missing elsewhere in the competitive market: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Connectedness can not only bring in new students but will help to maintain existing populations (Belenardo, 2001; Rumberger, 1999). It is possible that schools that offer open enrollment may lose students soon after their arrival; students who transfer for better opportunity may feel extremely isolated in a new, diverse environment if

strategies are not used to help them fit in (Walton, 2013). School administrators and teachers can

have a positive impact on the sense of connectedness by giving families ownership of decisions,

communicating, building trust, and getting involved in events outside of the school (Belenardo,

2001; Epstein, 2006; Khalifa, 2012).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Chapter 3

The purpose of this study was understand the experiences of parents whose children have been mobile students through participation in Michigan's school choice policy. The goal was to explore the lived experiences of those parents whose children left their home district for another public, private, or charter school, then moved on to a new school using the same open enrollment opportunity, or back to the home district.

In this chapter I will present the central question for this study, followed by an explanation of the purpose and the rationale for utilizing phenomenological methodology. I will describe the purposive sampling methods and research population. I will describe the interview and the interview protocol, as well as the three-interview structure that defined the structure of data collection. Thereafter, I will address data analysis procedures for this phenomenological study, which were guided by the writings of Moustakas (1994). An examination of the limitations and delimitations of this study will follow, along with a description of what types of validity measures I used. Expected findings and anticipated themes will be detailed. I will conclude this chapter with an examination of ethical issues, including any conflicts of interest, and a description of my role as the researcher. Lastly, I will address ethical issues that were unique to this study.

Research Question

The central research question for this study was: What are the experiences of parents whose children have been mobile students, through participation in the state's school choice policy? For this study, mobile students were defined as those who have moved from their home

district to at least two new schools of choice (public, private, or charter), or to a school of choice and back to their original school within three years.

Purpose and Design of the Proposed Study

The study was designed so that I could explore the experiences of parents who have utilized school choice policy in a way that has resulted in multiple moves for their children, either from one open enrollment school to another or a return to their assigned neighborhood school. For schools and districts that face inconsistent enrollment patterns from year to year, this research offers educators and school leaders insight so that they can offer incoming families an educational experience that causes them to re-enroll annually. This study extends the literature surrounding student mobility in school choice environments and illuminates parent perspectives and experiences through in-depth interviews.

Phenomenological research design is appropriate for such a study. In this research, I sought to understand the experiences of Michigan parents who had utilized the state's open enrollment policy multiple times, or that had returned to their assigned school after trying a new school. Phenomenological research allows the shared experiences of individuals to be reduced down to the singular, universal essence of that phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon in the context of this study was student mobility through the use of school choice policy. I sought to understand what parents experience when they enroll their children at schools outside of their assigned ones. I anticipated that there would be fundamental education concepts that might come forth in their descriptions, including concerns with student discipline, equity of opportunity, extracurricular activities, and Sense of Community.

Existing literature in the field of school choice varies in methodology, but qualitative studies with regard to the mobility of students who use school choice served as a motivation for

this specific choice of problem. Many quantitative studies of school choice point to enrollment instability. There is a phenomenon of mobility in Michigan, where demographics, academic achievement, and enrollment data were examined to paint a picture of student migration patterns that reflect continued mobility, rather than the stability one would hope families could find in the education marketplace (Cowen et al., 2015). A similar study of Colorado and Minnesota drew similar findings to the Michigan research (Carlson et al., 2011). Other quantitative studies have helped to describe who leaves their assigned schools, what types of schools they leave behind, or look for, and how academic success is affected (Bifulco et al., 2009; Carlson et al., 2011; Jacobs, 2013). It is also essential to determine why families move so often. A phenomenological study was designed to provide rich details in regard to the circumstances surrounding the choices parents make. Phenomenology as the science that derives meanings and essences through reality, not assumptions or presuppositions found in other methods (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1965), and van Kaam (1969) claimed that the shortcomings of natural sciences lie in their detachment from the reality in which we live.

Interview questions were focused on the self-described, lived experiences of the participants (See Appendices A, B, and C for the interview protocols). Parent interviews have contributed new ideas, first-hand experiences, and alternative perspectives, compared to the existing literature. If the goal of an education researcher is to add meaning to education practice and knowledge, then specific experiences must be illuminated (Saevi, 2014). These experiences can be explored best through phenomenological methodology, in which participants become co-researchers immersed in the study and contributing to the field of knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research is especially appropriate in education research since policies and directives within the field are consequential and become the lived experiences of many

51

(Langeveld, 1983). In this way, there is a need for researchers to directly communicate with others about those experiences, through conversations and an exchange of ideas. Most questions that educators encounter in their practice are "meaning" questions, rather than "problem" questions; meaning questions are never solved; they constantly require new attention (Van Manen, 1990). While natural sciences may address problems, and offer answers that provide a one-time solution, the human aspect of education calls for insight that could help educators act "more thoughtfully...in certain situations" (p.155). Human insight is especially important for education practitioners that work daily with students and parents under the circumstances shaped by local, state, and national policy.

Research Population and Sampling Method

For phenomenological scholars, the focus is on the phenomenon, and the purpose is to identify general meaning structures surrounding the phenomenon, without examining causation or association. This eliminates representativeness as an important factor when considering a research population (Englander, 2012). The phenomenon may turn out to be linked to specific populations, but it may take research to illuminate that link. (Englander, 2012). Therefore, the main question guiding a phenomenological researcher's hunt for participants should be "Do you have the experience I'm looking for?" (Englander, 2012, p.19). Purposive sampling for this study included 12 parents in Michigan who have utilized school choice policy to enroll their students in a school district other than their assigned one. Criterion will include: 1) the parent of a current elementary, middle, or high school student; 2) parents have either used open enrollment policies or private school options to move their child to multiple schools or has utilized choice options only to return to the home district; and 3) primary language is English. I recruited

participants who met these criteria in three different public school districts. While a cohort of 15

participants was originally estimated, data saturation occurred after interviews with 12.

Researchers often face what Seidman (2006) referred to as "gatekeepers" who block or

control access to study participants. For example, if student participants had been required,

administrators maintain control over access to those students. Likewise, a study of employee

experiences at a particular worksite would rely on the permissions of the employer. Since

potential participants were adult parents, not students, there was no prevention from such

"gatekeepers." I obtained permission from district administrators to send recruitment letters

home to families. The letter indicated the purpose of the study, the necessary criteria, and a

referral request in case they knew of other parents who met the criteria of the study.

Instrumentation

For phenomenological research, interviews are the primary form of instrumentation (See

Appendices A, B, and C for the interview protocols). After conducting purposive sampling that

identified willing parents who met the criteria for the study, I made introductory phone calls and

arranged in-person contact for each potential participant. Seidman (2006) and Englander (2012)

noted several benefits of contact visits, despite the extra investment of time. First, they provided

an opportunity for me to communicate all aspects of the study, answering any concerns the

participant may have had before they signed the informed consent form. Secondly, the contact

visit allowed me to confirm whether or not an individual was be an appropriate candidate

participant for the study, based on characteristics related to their experience with the

phenomenon, and based on their availability for future interviews.

The primary objective for the phenomenological researcher is that participants describe a

situation in which they experienced the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990; Englander,

2012). While circumstances and context may vary among participants, these differences become

helpful in the analysis stage for meaning-building. To obtain an in-depth description of the

phenomenon that flows logically, I used the three-interview technique (Seidman, 2006). With

the three-interview structure, the phenomenon was framed within context; for the first interview,

the participant was asked to describe their early experiences with education, both as a student

and as a parent. Also, participants were asked to describe how they found themselves taking

advantage of Michigan's open enrollment policy. In the second interview, the questions focused

on the phenomenon in context, and the participant was asked to recount their experience at their

chosen schools in detail, using stories, and descriptions of relationships with others in the school

community. Finally, during the third interview, the participant reflected on "the meaning of their

experience" (Seidman, 2006, p.18). Participants were asked to assign meaning to the

experiences they described, and also to apply those meanings to their current situation as well as

their future. Each interview relied on only 2-3 open-ended questions that elicit detailed

responses, but there were times where follow-up questions or a request for clarification was

necessary. The three-interview structure offered an opportunity to enhance validity; I embedded

member checking into the second and third interviews. At the start of these sessions, I presented

participants with an opportunity to revisit and review the data collected from the previous

interview.

I used an interview protocol to act as a guide and a note-taking tool. The interview

protocol specified general information about the interview, such as the interviewee, the time, and

the location. The protocol included the primary questions, but also question prompts, in the case

of needed clarification. The simple design allowed for in-depth, open-ended responses, but also

was useful in controlling the focus of the session. Listing some prompts in advance helped me

avoid leading or suggesting responses to the interviewee in any way (See interview protocols in Appendices A, B, and C for prompts).

Data Collection

As phenomenological researchers conduct interviews, they must balance attention and shift between a subject-subject approach and a subject-object approach. That is, the researcher conducts interviews with a person who has experienced the phenomenon; the only way to elicit necessary data is through them. This subject-subject relationship must be attended to throughout the study, and especially during the interviews. However, the interviewer's object is not a clinical one, so the phenomenon must remain the highest priority (Englander, 2012). It is the responsibility of the researcher to keep the focus of the interview on the phenomenon and to employ questions and prompts that allow for depth.

Phenomenological studies require interview techniques that elicit in-depth responses. The three-interview structure (Seidman, 2006) was beneficial in helping to collect a complete description of each participant's experience. The researcher's goal in a phenomenological interview is to elicit a complete description of the participant's lived experience (Giorgi, 2009). By creating a comfortable environment for the participant, and skillfully listening, I was able to evoke thoughtful responses that are honest and reliable. A comfortable atmosphere was created by choosing a quiet location, and by starting each interview with a social conversation (Moustakas, 1994). A key strategy was to listen for what Seidman (2006) called an "outer voice" and an "inner voice." Key phrases and words indicated when a participant was speaking about their experience in a very guarded way, as if to a large group of people. As stories unfolded, interviewees at times lost focus or began to move forward too fast. I made an effort to listen deliberately throughout the interviews.

The interview protocol was utilized to keep notes, so topics could be noted for re-examination, rather than interrupting the participant. The protocol contained the questions asked in each interview. Englander (2012) warned against using too many questions, to avoid the risk of leading the participant. Instead, two to three broad, open-ended questions guided each session. It was important not to interrupt too often, but at times I asked for clarification; misunderstandings or gaps within the first session could very well have led to missed connections and references in the second and third. By asking interviewees to tell stories, it is possible to "target particular aspects of a participant's experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 88). Participant stories became valuable when I was attempting to explore the people, actions, and emotions below the surface.

I transcribed each interview; care was taken to note in the transcripts anything that was not picked up in the recording such as interruptions or non-verbal signals (Seidman, 2006). While this process was daunting, there was a key benefit; I became quite familiar with the data as a whole collection, before analysis began. To make sure accurate interpretations occurred at the analysis stage, member checking was utilized. Participants had an opportunity to evaluate whether the data best represented their experiences, or if additions or redactions were necessary (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Identification of Attributes

For this study, student mobility, or a mobile student was one who exhibited at least two moves: a move away from their home district to another using Michigan's school choice policy, a move to a second new school district within three years of enrollment, still as a participant in school choice, or a re-enrollment back in the home district within three years of first changing schools.

School choice and open enrollment are broad terms in education, but for this study, each referred to Michigan's education policy. Students in Michigan have expanded options in regard to school enrollment. Public charter schools were established, and are often operated by universities or nonprofit organizations. These schools operate with some of the same freedoms that private schools do, since they do not adhere to all mandates of public schools. When a parent chooses a charter school, the foundation allowance dollars are moved from the neighborhood school to the charter (Cullen & Loeb, 2004).

In addition to the choice offered by charters, parents can now choose to send their child to public schools outside of their district that participate in open enrollment. School districts can choose to participate in the choice program, and enroll students from other communities in the intermediate school district, or even from outside of it. The per pupil foundation allowance follows the student to their new school (Cullen & Loeb, 2004; Schools of Choice Information, 2017). In addition, families can choose to attend private schools, which may require tuition.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis procedures for phenomenological research tend to be specific to the seminal author(s) who are utilized and referenced. I followed the guidance of Moustakas (1994) and the author's modified methods of Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975). I began the analysis by taking the time to bracket my experiences with the phenomenon under study. By writing a full account, I attempted to leave these biases and perceived meanings aside when analyzing the data collected from participants. I also kept a reflexive journal to bracket my experiences throughout the study, when confronted with my own biases during interviews or analysis.

The amount of data collected from three interviews with each of 15 participants was voluminous; it was helpful to organize and manage the data after each interview. During transcription, I became very familiar with the data; key ideas and themes became illuminated at this stage, and as they emerged I monitored the content so that emerging themes were supported with sufficient data. Data saturation refers to both quality and quantity and is said to have occurred when "there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible" (Fusch and Ness, 2015, p.1). In the case of this study, the three-interview format led to data saturation after only 12 participants (Lee, Woo, & Mackenzie, 2002).

I examined each statement from the interviews for significance. I conducted what is known as horizontalization of the data. Significant statements from the interviews were listed as "meaning units," and I coded each meaning unit. I used emotion coding, versus coding, values coding, and In Vivo coding. After that, I created a matrix by which I organized the coded meaning units into large themes. Once each statement was categorized, a synthesized, textural description of each interviewee's experience was composed. Next, a structural description of the experience was written for each participant, which described the context under which the phenomenon occurred; the three-interview structure was useful at that point.

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) was utilized during the analysis phase of this study. There were advantages and disadvantages of using technology tools for analysis rather than analyzing by hand (Creswell, 2013; Peters and Wester, 2006). By using computer software, data could be organized and stored together, but individual pieces of data could also be located and referenced quickly. Further, the software allowed me to create organizers to represent data visually. However, a computer program must be learned before it can be utilized. I had no prior

experience with research software, so it was essential to practice using it in advance. Humble (2012) warned that with QDAS researchers might spend more time on analysis than usual, but less time on the actual interpretation of data. Many become overwhelmed with the tool or spend a great deal of time getting to know the software and inputting data.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

Some limitations and delimitations undoubtedly affected this study. As in any research, there were indeed limitations beyond the researcher's control, which may have, despite careful planning, impacted the outcomes and conclusions. This study was conducted as part of a doctoral program, so time constraints were in effect. In a scenario where time is not a factor, many aspects of the study might have been different.

Even though it is crucial that the phenomenological researcher bracket their experiences in the early stages, there is no way to fully extract one's own lived experiences from the study (Snelgrove, 2014). There will always be some bias that remains within the researcher, and it may affect the way data is construed. One barrier to the bracketing process is self-awareness; the researcher who is aware of their own values, beliefs, interests, and assumptions and is at least in position to set aside those that might affect the study (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Snelgrove, 2014). In my position as an educator, I have many experiences with the phenomenon, and have personal biases; this meant it was essential to thoroughly bracket my experiences (Tufford & Newman, 2012). If bracketing only occurs before data collection, then the researcher is not checking their own biases and new realizations as they are confronted with them during face to face interviews. Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) offered a strategy that is practical and specific: reflective diaries. I kept a reflective diary throughout the data collection process, and attempt to consciously bracket "in-action," as the situation calls for, or as issues arise during

interviews. By bracketing in the diary, in the moment, I could later reflect upon the issue and determine the action to take. In this way, I was able to limit my influence on the data being collected, and maximize the benefits of the process. Tufford and Newman (2012) argued that in-depth reflection throughout the research process may result in more insightful analysis and rigorous contribution to the field.

The subjectivity of phenomenological data was in itself a limitation. As in the case of other qualitative studies, investigators are limited by the inability to establish certain validity and reliability. The sample size of 12 participants might cause critics to protest against conclusions and implications, since they cannot be generalized to a larger population.

People are often limited in their ability to articulate an experience or memory in precisely the way they wish to. The phenomenological researcher, who is interested primarily in the phenomenon, must extract information from a subject's flimsy retelling. Even the most articulate participants may not be able to find quite the right words for some aspects of their testimony. Further, it is true that the self-reporting nature of the data is a limitation (University of Southern California, 2016). I relied on participants for accurate responses, but remained aware of these four types of bias:

- Selective memory: interviewees either remember or leave out specific events from the past.

- Telescoping: the participant remembers an event from long ago as recent, or a recent event as distant past.

- Attribution: the participant will often remember positive parts of their experience as a result of their actions, but will place blame when portraying adverse events.

- Exaggeration: the embellishment of events.

I anticipated that each of these types of bias was quite likely to arise in the interviews with parents. I considered possible scenarios for each so that I could be prepared and listen carefully during each session. If it seemed that selective memory bias was happening with a participant, I used non-threatening questions to probe their experiences and acquire a complete explanation. During the analysis stage, I was open to unexpected meanings and descriptions of the phenomenon, even if my own life experiences presented doubt.

Some research design choices were delimitations that impacted the outcomes of the study. The choice of interview questions had a direct impact on data collection. There are no other instruments to be utilized, so careful crafting and prompting was crucial.

The decision to target parents of mobile students who use Michigan's open enrollment policy was perhaps limiting, but it was defining. Parents who used open enrollment, but then returned to their assigned district or moved on to yet another school made the decision to change schools. If the study had focused on parents of any mobile students, it is possible that the circumstances of those moves would be far too broad; non-promotional movement could be due to a parent's job loss, family circumstances, or other factors (Grigg, 2012). I focused on this group because I hoped to inform practitioners who are attempting to create a sense of permanency in their school communities

The decision to utilize a three-interview structure was in itself a delimitation. The features of this structure offered the best format for this study, despite the risk of participant fatigue. The series of interviews could have been a limiting choice (Abshire et al., 2017), but participants sat through three interviews, and attrition was not a problem during this research.

Validation

  Qualitative studies have historically faced scrutiny as being invalid and without rigor. Seminal authors have identified strategies and techniques that encourage verification, investigation, and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) wrote that qualitative researchers, including student researchers, must take more responsibility during the investigation to actively ensure rigor. The authors argue that too many evaluation boards, standards, and criteria are being utilized to assess the quality of a study and that instead, researchers must take the lead when it comes to rigorous research.

  Credibility. Provisions can be established by the researcher to establish the trustworthiness of the data. The structure of this study, as a three-interview process, was a key to ensuring credibility. The three-interview process offered long-term engagement with the participants and with the data (Seidman, 2006). With each new session, there were opportunities to ensure that there were no contradictions between previous statements made by the participant. Connections that appeared in the responses between each of the interviews illustrated the participants' truthfulness and consistency.

  Giorgi (2011) emphasized the importance of clarifying researcher bias so that one can be open to all possible meanings. Known as "bracketing," this process was critical to ensure that analysis is not influenced by the researcher's own perceptions and assumptions. A reflective journal used to bracket throughout the study contained reflections about my own biases, interpretations, and experiences with the concepts that participants discuss.

  Member-checking was critical to ensuring credibility. Seminal texts by Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that credibility is rooted in the accurate interpretation of the data; this includes the way "viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and experiences are understood and

portrayed" (Johnson, 1997, p.285). Participants had the opportunity to review the report before finalization; each received a preliminary analysis of the data, to ensure accuracy. Member-checking also gave participants with concerns such as vulnerability the opportunity to change their responses, or to add or withdraw information (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006).

By debriefing regularly with Dr. Chad Becker, my faculty chair, I improved the credibility of my analysis. During these sessions, I remained open to criticisms and scrutiny, for the sake of credibility.

I strove to create rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon in focus, so readers will be able to determine transferability and shared characteristics. Thick descriptions, quotes, verb usage, and interconnected details help paint a picture of the situations and contexts under which the phenomenon has occurred. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Stake (2010) clarified, "A description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details, and possibly cultural complexity, but it becomes *thick* description if it offers a direct connection to cultural theory and scientific knowledge" (p. 49). I wrote detailed accounts of analysis procedures and considerations in an attempt to earn the reader's trust (Goldberg & Allen, 2015).

Dependability. Reliability of the data was improved by implementing several strategies. First, interviews were transcribed carefully and in detail, even including non-verbal content such as pauses. The program ATLAS.ti allows an audio recording or video to be played side-by-side against a document to be typed on and contains functionality that includes quick rewinding, time marking, and the ability to simultaneously listen to the audio and read the transcription. Such features allowed the full content of the interview to be represented for coding and analysis. Researchers should use auto-coding features of QDAS with caution and that they must find ways to remain close to the data (Humble, 2012). Thus, I read the transcripts

thoroughly before coding, and the auto-coding feature was used sparingly. John and Johnson (2000) determined that QDAS can improve validity, but researchers should give as much consideration to the tools they utilize during the study as they would to research questions, methods, and research design.

Expected Findings

School enrollment under choice policies is unstable, and participation in choice programs, especially for those students who have the most need, is dynamic (Cowen et al., 2015; Howell, 2004; Lavery & Carlson, 2015; Rumberger et al., 1999). The results of this study have provided new knowledge to fill gaps in the literature. With new understandings of what parents experience when they choose a new school for their child, we can begin to understand why they may not stay. This research will help school leaders understand what concepts are part of the shared experience of non-resident families in Michigan schools. It was expected that parents would report adverse experiences that related to the concepts of equity issues, extracurricular activities, and community relations and school climate.

I anticipated that equity would be a theme that resonated with parents as they recalled their experiences. While school choice policy might provide equitable opportunities for students, the literature on this topic illustrates many challenges that families experience. Deluca and Rosenblatt (2010) investigated why low-income students in a program called "Moving to Opportunity" did not see anticipated gains, and they concluded that there are not enough benefits to enroll in a new school. School officials and counselors must actively engage parents and students in the choice process, as well as once the school year begins. Some families are unable to make sense of school literature and marketing materials, as well as test scores. Many parents are uninformed about the schools they have to choose from. For other families, transportation

challenges might make the school year in a new location problematic. Social and economic

constraints may reflect why some families opt to leave their home district, only to return or to

choose a new one the following year.

I predicted that parents would include descriptions and depictions of extracurricular

programs offered. While school choice advocates may point to opportunities for parents to

relocate their students to districts with high test scores, achievement growth, and high graduation

rates, parents may be looking for aspects that are non-academic. Welsch, Statz, & Skidmore

(2010) studied interdistrict transfers in Wisconsin and found that students were likely to transfer

from districts with fewer extracurricular opportunities.

It was expected that community relations and connectedness would be a common theme,

perhaps as a missing element for mobile students. I expected that some parents would describe

this in terms of racial and social divides, while others would refer to a lack of connectedness to

the staff and students. Walton (2013) interviewed students of color that had transferred schools

for a better opportunity and discovered that isolation perpetuated at the new schools, sometimes

more intensely than it was at the previous school. Emotional engagement and connectedness

benefit students (Klem & Connell, 2004), and I expected that parents may reflect on this theme

when recalling their experiences.

Ethical Issues

The personal nature of phenomenological research called into focus a need for strict

ethical considerations. Since methods included in-depth interviews that convey one's personal,

lived experiences, the resulting data may was intensely private and sensitive (Polit & Hungler,

1999). In qualitative studies, ethical issues surround the manner in which a researcher accesses

participants, the existence of power between the researcher and participant, and the way the researcher conducts the interview (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000).

Conflict of interest assessment. There was no possibility of a conflict of interest, financially or personally. There were no connections or circumstances that would compromise the research. I reassured parents that while I am a teacher in the school district, the study was not affiliated with the local district in any way. Results are not for the benefit of the district, and their participation was kept confidential. I ensured participants that no other school leaders or teachers within the district were involved with the study, or had an interest in the results of the study.

Researcher's position. I made participants aware of my position as a university student in a doctoral program as well as my position as a teacher in the school district. As the head researcher in the study, I conducted all interviews alone and was the only person to have access to all documents. The participants were made aware that my dissertation chair will have access to transcripts and research materials, but only after I have removed any identifying information, and replaced names with representative numbers.

Ethical issues in the proposed study. Participation in this study was voluntary, meaning that interviewees made their choice to take part while fully informed about the study. The Belmont Report provided eight guidelines for informed consent, which were originally designed for biomedical researchers (United States, 1978). Seidman (2006) adapted the eight federal guidelines for informed consent to fit qualitative research. I utilized these eight guidelines to compose an initial letter to participants and a consent form.

- An invitation to participate in what, to what end, for how long, and for whom?
- Risks

- Rights

- Possible benefits

- Confidentiality of records

- Dissemination

- Special considerations for children (none apply for this study)

- Contact information and copies of the form

Among the most applicable ethical considerations was the issue of recording. Each of the three sessions with participants was recorded. In a world where social media concerns could make anyone hesitant to be recorded, interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality and must had the opportunity to provide formal consent.

Neither deception nor covert activities were used in this study. The participants were assigned aliases for any documents that have been viewed by someone other than myself, and all other personal information has remained confidential. Creswell (2013) noted that the researcher is supposed to bracket their own experiences and biases out of the study, so questions and prompts for the interviewees were designed in such a way that no examples or personal stories of my own were necessary.

Bias is present in every study, and for this one, it was important to acknowledge my own. As an educator in Michigan, I have been aware of enrollment inconsistencies for years under the state's choice policy. For many districts, including mine, enrollment numbers are dynamic, and each spring and summer there is a bit of anxiety, as school leaders attempt to stabilize their student population for the next school year. Enrollment impacts staffing, logistical concerns in the building, budgeting, and other factors that administrators must address. From the perspective of teachers and administrators, school choice seems like a revolving door: non-

resident students come in, and sometimes resident students leave. At times, those non-resident families will move on to a new school, and other times we will learn that they are returning to their home district next year. This system wreaks havoc on planning or efforts to reach our population, which is always changing. In short, my bias was reflected in my desire to know "What do parents want?" I attempted to lessen the impact of my own bias by creating interview questions that ask elicited only descriptions of experiences and parent reflections on those experiences. I avoided responding to the participant, or leading them; I only asked probing questions when further description was necessary.

Chapter 3 Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of Michigan parents who have mobile students, due to their participation in the state's school choice opportunities. The goal was to identify the meanings behind those experiences so that school leaders might "act more thoughtfully" in regard to the enrollment of non-resident students to any school community (Van Manen, 1990, p. 155). Education practitioners utilize and impose policies, procedures, and techniques each day that serve as experiences for others. As Moustakas (1994) explained, those experiences are set in reality, and phenomenology offers access to that reality, while results from other methodologies are often based upon assumptions or presuppositions. The power of the phenomenological study is that researchers can offer practitioners insight into a phenomenon through the real experiences of others so that they might adjust their professional routines. The results of this research offer insight to school leaders who hope to stabilize enrollment populations from year to year, after being confronted with the experiences parents have with school choice programs.

The participants included 12 parents who utilized the state's school choice program and whose children could be described as mobile students. Specifically, participants in this study used open enrollment opportunities or private schools to enroll their child in multiple new schools or to return to the home district after trying a school of choice. Purposive criterion methods were used; in phenomenological studies, the primary requirement is whether or not the participant has the experience in question (Englander, 2012). Representative sampling of specific subpopulations is not useful in phenomenology; the research is not attempting to identify causations or association. Instead, the purpose is to find the singular essence of the phenomenon for those that experience it.

Participants took part in three separate interviews, for approximately one hour each. The interviews each addressed the phenomenon in a specific context. The first interview was focused on the early context of the experience, and what events led up to it. In the second interview, the participant was asked to describe the experience itself, and in the third interview, the participant was asked to reflect upon the meaning the experience holds for them, and future implications. After each interview, emerging themes were examined, and to member checking occurred at the start of the next session. The three interview structure ensured that the data encapsulates the participants' experiences as completely as possible.

During each interview, specific strategies were used that kept the participant comfortable and willing to speak and to keep the responses focused on the phenomenon in question. Interviews were held in a comfortable, quiet space, where distractions will be avoided. The interview protocol was be used for hand-written notes, and prompts were prepared so that clarification could be requested without leading the participant. Each session was recorded for later transcription.

The study included limitations and delimitations that the researcher must attend to. The subjective nature of the phenomenological methodology was unable to be avoided. In addition, the researcher listened for responses that indicate natural biases from participants, such as selective memory or exaggeration. The researcher must be prepared with questioning strategies to elicit in-depth but accurate answers. One primary delimitation was the investigator's decision to target parents, and not children as part of this study of student mobility.

Five specific provisions promote the credibility of the data. To begin with, the three-interview structure encouraged credibility because of the long-term engagement that the researcher had with the participants. In addition, the researcher engaged in "bracketing" to ensure that the data collected and analyzed was done so in a forthright way, with any biases or assumptions exposed from the start. Member-checking gave participants the opportunity to determine whether or not the initial analyses are complete, accurate, and that there were no concerns with vulnerability. In-depth descriptions in this report have enhanced the trustworthiness of the data and analysis. The use of computer software for transcription, categorizing, and coding have bolstered dependability.

There were ethical issues to consider for this study. While no conflict of interest exists, and there was no use of deception, there were confidentiality issues that must be addressed. Interviews were recorded, and participants were guaranteed confidentiality. A consent form was provided for each participant and signed; it aligned with the eight federal guidelines for qualitative research. The author's bias as a public school teacher has been explicitly bracketed in this report. The author has experience as a practitioner in schools with inconsistent enrollment, and this life experience has undoubtedly created personal biases with regard to school choice and student mobility.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction to Chapter 4

In this chapter, I will describe the process of data analysis, and present the findings of the study. I will first present a description of the study sample, then the methodology and process of data analysis. I will conclude the chapter with a summary of the findings and a detailed account of the major and corresponding subthemes.

Phenomenological methods allow researchers to uncover the full essence of a shared experience, as described by those who have lived it (Giorgi, 2009). I was guided by one research question: What are the experiences of parents whose children have been mobile students through participation in Michigan's school choice policy? I utilized purposive sampling to recruit 12 participants, all of whom had used school choice options to enroll their child at multiple schools in just three years or less. During the research design stage, I anticipated that I would need to interview between 12 and 15 participants, but data saturation occurred after 12. Seidman's (2006) three-interview process was utilized, and throughout the interview and transcription phases, I kept a reflexive journal to bracket my own experiences and confront personal biases.

Once all interviews and transcripts were completed, I used Atlas.ti software to analyze the data using four coding methods: emotion coding, values coding, versus coding, and In Vivo coding (Saldana, 2016). After creating code groups and identifying central themes, I created a matrix of supporting quotations, organized by participant to ensure data saturation. I completed a process of member-checking to confirm that textural descriptions were appropriate for each participant; I contacted each participant and requested that they review executive summaries of their experiences. I was able to obtain additional, clarifying information in two cases. Three primary themes and corresponding subthemes were found: (a) parents have feelings of empowerment and freedom in regard to the opportunities school choice provides; (b) parents

71

experience feelings of being limited and helpless; (c) parents feel a lack of connectedness to school communities.

The researcher's role in qualitative studies is to be an instrument through which data is collected and interpreted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). For that reason, it is appropriate for the researcher to present personal background and experience that might be relevant to the investigation, including any assumptions or biases that might influence the results (Greenbank, 2003). My experience as an educator motivated me to complete this research. I have been a public school teacher in the state of Michigan for 15 years, and have experienced the unpredictability that exists in an environment where public charter schools and open enrollment are available for families. I felt it critical to identify what parents experience that would lead to multiple enrollment changes. Student populations fluctuate constantly; as students change, so do their needs and the programs schools use to address them.

A phenomenological approach to this research has given me the opportunity to explain student mobility through the lived experiences of the parents who make education decisions. I conducted all interviews with participants, as well as data analysis. My role as an education practitioner, which was known to all participants, may have had two effects. First, I believe that parents were eager to share their experiences with a teacher; several remarked that they never had the opportunity to articulate why they left a school, or what drew them to a new one. Additionally, my role may have caused some participants hesitation with regard to sharing certain aspects of their experiences. I assured all participants of confidentiality and understood that they were comfortable and eager to take part in the study.

Description of the Sample

  The results of this phenomenological study came from interviews with participants recruited from schools in Wayne County, Michigan. All participants were parents with children in kindergarten through 12th grade. I obtained permission from district administrators to recruit parents through a mass email. Seidman (2006) referred to "gatekeepers" who block or control access to study participants, but I was able to avoid such a problem. Administrators authorized me to recruit participants through the use of the district email and contact lists.

  The central question guiding a phenomenological researcher's hunt for participants should be "Do you have the experience I'm looking for?" (Englander, 2012, p.19). Purposive criterion sampling was used to focus the population for my study. There were three required criteria for participants: 1) the parent of a current elementary, middle, or high school student 2) parents have either used open enrollment policies or private school options to move their child to multiple schools or has utilized choice options only to return to the home district 3) primary language is English. Early in the recruitment phase, I identified 12 participants met the criteria, and their experiences with open enrollment policies and rates of mobility differed. In this study, 11 participants utilized at least one Michigan charter school, while all participants had enrolled their child in at least one public "school of choice." Two parents had chosen virtual academies for their child at one point, and two homeschooled their children at some stage. Several participants had re-enrolled their child in a school or district after sending them to other schools temporarily. While some did report a change in residency at some point, their eligibility for the study was based on their use of open enrollment policies, charter schools, and private school options.

Research Methodology and Analysis

Phenomenology provides rich details in regard to the circumstances surrounding the choices parents make and helps to ascribe meaning to their experiences. Moustakas (1994) promotes phenomenology as the science that derives meanings and essences through reality, not assumptions or presuppositions found in other methods. The ultimate goal of this research was to contribute new ideas and first-hand experiences to school practitioners, so they can better understand the phenomenon of student mobility in Michigan, and stabilize their student populations.

Researchers use various methods to bracket their own experiences and biases in regard to the phenomenon. For this study, a reflexive journal was kept throughout the data collection process and early into the analysis stage (Wall et al., 2004). By periodically recording the internal conflicts, assumptions, personal values, and feelings that would arise, I was able to set aside preconceptions as I was confronted with them throughout the data collection process. Tufford and Newman (2012) described this as the "ability to sustain a reflexive stance" (p.86). If I had bracketed my experiences before data collection, then I would have gone without confronting some of the biases that would unknowingly arise during the interview process.

Seidman's (2006) three-interview process was used to understand participant experiences in context, and it offered a chance to check for understanding. Between interviews, I transcribed the recordings and made notes about points that needed to be revisited during the next interview.

As Saldana (2016) suggested, it was beneficial to complete an initial review of the data collected to determine which coding methods would be most appropriate. Even during the collection and transcription phase, as ideas, themes, and patterns began to emerge, it became clear which methods would be most useful. Atlas.ti software was utilized during data analysis.

All interview transcripts were uploaded into the program, and four first cycle coding methods were completed. Three affective methods were utilized (emotion, values, and versus), as well as In Vivo coding. Emotion coding is appropriate when studying interpersonal experiences (Saldana, 2016). Participants in this study were quite descriptive in regard to the range of emotions they experienced. Values coding was useful in examining the attitudes, beliefs, and values that were illuminated during interviews. Since education is a social experience, it was clear that value coding would be constructive. A third affective method, versus coding, proved to be useful in identifying the conflicts that the participants experienced. During initial analysis, it became clear all participants had faced conflicts; perhaps with the school systems, specific staff members, entire communities, or even within themselves. Versus coding was useful with regard to the identification of conflicts at play. Saldana (2016) stated that researchers should attempt to use sentence coupling to illustrate the conflicts. For example, some parents experienced frustration in finding a high-quality, inclusive school for their student. On the one hand, parents want access to quality schools that are in the suburbs, however, on the other hand, parents do not want their children to experience racism or feel like an outsider. This conflict was coded as "school quality vs. being somewhere you're not wanted."

In Vivo coding was used to give a parent's voice to the phenomenon. Many school choice studies are quantitative or are focused on the experiences of students, but this study examines and respects the voice of parents. Parents often make enrollment decisions, and if the hope is to inform practitioners, "sometimes the participant says it best" (Saldana, 2016, p. 76). Researchers should attune themselves to phrases that would require vocal emphasis if spoken aloud; by doing this, I was able to focus on those ideas that participants most wanted to make clear. I tuned into the emotional portions of the transcripts; I could recall the moments where

75

participants used physical expression or volume to emphasize their point. Key phrases that were derived from In Vivo coding highlighted some powerful reflections from participants. Phrases such as "dumping ground," "it's the American way," "we're not wanted," and "I want to be part of the solution" were explicit expressions of critical concepts. Each of those codes was used to construct major and minor themes of this research.

After writing up a textural description of each participant, I utilized member checking to verify that the primary themes emerging were appropriate and accurate according to the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that credibility is rooted in the accurate interpretation of the data, and member checking is a direct way to ensure this. The process of member checking gives participants the opportunity to withdraw statements from inclusion. During this phase, I was able to obtain in-depth explanations that provided further insight and clarification into emerging themes. For example, two participants had left the interviews and reflected further about their descriptions of particular events. The member checking phase gave them a chance to add details and provide clarification.

Once the primary themes and corresponding subthemes were clarified, I constructed a matrix to ensure data saturation. While matrices are often used to present data in both qualitative and quantitative research, they are also useful for analysis (Nadin & Cassell, 2004). I inserted quotes from code groups into the matrix and organized it by participant. This visual aid was also helpful in narrowing and contextualizing the themes into the appropriate subthemes. For example, I had categorized many codes into a theme of "helplessness," and within the matrix had inserted quotes that provided context for the meaning of this emotion. Some parents described feelings of helplessness when it came to finding information about schools; others felt helpless because a school that seemed to have it all began cutting programs soon after their child was

enrolled. With the color-coded matrix, I was able to identify the existence of common themes and any shared context.

Summary of the Findings

I sought to identify what parents experience when they utilize school choice in a way that results in high mobility for their children. Three central themes and corresponding subthemes emerged from the interviews: (a) parents have feelings of empowerment and freedom in regard to the opportunities school choice provides; (b) parents experience feelings of being limited and helpless; (c) parents feel a lack of connectedness to school communities.

Participants feel empowered by their right to make their own decisions about their child's education. This empowerment is a major emerging theme, and takes shape in three ways. For some, they feel proud of the ownership and sense of autonomy that they have over the educational experience; they are eager to find the right "fit" for their child's individual needs and feel most qualified to do so. Secondly, parents are eager to find equity when it comes to education; they have either already experienced inconsistent quality or are exploring enrollment options because they refuse to try their local schools. Finally, parents feel empowered by their role as a consumer in the education marketplace; and they like the idea of schools working to meet their needs. They appreciate that they are in control, and can enroll elsewhere for a better experience.

Despite feelings of empowerment, feelings of helplessness emerged as another key theme. Participants experience feelings of helplessness since (a) access to desirable schools is limited by transportation issues and restricted enrollment options; (b) they find inequities among the schools that they choose; (c) there is limited information available to help parents make informed decisions (d) school communities change quickly and drastically as student populations

77

change in Michigan's school choice environment, and the positive features of a school may not be long-lasting.

The final major theme that emerged from the data is that parents lack a sense of connectedness to school communities. They feel no sense of belonging for themselves or their children and they experience frustration over a lack of emotional support from schools. Lastly, parents feel unable to influence the school community, despite attempts to participate and invest themselves.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The data suggest three major themes: (a) Parents feel a sense of empowerment and freedom when it comes to utilizing school choice and open enrollment options; (b) parents feel limited and helpless throughout their child's enrollment changes; (c) parents feel a lack of connectedness to the school communities that they belong to.

Empowerment and freedom. Parents experience feelings of empowerment and freedom in regard to their right to choose a school for their child. Despite the multiple enrollment changes their children experienced, parents spoke about the opportunity to have some autonomy over their child's education. Three subthemes define the ways parents felt empowered. First, they felt a sense of ownership and control over their child's education. Secondly, parents described their right to find quality schools rather than being anchored to the failing schools in their neighborhoods. Finally, some parents felt emboldened by their role as a consumer in the education market.

Ownership. The participants felt especially empowered over the sense of ownership they have in the process. Several explained that a parent knows their child best, they value autonomy when choosing the school community that would best fit their personality or needs.

Also, parents know that most Michigan schools rely upon student counts as their primary funding source. One parent explained that when two of her children were accepted at elite Detroit Public Schools, she wanted her youngest child to attend an elite elementary school in the same district for proximity, but there were rules against enrolling after third grade. Knowing that Detroit Public Schools struggle to keep students enrolled, she threatened to remove her two older students from the district's high schools if her youngest son was not accepted. He was admitted soon after. "That's what I wanted, so I made it happen," she said. Parents are aware that Michigan's school aid process uses per-pupil funding, and that many schools are desperate for enrollment; they believe this should give them some power when it comes to their child's school experiences.

Equity. Parents described their determination to find quality schools and equitable opportunity for their children. Most participants described early experiences with inconsistent levels of school quality and indicated a desire to find high standards, fair treatment, and quality educators. Participant C stated, "I'm not taking a backseat…I know I won't get everything, but I need to get him educated and him being treated fair." Parents were confident that their ability to select a school, rather than be assigned one would help them avoid previous experiences with low-quality instruction, where their children were either grouped with low-achieving students and unqualified teachers. Several participants had not yet experienced inequities but refused to try their assigned schools, based on negative reputations, publicity, and a loss of hope for the future of those schools.

Choice. Parents felt empowered by their role as a consumer, rather than being restricted to an assigned school. As Participant D put it, "I took advantage of a ton of different choices. I can have whatever I want. That's the American way." Participants counted on the flexibility of

79

choice, rather than a long-term commitment to a school or district, explaining that over time, the needs of their child may change, or their family needs may change, so they appreciated the freedom to move on if things did not work out well. Participant I had searched for a comprehensive education experience and was determined to find it, despite the risks of mobility. "They need to challenge my children. They get bored easily like I do, and if you cannot provide something extra in addition to the curriculum to enhance the whole procedure, I don't want them there." Parents felt that the school choice options gave them the power to demand high standards and a quality experience for students.

Feeling limited and helpless. Despite these feelings of empowerment, freedom, and ownership, parents experience opposing feelings of being limited and often helpless throughout their child's schooling and enrollment changes. Several subthemes emerged to explain these conflicting emotions. First, parents find that they lack access to real choice in the education marketplace. Secondly, they experience frustration over inequities among schools and districts in the open market. Thirdly, parents find it difficult to get information about schools, and about the choices they have. Finally, parents feel helpless in finding a long-term environment since mobile student populations create an ever-changing climate at schools that offer choice.

Access. Parents experience frustration and helplessness in their ability to have real choice and access to the types of schools they would like. There are two basic limitations when it comes to access: transportation and the lack of high-performing schools that offer open enrollment. Charter and public schools that offer open enrollment are not required to provide transportation. Some charter schools have arrangements with bus systems to offer some level of busing. Parents who utilize school choice experience frustration as they find themselves either limited by enrollment options or sacrificing their time and money to drive their child to

surrounding cities. With this in mind, parents who are determined to find a new school often make proximity a key factor, even above school performance. During interviews, 11 participants described their frustration over transportation. Several specifically described how their ability to enroll in a school was limited by a dependence on ride-sharing with others, or family dynamics. One participant even described her child's mobility at one point as being utterly unrelated to education, and more about maintaining transportation arrangements. Interviewees explained that whether they are stay-at-home or working parents can make a difference in flexibility, but even for stay-at-home parents, the cost can be too much. Participant E, for example, described the financial cost as a burden, considering wear and tear on vehicles, as well as fuel costs.

Participants explained that providing transportation across town or into the suburbs is particularly exhausting if their child participates in extracurricular activities or athletics. Participant D explained how she would wait for hours in her car to avoid further driving:

The drive was just atrocious. The annoyance was that I went out to drive him to

school, came back to get him at 3, came home. Then wrestling was from 5:00

until 7:00. Most of the time I just waited during wrestling. That was the same

time that my daughter was doing her culinary school in another city.

Two other participants described how a lack of transportation often puts students on city buses, where concerns for safety arise. Students may be forced to wait for hours at a bus stop, or take multiple routes, since some students travel across cities or from urban areas out to the suburbs, often alone. Participant L explained that at one charter school, students had to take the city bus to a suburban mall, catch a different bus, then walk the final leg of their journey.

They'd get dropped off at Fairlane Mall by their parents, then take that city bus all

the way down Michigan Avenue. Then they would walk the rest of the way to

school. Nine times out of 10, these parents don't have a car. That's a big issue transportation wise. That's a big safety concern for some families.

Access is not only limited by transportation issues, but also by the limited availability of open enrollment among high-performing schools. In Michigan, public schools and districts decide whether they will offer open enrollment, and can determine the admissions requirements and number of students that will be accepted. Parents experience limitations in this regard, finding that many high performing schools either offer extremely restricted open enrollment or remain closed to non-resident students. Parents described feelings of helplessness, as they tried to research schools and found that their only options were as low-performing as their assigned ones. Participant C found herself frustrated over these limitations, and explained that parents ultimately must settle for what's available.

 So you find somewhere that's ok, or you pay for an education. And districts like Grosse Pointe and Birmingham, those cities are really good ones on the cusp of Detroit, and they stay closed to outsiders. I have the opinion that it's to weed out the riff-raff, to weed out people like me…minorities. School of choice should be open to everybody, not you're only accepting ten kids for school choice for high school. It should be a universal rule for everybody. The race card is overused, but it is an issue. If the funding is state-mandated, then choice should be too, and it shouldn't be up to the district to decide how many they'll take. I think the rules about choice should be universal. Because if I can get my son there, and you are getting state funds, and we aren't having any problems, then what's keeping you from having him here?

Participant C described school choice policy as contributing to continued racial segregation, rather than expanding opportunity. While many schools offer open enrollment to ensure sufficient funding, others would rather stay closed to outsiders and serve only their neighborhood populations. Parents in this study discovered that while school choice might give them initial feelings of empowerment, specific policy design keeps barriers in place, limiting access.

Lack of equity. Parents experience frustration in regard to the lack of equity that they find at various schools and districts. In general, parents identified three types of inequities that were part of their experiences: teacher quality, academic programs, and extracurricular activities. Ten participants spoke about their experiences with unqualified teachers and teacher turnover. Parents reported that in some charter schools, teachers are not required to be subject-area certified. Often, parents struggled at home trying to help with subjects such as mathematics and felt unqualified to help their child. Participant D found it particularly troubling that the school hired five different "placeholders" in one algebra class. Participant L noted that at one point teacher turnover was like "a revolving door." Participant C experienced similar issues with turnover, as well as quality. "He had a science teacher that didn't really know science. I don't think a teacher can be a teacher universally."

In addition to teacher quality, parents reported frustration with inequities when it comes to academic programs. Participant B discovered that teachers were not adhering to her child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP):

They (public schools) are kind of held to a higher standard as far as what has to be

provided. Charter schools kind of get a little bit of a pass on that in my

experience. Um, technically yes, they are bound by those same laws, but they

seem to be less accommodating.

Participant K grew frustrated with one charter school's dishonesty about accreditation:

Then we started finding out that the school didn't have any accreditation

whatsoever. They were trying; I don't remember which one, but they couldn't get

it from either Central or Eastern. It was just kind of like you or I opening a

school. They didn't tell parents. I was digging, and we found out.

Other participants described inequities that appeared over time. Upon recruiting families,

schools offered programs and activities that would eventually disappear. One participant

explained that foreign language courses and other programs disappeared, and the school

explained that many new students needed a focus on the fundamentals.

It was just a downgrade in quality for everything; she learned Spanish during K-5,

but in sixth grade they said it's no longer needed. Why? I would have liked for it

to continue. They didn't offer it anymore; they said that the bigger kids needed to

learn the fundamentals, but show me what they are, because I already have my

children in DAP, University of Michigan Culture Club, all that on the weekends.

You tell me what you can do during the week because I got the weekends down

pat. I got this!

The school quickly lost its appeal. Six participants described their child's enrollment in a school

that offered no extracurricular activities or sports. Others reported that their children went

without basic needs; in one case parents described classrooms that didn't have enough desks,

where students were seated on the floor. Other participants voiced frustration over a lack of

textbooks and other materials. Participant L stated, "There's no books anymore. They give you

a piece of paper. They don't give you books. Because of a lost issue, or they won't bring them to school. That's what I miss, is textbooks." Many described a lack of access to technology. Participant F explained that inequalities would only be addressed when a parent speaks up, and then things may only improve for one child.

Participants experienced struggles with Advanced Placement offerings. Participant I's children attended a test-in school in Detroit, where students must earn admission based on academic requirements and other factors; these schools are highly valued. Participant I explained that in her experience, the district invests heavily in those schools compared to others. When her child was moved from that elite public school to a public high school in another city, she was surprised that the non-elite suburban school offered Advanced Placement courses that were much more challenging than the Detroit test-in school. "It tickled me because I think she thought she was getting out of a sinking ship onto a floating one, but she just had to work harder." Another participant struggled with the realization that the opportunity to dual enroll in college courses as a high school student depended upon the high school they attended. Her daughter was denied a request to dual enroll in a music course at a local community college, and the high school reported that even though the student intended on a career in music, the course was not an academic one. As a parent, she decided to pay for the course out of pocket, but they soon discovered that other high schools had covered the cost of tuition.

Lack of information. Parents whose children face enrollment changes through school choice reported that there is a lack of information available for proper research. Parents utilize websites that contain confusing and limited information. Interviewees expressed frustration over using websites like greatschools.org to compare test scores and find out other information. Participant G tried to compare test scores and expressed that when performance data describes

most local schools as failing, it is difficult to navigate the system. "There's not a school within 15 miles that has anything over the 30th percentile. You have to go far to get something in the 50th percentile." The same participant also reflected on publicized performance data that may not be reliable. Children may not be doing their very best, because they do not realize the implications of their results. "All we seem to be doing is testing our kids. Test, test, test, test, test. Let the kids know how important these tests are. They don't realize the importance of it. Do the kids realize?"

Parents reported that reviews on school comparison sites are often unhelpful because it is difficult to determine how reliable the reviews are, and that most schools in one area will have a bad rating. Parents reported that it feels like schools put up a façade for school visits and open houses. However, a visit can be helpful if a parent is concerned about the social aspects of a school:

> I went to their uh...where the main...the board of education. I knew I wouldn't fit
> in there, and I knew my kid wouldn't fit in there. Because it was uh, for lack of
> better words, it was ghetto. The type of parents that I saw there were the type of
> parents that I wouldn't want to come in contact with. And based on how the
> parents are, you can kind of tell how the school district is.

These comments indicate that this participant is concerned with more than just performance data and that in her experience, a social environment can be just as impactful on a child as academic programming.

Changes in school climate. Despite their feelings of empowerment and freedom in regard to enrollment, parents explained that their satisfaction at a school was often only temporary. Seven interviewees reported that school environments, including academic

programs, standards, activities, and leadership are continually changing due to student population

changes. As student populations change, academic needs change, performance data changes, and

student services change. Schools must address state testing requirements to stay viable, so they

must adjust to the immediate needs of incoming families. This may require targeted

interventions to bring students up to speed, the hiring of paraprofessionals, or major curriculum

changes. In addition, the social and emotional needs of students must be addressed, requiring

schools to provide costly non-academic services. Parents explained that these factors often cause

schools to become far less attractive than they once were. Participant I had enrolled her children

in a charter school for years, but it faced dramatic changes when public schools in the

neighborhood began closing:

> Things started to be different, because a lot of Detroit public schools started
>
> closing, and then neighborhood children who would normally go to
>
> neighborhood schools, started going to this school. The atmosphere changed,
>
> and the curriculum started to slack. It was more focused on behavioral issues
>
> than academic issues. Surrounding the school were low income housing
>
> units...projects. So those kids had went to Detroit public schools, they all came
>
> to this charter now because its dead smack in the middle. I could see the culture
>
> change of the children and parents…Then they started to take away a lot of the
>
> programs, because, well what I think, is that children in the neighborhood would
>
> participate and didn't pay. So you can't have things if they don't pay, so they just
>
> eliminated stuff altogether. By the time my daughter was in sixth grade, I was
>
> like, 'I don't like it here anymore.'

Several participants explained that once they enrolled in a school, it seemed like the application requirements began to change. They experienced frustration in choosing an environment that would lose its attraction with looser requirements. Participant H stated that in her experience, "school choice sometimes becomes a dumping ground," as schools relax their admissions qualifications. Participant J explained that in his experience with a for-profit charter school, there is extreme pressure to boost enrollment, so in recruiting students, schools specifically target students in the lowest-performing areas.

Feelings of helplessness persist for parents who change their child's enrollment in a school choice environment. Access for their children is limited despite choice, due to transportation issues and a lack of high-performing schools that offer open enrollment. Parents also face inequities when it comes to academic programs, resources, and extracurricular activities. Thirdly, there is a general lack of reliable information available to parents when they are searching for a school. Finally, frustrations arise when parents find their child's school climate changing over time, with mobile student populations.

Connectedness and community. The third major theme that emerged from the data is that parents feel a lack of connectedness to their child's school community. While every participant reported a lack of connectedness in some form, three sub-themes outline this part of their collective experience. To begin with, participants lacked a sense of belonging and did not identify with others in the school community. Secondly, participants were frustrated that their child's emotional needs were not supported. Finally, parents felt a lack of influence over the school community.

Sense of belonging. Nine participants described how neither they nor their children identified with the school community, or feel a sense of belonging while enrolled. Participants

felt that their own children were viewed as outsiders, and in some cases considered other families to be outsiders. For four of those participants, experiences with racism contributed to that feeling. Five participants explained that many newcomers did not belong in their school community. Their displeasure was based on factors like race, native language, religion, or neighborhood residency, and often led to an enrollment change. Participant K knew that her own children were considered outsiders in their suburban school, looked down upon because of their residency in Detroit:

> So you do, you feel alienated, left out, and like they don't like you because of
>
> where you're living. And I also know that I pay higher taxes on all of them, and I
>
> know how big the check is that they get for having my student there. So I know
>
> why they want them, but the parents need to understand that we're running from
>
> the same thing that they don't want.

Participant K further described feeling alienated, and had regrets about leaving the neighborhood school. Like other participants, she felt that there was a loss of community in her own neighborhood, since so many parents sent their children to other cities for school. Many traditional community bonds were never forged. Other participants referred to being where you are "not wanted." Experiences with racism weighed heavy on some, such as Participant C, who explained that after several incidents, she now considers more than just school quality when enrolling her child.

> And this is my son, who never saw race before…I start seeing that my son might
>
> start to become militant, because this is all happening at the same time as all this
>
> stuff on TV with race and the police and everything. So it's not cut and dry,
>
> when it comes to us picking schools. I have to take that into consideration,

versus the performance. Because if he goes somewhere and he's not wanted, we

have to leave.

Like Participant C, several parents explained that their child's well-being was most important,

and that the empowerment they originally felt turned into helplessness. Enrolling in a new

school did not guarantee their children acceptance or a sense of belonging.

 Emotional support. Eight participants reported feeling that their child's emotional needs

were not being fulfilled at school, citing non-support from staff members or a lack of peer

relationships. For several parents, it became clear that their children were withdrawn, or

unhappy at school. "They came home every day just defeated," reported one parent. Parents

explained that a welcoming, encouraging environment is key, and was often lacking. In four

cases, parents described a major issue with a staff member, such as physical assault or verbal

harassment. But nine participants explained that administrators and/or teachers showed a general

lack of compassion and understanding: the way administrators dealt with discipline, teachers

spoke to their struggling students, or in the unfriendly ways a school secretary spoke to visiting

adults. One parent reported that after enrolling at a new school, "It was nice to go into an IEP

and not come out crying." Other participants explained in their experience there are ways to

identify an emotionally supportive staff. According to their experiences, supportive

administrators who make themselves known, and are present. One participant explained,

> I remember when the superintendent came right out, shook my hand, looked me
>
> in the eye and introduced himself. Now, to me that's huge. That's trust, when
>
> someone does that. I just felt welcome; we both did. They felt like, thank you
>
> for choosing us. It seemed real, and a genuine good feeling.

Often, parents felt a lack of compassion; behavior management was often punitive. In their experience, administrators who suspend students without showing compassion and understanding contribute to a disconnect between the student and their education. One parent explained, "I know you can't have kids totally rebel, but you can't break their spirit either."

Lack of influence. Participants noted a lack of influence over the school communities. Ten participants made attempts to invest either their own time or resources in the school community, serving on school boards, parent associations, and in one case, running a before-school activity club. Participants in this study felt that parent participation should be valued. In many cases, their own passions and interests led them to contribute, or try to contribute in specific ways. For one set of parents, they experienced great frustration over seeing a beautiful stage and theater equipment go to waste, as the school lacked any drama program. Knowing their own children and others would benefit and enjoy such an opportunity, they inquired about leading such a project but were told there was simply no money, and the idea was quickly dismissed.

When parents began to dislike a school, or were considering moving on, several attempted to suggest solutions or work on projects that might bring about positive changes. They tried to work closely with administrators and teachers on their idea. Most of the time their input was not supported, appreciated, or impactful enough to cause real change. One participant noted that he continues to devote his time as a board member even though the school makes many decisions without consulting the board or parents in general: "I've had three kids in that school, and I have a vested interest in seeing things improve."

Parents in this study realized that they had a lack of influence over some of the school communities they joined. Their ideas and offers of support were often ignored, and they felt detached, prompting another enrollment change.

Chapter 4 Summary

Overall, participants described their experiences with school choice and open enrollment as including conflicting emotions and unanswered educational goals for children. Three themes emerged during analysis, including corresponding subthemes. First, parents feel empowered by their opportunity in Michigan to utilize school choice. They feel a strong sense of ownership over enrollment decisions, believing that they are most qualified to find the right fit based on their child's individual needs. Parents are determined to find equity and opportunity, having experienced inconsistencies in quality. Moreover, they feel empowered by their role as a consumer in the education market; they believe that utilizing school choice will cause schools to respond with quality programming and services.

A second major theme that emerged from the data is that parents feel limited and helpless throughout the enrollment changes. First, they lack access to quality schools for two reasons: (a) transportation is often unavailable or unsafe; (b) enrollment access is limited by policy designs that give schools the right to stay closed to non-residents, and to determine their own admissions requirements. They often find that the only available options nearby are other low-performing schools. Membership and inclusion is a problem for American students; Orfield et al. (2016) identified patterns of double segregation that continue to emerge in the United States, in which students are separated based on race and poverty. Secondly, parents find a lack of equity among the schools that they enroll their children in, citing low-quality teachers, a lack of academic and extracurricular programs, and limited resources. Thirdly, parents feel helpless when it comes to

finding a school since there is a lack of information to help make informed decisions. Finally, parents feel at a loss when the schools they choose seem to change dramatically over time, and no longer offer the features that were attractive to begin with; as student populations fluctuate in a choice-filled environment, schools often change academic programming and cut non-academic services to adjust financially and to boost performance data for state testing.

Further, parents who utilize school choice enrollment options find that they feel a lack of connectedness to school communities. They did not feel a sense of belonging that would normally tie them to a school; some felt like an outsider, others had experiences with racism, and some felt that there were too many times outsiders had a negative impact on a school. In addition, they were frustrated that their students' emotional needs were not being fulfilled. Parents also felt that they had little influence over the school community, despite attempts to invest their time and resources. Such disengagement often led to further enrollment changes.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The experiences of parents whose children are mobile by means of school choice policy were presented in the previous chapter. The three emerging themes include: (a) parents feel empowered in their ability to choose where their child will be educated; (b) parents feel limited and helpless throughout the process of finding a school that best fits their family's needs; (c) parents experience a lack of connectedness for themselves and for their children to school communities they enter. Education practitioners who are looking to stabilize student mobility and enrollment rates in school choice environments must understand the lived experiences of parents who make enrollment decisions.

Introduction to Chapter 5

In this chapter, I will examine the results of the study to provide interpretation and insight for practitioners and policymakers. Next, I will offer a discussion of the results in relation to the literature by offering new ideas to the community of practice, connections and confirmations of existing literature, and by explaining the contributions this research can make to the work of scholars. I will thereafter present the limitations of this study, as well as provide further recommendations for research.

Summary of the Results

With this research, I attempted to answer the question: What are the experiences of parents whose children have been mobile students, through participation in Michigan's school choice policy? This study is significant as it informs the literature on student mobility in school choice environments, and illuminates parent perspectives and experiences through in-depth interviews. Jimerson (2002) described the negative impact that inter-district open enrollment has on schools that are not as competitive. For some, consolidation or even closures may result. As some parents exercise their right to choose, those who stay in their home districts may feel the

impact more significantly. In schools with high mobility rates, achievement levels decline (Scherrer, 2012), and a sort of chaotic element can develop. In such an environment, there is also a decline in instructional quality and morale, while increased administrative duties result in a poor learning environment (Rumberger et al., 1999).

Since the onset of this study, Kotok, Frankenberg, Schafft, Mann, and Fuller (2017) have provided deeper insights into the patterns of student mobility related to school choice. The authors examined student mobility between Pennsylvania's public schools and varying types of charter schools, and found that the number of mobile students increased each year between 2009 and 2012. The impact of such mobility was thus felt by a growing number of students across the state. The findings confirmed that the mobility led to increased segregation of African-American students, while the authors also speculated that public school closings in urban areas could be attributed to high rates of mobility. In addition, the authors note that these increasing rates of mobility are in many cases explained as moves to and from a charter school, or from one charter to another; hence, they assert that parents are not finding the equity and diversity promised by school choice proponents. The authors regard such transfer rates as disruptive to students, but also to the schools that lose and gain these types of students. Such results illustrate that school choice mobility patterns extend beyond Michigan, and the negative impacts of student mobility may all too soon become a national problem.

To answer the research question, I interviewed 12 parents who changed their child's enrollment multiple times through Michigan's school choice policies. Participants had moved their children between some combination of public schools that offer open enrollment, public charter schools, private schools, homeschool, or virtual academies. A goal of this study was to

inform education leaders about the experiences of families who utilize open enrollment options, so they can stabilize or boost enrollment in their own schools.

Phenomenological design was used to identify the common experience of these parents. I was not seeking to confirm a particular theory or hypothesis. Instead, I hoped that any emerging themes from this study could be applied to practice, since they reflect the real, lived experiences of parents. There were three major themes that emerged from the data analysis, each with corresponding subthemes: (a) the feelings of empowerment and freedom parents have in regard to choice of school for their children; (b) the feelings of limitation and helplessness parents also experience; and (c) the lack of connectedness parents feel to school communities.

Empowerment. Participants feel empowered by their right to make their own decisions about their child's education; they are proud of the ownership and sense of autonomy they have over their child's educational experience. They are eager to find equity in education. In addition, parents feel empowered as a consumer in the education marketplace and the idea of a student-centered experience appeals to them.

Helplessness. Despite feelings of empowerment, freedom, and ownership, parents are faced with opposing feelings of being limited and often helpless throughout their child's schooling and enrollment changes. To begin with, parents find that they lack access to true choice in the education marketplace. Secondly, they experience frustration over inequities among schools and districts in the open market. Thirdly, parents find it difficult to get information about schools, and about the choices they have. Finally, parents feel helpless and unable to find a long-term environment for their children since mobile student populations create ever-changing school climates.

Connectedness and cmmunity. Parents who utilize school choice in a way that results in high levels of student mobility feel a lack of connectedness to their child's school community. Participants lacked a sense of belonging and did not identify with others in the school community. Moreover, participants were frustrated that their child's emotional needs were not supported. Finally, parents felt a lack of influence over the school community.

Discussion of the Results

The results indicate that parents value the sense of empowerment they have when utilizing school choice options; they use choice to serve the individual interests of their own children. But feelings of helplessness indicate that those efforts are often unsuccessful; parents are attempting to pursue opportunity for their children in an environment that is specifically designed to preserve privilege for others (Labaree, 2011). Limited access, a lack of equity and information, and changing school communities seem to illustrate that parents are less empowered than they would like to be. Finally, the theme of connectedness and community indicates that though participants want ownership over education choices, they are concerned about the social and emotional implications of mobility.

Empowerment. Participants described feelings of empowerment and freedom that exist in the utilization of school choice. Participants embrace enrollment changes as an opportunity to take ownership of their child's education and individual needs. In addition, they expressed that enrollment changes give voice to their concerns, needs, and even their feelings about the community, and their own place in it. The emergence of this theme suggests that they embrace school choice as a source of leverage for their children, when they cannot rely on the local system or school to meet their needs.

The literature indicates that school choice is utilized as a form of social protest, especially among African-American communities, who may view charter schools and choice as a form of black liberation (Camille, 2005; Stern & Hussain, 2015). Feelings of resistance were detected in participant statements, such as Participant C's, "I'm not taking a backseat." Labaree (2011) argued that a focus on the individual student has supported a societal push for the marketization of public schools; choice proponents invoked the politics of equal opportunity. In the current study, participants valued their rights to quality education and their role as a selective consumer in the education marketplace. School choice has made education a private good, where consumers are pursuing their own individual interests. (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Labaree, 2011).

Helplessness. At almost every turn, feelings of empowerment and freedom were met with feelings of helplessness or limited opportunity. Parents explained that (a) they lack access to desirable schools; (b) they find inequities among the schools they choose; (c) there is limited information available to help parents make informed decisions (d) school communities change quickly and drastically as student populations change in Michigan's school choice environment. The emergence of this theme suggests that parents pursue equal individual access and advancement in an environment designed to preserve privilege (Labaree, 2011).

Access. Labaree (2011) argued that there is a focus on making school choice "inclusive at one level and exclusive at the next, to make sure that it meets the demands for access and advantage" (p. 394). One participant in this study noted the paradox of open enrollment policies in Michigan: "If I can get my son there, and you are getting state funds, and we aren't having any problems, then what's keeping you from having him here?" Parents find that many high achieving public schools are either closed to non-residents or are inaccessible due to distance.

Transportation barriers do not pose the same problem for advantaged families as they do for the families of low socioeconomic status (Phillips et al., 2012). A lack of transportation to districts outside of one's neighborhood limits choice, and results in increased segregation for open enrollment districts (Koedel et al., 2009; Lake et al., 2015; Scott & Quinn, 2014).

Equity. Throughout their experiences, parents were confronted with the realities of inequity: not only are there differences in the quality of education and services across districts, but even within districts, resources are allocated unequally. Participants reported enrolling in schools that seemed to shine during the application process, only to discover that teachers lacked credentials, resources were scarce, and extracurricular programs did not exist. Darden and Cavendish (2012) reported that inequities exist within many districts, where funds for high-quality resources, experienced educators, and excellent after-school programs are concentrated on a few select schools. As parents faced these realities, they considered their next enrollment change. Participants in this study reported their attempts to enroll in specific schools within a district, knowing that the others had a reputation for inequitable resources and staffing.

Lack of information. Parents navigate school choice with limited information about schools and often rely on their social circles, public perceptions, and historical reputations about schools or districts. This may limit the scope and quality of schools that parents consider for their students. Because parents are motivated by factors other than academic performance when choosing schools, marketing attempts and statewide academic reports may not always influence enrollment. However, participants described the challenges they faced when it came to researching schools. At least seven reported they first utilized school choice because their assigned school or district's reputation was unacceptable. Participants also reported that they moved schools at least once because of the other families that attended the school; social status

and perceived membership were often at play. During the analysis stage, versus coding helped the researcher detect patterns of "us vs. them." Parents had assigned status and meanings to schools and students, and they used blunt language to describe school communities: "ghetto"; "nobody speaks English;" and "it was exclusively Arabic and not a pleasant environment." Parents are equipped with little information about curriculum, performance, or available programs; instead, they had developed status ideologies, basing assumptions about schools on their population demographics, or even the enrollment of a specific family (Holme, 2002). Reay and Lucey (2004) determined that schools are thought about and assigned status through the imaginings of people within society; those assigned meanings can impact the education marketplace and demonize schools. These findings suggest that in the absence of useful information, parents turn to their social circles and perceived social status to make choices about schools. One participant explained that as a Detroit resident, she applied to a suburban district, but was careful to request a particular school if accepted, since the others were known as "too blue collar."

Changing school communities. An illuminating theme that emerged from the data was that parents experience frustration over schools that seemed to drastically change over a short time. Schools would seem to transform, dropping programs, academic offerings, overall safety, and more. Participants described situations where a school's population might change demographically, or in number, and that would seem to drastically impact the climate. Parents found that the very things that attracted them to a school were gone within a year or so. One participant explained the severe changes that occurred at a charter school, causing him to pull out his children:

So the kids there that are in high school aren't necessarily even 30% of the kids

that were there in the connected elementary. They've moved on to somewhere

else or something better. Whereas a lot of the kids that are there now have been

brought in to fill seats. We've had teachers assaulted, we've had to hire a full-

time dean of discipline, and they have enhanced the security process.

In schools with high mobility rates, achievement levels decline (Scherrer, 2012), and a sort of

"chaos" element may begin to develop; instruction is affected and morale plummets. With these

changes, administrative duties increase and the school becomes a poor learning environment

(Rumberger et al., 1999). Over the years, the effects of high turnover combine with achievement

gaps that already exist for minorities and the poor (Hanushek et al., 2004). Ledwith (2010)

described "hollowed out" schools that may be left for the most at-risk students and families (p.

258). The enrollment losses are often felt most in those districts with low-income populations,

so the schools with the most to lose are those who are already facing the most challenging

populations (Ni & Arsen, 2011).

Connectedness and community. The finding that parents feel disconnected from these

temporary school communities indicates that while parents are empowered by the individual

access and attainment that school choice offers, they value and desire the shared connectedness

and sense of community that social education should offer over a long-term period.

Sense of belonging and emotional security. As participants in this study wavered over

their decisions about enrollment decisions from year-to-year, achievement levels and

performance data were often non-factors. Parents desire schools that nurture a connection to the

community and must weigh that desire among other factors, such as academic achievement (Hill,

2016; Lareau & Goyette, 2014). Participants in this study struggled to find a balance between

finding a quality school and enrolling "where you're not wanted." Participant K stated, "There was never anything to make us feel like part of the community…I would not recommend crossing borders. You want what's best for your kid, but crossing that line, you really do feel like you're not wanted." Other participants described similar experiences of failing to fit in, and several participants had experiences with racism when they utilized open enrollment options. One explained that racial tensions complicate school choice:

> I have to take that into consideration, versus the school's performance. Because if he goes somewhere and he's not wanted, we have to leave. If he doesn't want to go to school, or if he just starts navigating to people that just look like him, that's a problem.

Without meaningful interactions, students may socially segregate themselves, and subgroups will be disengaged from the community as they feel that they have little influence as members (Yates, 2000). Schools must deliberately nourish connectedness, especially as the diversity of a school increases (Chapman, 2007; Walton, 2013). Parents were frustrated by teacher turnover (especially in charter schools) and explained that their children didn't have strong bonds with staff members; teachers in some cases were leaving a school after several weeks or a semester. Participants explained that in charter school networks, administrators often open a building and stay for a year or two, then are sent to another school in the network. New administrators would bring organizational changes that impacted families. Facing constant change, parents struggled to support or even understand building policies. Khalifa (2012) found that urban school principals with strong bonds to the community were able to unite members of the school around building policy.

The Sense of Community theory states that membership within a community is accompanied by feelings of belonging and emotional safety (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Parents are looking for connectedness for their children, despite their mobility. In describing enrollment changes, participants came back to the topic of connection again and again. Participants indicated that mobility of students is breaking down social relationships not only in school communities, but in the wider neighborhood communities as well. Participant D explained that she had given her experiences with a lack of connectedness much thought. She considered her family's commitment to a school's athletic programs, and how communal activities such as sports were no longer sources of bonding and unity.

> So I think a sense of community is breaking down because of that in some places. It kind of makes things like the wrestling team more important for providing community that way. If you're not from the area, and you can't drive, then you don't come to the football games, you don't come to the concerts, maybe even if you're in choir you can't come because you can't drive or your parents work. Then we have no buses, so we are already driving neighborhood kids. So to try to get out of district kids to the meet, or home from the meet. Those are big deterrents to building togetherness, in a school or in a community.

The feelings of rejection and non-membership that some parents experienced upon enrolling in schools of choice seemed to be confirmed by the descriptions of other participants. Some explained that they'd left their neighborhood school due to demographic changes of school choice. Participant H stated, "We have kids come in from Detroit, a lot from there. Kids from River Rouge and they are not the good kids. You know, having kids coming in talking ghetto. Those are the kids that are causing issues." Another participant grew frustrated over the years

with the number of English language learners coming to her residential school district, and moved her child to a local charter school. She claimed that her frustration was only directed at the diversion of funds to provide language services. In either case, ideas about membership and belonging indicate that in navigating school choice parents confront social barriers. Membership means that one "has a right to belong" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.9). Membership requires boundaries, which are often created by members for protection, and to promote emotional safety. These help to identify who is in, who is out. In neighborhood schools, boundaries are sometimes clear and based on geography. In a choice market, those geographic boundary lines are less significant.

Participants in this study experienced regret in some cases over the way mobility has impacted local communities and neighborhoods. Participant K said, "Now they're meeting friends that live so close, and nobody knew each other all these years. Even though they were so close as kids, all the same age. We lost that sense of community in our neighborhood."

Investment and influence. Parents described a lack of emotional security between their child and the school community, but also insisted that they attempted to connect with and have influence over the school community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) emphasized that investing in a community makes membership more meaningful, and refer to home ownership as an investment that earns one the right to be part of a community. Participants in this study attempted to lead extracurricular programs, serve on parent boards, and to have a sense of presence at the school.

The findings of this study indicate that parents feel empowered by school choice options to influence the individual interests of their child when it comes to education. The emergence of helplessness as a theme suggests that parents are attempting to pursue opportunity for their

children in an environment that is designed to preserve privilege (Labaree, 2011). Limited access, a lack of equity and information, and changing school communities seem to suggest that parents are less empowered than they would like to be. Finally, the theme of connectedness and community seems to suggest that though participants want ownership over education choices so that they can meet the individual needs of their child, they are concerned about the social implications of mobility.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

The competitive education marketplace in Michigan is hampered by inconsistent enrollment, and unstable student populations impede the work of educators in school communities. The state's open enrollment policy has parents and students taking on the role of consumers, and school leaders fighting to attract and retain students (Powers et al., 2010; Lake et al., 2015). The literature points to enrollment instability within the choice-centered education marketplace. Cowen et al. (2015) illustrated a phenomenon of mobility in Michigan: student migration patterns reflected high levels mobility using school choice policy, rather than the permanency one would hope families could find for their students. Schools that face funding instability and high levels of student mobility can affect the academic growth for all students in high-turnover environments, not just the most mobile (Militello et al., 2008; Scott & Quinn, 2014; Scherrer, 2012; Rumberger et al., 1999).

This study attempted to illuminate the experiences parents have when they use school choice policies to move their child from school to school. The results unveiled the conflicts that such parents experience, and offer some explanation for the high rates of mobility among their students. In this section, I explain the connections and relationships between the results of this study and the existing literature.

Obstacles in the education marketplace. Existing school choice research supports the findings of this study; merely giving families choices about schools does not actually open them up to more desirable ones (Beal & Hendry, 2012; Bell, 2009; Plank & Sykes, 1999). Rather than creating equal opportunity, institutional mechanisms impede equal access to school choice. The mechanisms may differ, depending on a state's choice policies; Beal and Hendry (2012) focused on school choice in Louisiana, where race-based quotas, a lack of useful information, lotteries, and application procedures keep many families from choosing the schools that seem most attractive to them. In the current study, Michigan parents described other factors that they were confronted with when searching for quality schools: (a) public schools can determine whether or not they will offer open enrollment, and what the admissions requirements will be; (b) charter schools and open enrollment public schools are not required to provide transportation. Parents cited a lack of options that left them feeling helpless and limited. One parent described how a quality education might only be possible by paying tuition at a private school: "You know, at that point, I was kind of running out of options. So you find somewhere that's OK, or you pay for an education. No schools in the area had a rating that I was comfortable with." In both studies, mechanisms prohibited equitable access. Beal and Hendry (2012, p. 544) argued that

> By engaging in choice, parents participate in a market culture situating schools as
>
> a private, consumer good. Conceptualizing public education as a private rather
>
> than a public good advances an understanding of democracy as a consumer
>
> commodity.

Participants in this study risked the negative effects of student mobility in an effort to find the right school for their child. Their efforts became a burden, as they attempted to find equity, access, and connectedness.

Impacts of inconsistent enrollment and student mobility. The results of this study support Scherrer's (2012) findings that in schools with high mobility rates, achievement levels decline and a sort of "chaos" element develops. Participants in this study detailed the frustrations they experienced as schools drastically decreased in quality, losing programming, quality teachers, and non-academic offerings as populations changed. A poor learning environment arises as morale drops and administrative duties increase (Rumberger et al., 1999). These impacts on schools are certainly part of the parent experience and were sources of parent feelings of helplessness. These "hollowed out" schools that are left for the most at-risk students and families (Ledwith, 2010, p. 258). Cowen et al. (2012) warned that schools offering open enrollment may often only be a temporary site for choosing families. That was certainly the experience for participants in this study, who felt empowered about not being "stuck" in any one place. However, they were frustrated about how schools change when enrollment fluctuates.

Community, connectedness, and sense of belonging. Participants in this study experienced a lack of connectedness and community with the schools they enroll their children in. Especially in schools with changing demographics, students of color may find themselves isolated and performing worse than they did in the low-quality schools they left (Walton, 2013). For practitioners looking to stabilize enrollment, existing literature could offer solutions. Rumberger et al. (1999) argued that schools can lessen mobility rates; when a school's sense of community is strong and features committed members who are bonded to the institution, more students will be attracted, and will want to become members (Hill, 2016; Payne, 2002; Belenardo, 2001). Parents experience frustrations and helplessness throughout the choice process, and then find that their children lack connectedness and emotional support at their new

schools. In addition, parents lack a sense of belonging, or membership for themselves, and are unable to impact or influence the school community.

Participants in this study had experiences with racism; research confirms that as school demographics change, climate, connectedness, and community must be nourished in a deliberate way (Chapman, 2007). Schools must be strategic about building connectedness among diverse student populations (Walton, 2013). Participants in this study experienced feelings of seclusion, and felt like "outsiders;" acceptance and tolerance became as important in the search for a school as academic quality and programming.

Limitations

For this research, I focused on the experiences of parents, in an effort to help practitioners better understand high levels of student mobility. However, the focus on a singular perspective, that of parents, is limiting. The experiences that participants of this study described were often shared ones, with their own children. Interviews with students could have provided alternative insights into the phenomenon of student mobility.

Throughout the interviews, participants described events that often involved conflict, or they described conflicting feelings and emotions. The descriptions of events during these emotional tellings seemed authentic, but there is a chance that some bias influenced the stories, including selective memory and exaggeration (University of Southern California, 2016). Anger and frustration emerged when participants told stories about being denied access to a school because of their requirements, experiencing an administrator's unfair discipline policies, and feeling like an outsider.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

In this study, a phenomenological approach was utilized to explore the experiences of parents who use school choice options in Michigan in a way that results in high mobility for their children. Participant interviews were analyzed, and three key findings emerged: a) parents feel empowered by school choice options; b) they feel helpless and limited when confronted with a lack of access, information, equity, and when they find that schools change with student populations; c) parents lack experience a lack of connectedness for themselves and their children. Parent participation in this study offered insight into their experiences, and shed light on the some of the reasons Michigan has such high mobility rates among school choice families. These insights have direct implications for practice, policy, and theory.

Practice. High rates of mobility can drastically impact schools and the students within them (Brasington et al., 2016; DeArmond et al., 2014; Duim, 2013; Militello et al., 2008; Scott & Quinn, 2014). Practitioners should consider one particular implication of this study: school leaders must create a greater sense of community. Growing a strong sense of community will solve the problem of mobility, but as a major theme of this study, educators should be advised to consider the issue. Phenomenological research addresses meaning questions that constantly need new attention (Van Manen, 1990); until policy changes occur in Michigan, the education marketplace may be plagued by mobility. In the interim, practitioners on the ground have the opportunity to use phenomenological research to "act more thoughtfully," about community and connectedness (p. 155). Parents experienced a lack of emotional support for their child, and several participants had experiences with racism. While parents may not always choose a school based on academic performance or proximity, feelings of community may encourage permanency.

Schools can lessen mobility rates; when a school's sense of community is strong and features committed members who are bonded to the institution, more students will be attracted and will want to become members (Belenardo, 2001; Hill, 2016; Payne, 2002; Rumberger et al., 1999). There are specific ways practitioners can manage this. It is vital that administrators and teachers identify the demographic compositions of their students and families. By identifying what races, religions, languages, and cultural traditions make up the community, practitioners can better address student needs. Planning committees and action groups should include parents of non-resident students, and leaders must be engaged with individual families in all aspects of school life. Sense of community is "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). There are four elements that comprise a sense of community: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection. Each of these elements can be found in strong school cultures; practitioners would benefit from identifying how each of the elements is at play in their own schools and districts.

Policy. School choice policy seems to have put a burden upon families; parents are troubled with finding schools that are open to their children, finding useful information to help them choose, and finding ways to transport their children to other communities. Eastman, Anderson, and Boyles (2016) argued that a child's ability to obtain a quality public education now depends on a parent's ability to navigate the complexities of a consumer marketplace. Thus, school choice "rolls back the *rights* that were already secured through the labor of democracy" (p. 79).

Policy-makers in Michigan must reevaluate the structure of school choice to ensure students have equitable access. If choice is supposed to benefit the most vulnerable students, then policy must be designed to ensure enrollment is open to all. Students lack open access to public schools; the highest performing schools do not offer open enrollment and the ones that do offer it get to determine their own application guidelines and acceptance rates. Schools lack any incentive to enroll the most at-risk students, other than standard funding dollars. Choice proponents claim that resources should not be dumped into failing schools, but families often lack transportation to the public and charter schools outside of their neighborhoods. Families that remain in their neighborhood schools face inequities as well; they are left with the "hollowed-out," segregated schools that try to maintain resources and services despite inconsistent or decreasing enrollment rates (Ledwith, 2010). In communities like Detroit, where the public school system has a disreputable name, for-profit and not-for-profit charter schools pop up and waves of students enroll. These schools seem to take advantage of the local families that are desperate for another option; parents enroll their child only to find that the school is filling seats, but has low standards of instruction, staffing, and resources. Meanwhile, public schools are burdened with the task of marketing, which is a further drain on resources. As student populations change, schools must adapt to the academic and social needs of students, and parents experience significant changes in school communities over short periods of time.

Theory. School choice advocates often point to economic theory to support the freedom students have to change schools. Hoxby (2003) argued that because choice programs relax constraints on student mobility, school choice is able to most affect students who originally had the most constraints; the author speculated that this would be urban students who are "sufficiently poor or sufficiently discriminated against." However, constraints remain largely

111

intact for the most vulnerable families. Transportation is usually not available for schools of choice, and high-quality schools often remain closed to non-residents. The most vulnerable students are often the most costly to serve; social services are needed, as are academic intervention programs and special programs. Schools lack any incentive to serve this population. Therefore, constraints remain.

Choice advocates claim that schools will respond to competition if they hope to remain viable. However, participants in this study indicated many schools seem to be losing their most attractive features and programs as they adjust to a changing population. There may be little opportunity for schools to make long-term plans if they face inconsistent funding and an influx of struggling students.

Recommendations for Further Research

Parents in Michigan lack buying power when it comes to the education marketplace. There is a lack of equity, and policy implementations are necessary to level the playing field. New research should be conducted to identify patterns of mobility in states that have implemented strategies to improve equity of opportunity. For example, perhaps a state offers incentives to schools that accept especially at-risk students, or policy requires that all schools of choice provide transportation. Do high rates of student mobility exist where parents are given more buying power in the marketplace?

Population sampling for this study was based on criteria; participants must have experienced the phenomenon of school choice and high mobility. Racial and ethnic demographics were not considered, other than being a parent. The focus of this research was on Michigan families in general, but throughout the data collection process, it became clear that race and experiences with racism were at play for many participants. Future research should examine

the experiences of minority families as they navigate school choice. A comparative study that examines the experiences of various ethnic groups could be informative. Alternatively, the perspectives of children could have shed an additional light on some of the experiences that parents portrayed. This is especially true for trying to understand connectedness and community.

While research has been conducted on the impacts of high mobility on schools, it is recommended that a case study is conducted to examine not only what specific changes occur in a particular school or district dealing with high mobility from school choice, but how budgetary and organizational decisions are made throughout the process. Participants in this study described school efforts to recruit enrollees, as they attempt to deal with funding losses and enrollment instabilities. Promises made during recruitment were not always promises kept; extracurricular programs and academic offerings such as Advanced Placement, foreign languages, and technology were occasionally lost, along with qualified teachers and administrators.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was can explore the experiences of parents who have utilized school choice policy in a way that has resulted in multiple moves for their children, either from one open enrollment school to another or a return to their assigned neighborhood school. Cowen et al. (2015) discovered a phenomenon of mobility in Michigan: student migration patterns reflected high levels mobility using school choice policy, rather than the permanency one would hope families could find for their students. For schools and districts that face inconsistent enrollment patterns from year to year, the findings of this study can help them stabilize enrollment in a high-mobility environment.

The central research question for this study is: What are the experiences of parents whose children have been mobile students, through participation in the state's school choice policy? Participants described their experiences over the course of three interviews, and three major themes emerged. First, parents feel empowered with regard to their ability to choose. They feel a strong sense of ownership over enrollment decisions, are determined to find equity and opportunity, and enjoy their role as a consumer in the education market. Secondly, parents feel limited and helpless throughout the enrollment changes. They lack access and equity, and there is a lack of information to help make informed decisions. The schools they choose seem to change dramatically over time. The third major emerging theme is that parents who utilize school choice enrollment options find that they feel a lack of connectedness to school communities. They did not feel a sense of belonging; they were frustrated that their students' emotional needs were not being fulfilled, and also felt that they had little influence on the school community.

The results indicate that parents feel empowered by school choice options because they want to influence the individual interests of their child when it comes to education. They value the possibility of an educational experience that they have some control over, and that is individualized to their child. They appreciate being able to have ownership and to be a consumer in the education marketplace. As one participant put it, "that's the American way." However, parent feelings of helplessness throughout the choice process suggest parents are attempting to pursue opportunity for their children in an environment that is designed to preserve privilege (Labaree, 2011). Limited access, a lack of equity and information, and changing school communities seem to suggest that parents are less empowered than they would like to be. Parents desire connectedness for themselves and their children; this seems to suggest that though

they feel empowered by choice, they are concerned about the social and emotional implications of mobility.

Rather than creating equal opportunity, institutional mechanisms impede equal access to school choice. School choice policy varies by state, but in Michigan there are policy specifics that obstruct access to the types of opportunities that many families are looking for: (a) public schools can determine whether or not they will offer open enrollment, and what the admissions requirements will be ; (b) charter schools and open enrollment public schools are not required to provide transportation. Obstacles exist beyond policy specifics: there is a lack of quality information available for parents to make informed decisions in the education marketplace, and inequities exist among schools. School choice research supports the findings of this study; merely giving families choices about schools does not actually open them up to more desirable ones (Bell, 2009; Plank & Sykes, 1999; Beal & Hendry, 2012).

Qualitative research provides an opportunity for practitioners to become more thoughtful about the problems that exist in their environments. A major theme that emerged from the experiences of mobile parents is that they feel a lack of connectedness to school communities. While enhancing the sense of community and connectedness may not solve the issue of mobility, practitioners may find that it would encourage permanency for some families. Practitioners should refer to the Sense of Community theory: "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). The four elements that comprise a sense of community can be examined for application: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection.

Practitioners should find ways to engage families and encourage connectedness despite changing

demographics

The findings of this study support the argument that high rates of mobility can drastically

impact schools and the students within them (DeArmond et al., 2014; Militello et al., 2008; Scott

& Quinn, 2014). Participants experienced sweeping changes in the schools their children

attended, as programs were cut, student safety declined, and academic programming became

quite basic. Parents enjoy the feelings of empowerment that school choice policies offer, but

they face a complex burden when navigating Michigan's education marketplace (Eastman et al.,

2016).

References

Abshire, M., Dinglas, V. D., Cajita, M. I. A., Eakin, M. N., Needham, D. M., & Himmelfarb, C.

    D. (2017). Participant retention practices in longitudinal clinical research studies with

    high retention rates. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *17*(1), 30.

America after 3PM special report: Afterschool in communities of concentrated poverty (Rep.).

    (2016, August). Retrieved from

    http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/Concentrated_Poverty.pdf

Beal, H. K. O., & Hendry, P. M. (2012). The ironies of school choice: Empowering parents and

    reconceptualizing public education. *American Journal of Education, 118*(4), 521.

    Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-

    com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1026560876?accountid=10248

Belenardo, S. J. (2001). Practices and conditions that lead to a sense of community in middle

    schools. *National Association of Secondary School Principals*, *85*(627), 33-45. Retrieved

    from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org

    /docview/216030852?accountid=10248

Bell, C. (2009). Geography in parental choice. *American Journal of Education*, *115*(4), 493-521.

    doi:10.1086/599779

Bifulco, R., Ladd, H. F., & Ross, S. L. (2009). Public school choice and integration evidence

    from Durham, North Carolina. *Social Science Research*, *38*(1), 71. Retrieved from

    http://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=cpr

Booker, K. C. (2006). School belonging and the African American adolescent: What do we know

    and where should we go? *The High School Journal, 89*(4), 1-7. Retrieved from

    http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

    ew/220230611?accountid=10248

Brasington, D., Flores-Lagunes, A., & Guci, L. (2016). A spatial model of school district open

    enrollment choice. *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, *56*, 1. Retrieved from

    http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

    ew/1765602502?accountid=10248

Brown, R., & Evans, W. P. (2002). Extracurricular activity and ethnicity: Creating greater school

    connection among diverse student populations. Urban Education, *37*(1), 41-58. Retrieved

    from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org

    /docview/62209379?accountid=10248

Burgess, S., Greaves, E., Vignoles, A., & Wilson, D. (2009). *What parents want: school*

    preferences and school choice. Bristol: CMPO.

Carlson, D., Lavery, L., & Witte, J. F. (2011). The determinants of interdistrict open enrollment

    flows: Evidence from two states. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *33*(1), 76.

    Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.id

    m.oclc.org/docview/856978697?accountid=10248

Chan, Z. C. Y., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken

    in the data collection and analysis process? *The Qualitative Report, 18*(30), 1-9.

    Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx

    .idm.oclc.org/docview/1505321230?accountid=10248

Colburn, B. (2012). Responsibility and school choice in education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *46*(2), 207-222. doi:http://dx.doi.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2012.00848.x

Condliffe, B. F., Boyd, M. L., & DeLuca, S. (2015). Stuck in school: How social context shapes school choice for inner-city students. *Teachers College Record*, *117*(3), 36. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1697505418?accountid=10248

Cooper, C. W. (2005). School choice and the standpoint of African-American mothers: Considering the power of positionality. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *74*(2), 174-189. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/222080699?accountid=10248

Cooper, M. A. (2011). High school "3:05ers" geared for success. *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, 21*, 34-35. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/851537933?accountid=10248

Cowen, J., Creed, B., & Keesler, V. (2015, July). Dynamic participation in inter-district open enrollment: Evidence from Michigan 2005-2013 (Working Paper #49). Retrieved from http://education.msu.edu/epc/publications/documents/WP49-Dynamic-Participation-In-Interdistrict-Open-Enrollment-Cowen.pdf

Cowen, J. M., Fleming, D. J., Witte, J. F., & Wolf, P. J. (2012). Going public: Who leaves a large, longstanding, and widely available urban voucher program? *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(2), 231. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/963343749?accountid=10248

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Third ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Cullen, J. B., & Loeb, S. (2004). School finance reform in Michigan: Evaluating proposal A. *Helping children left behind: State aid and the pursuit of educational equity*, 215-50.

Darden, E. C., & Cavendish, E. (2012). Achieving resource equity within a single school district: Erasing the opportunity gap by examining school board decisions. *Education and Urban Society, 44*(1), 61. doi:10.1177/0013124510380912

DeLuca, S., & Rosenblatt, P. (2010). Does moving to better neighborhoods lead to better schooling opportunities? Parental school choice in an experimental housing voucher program. *Teachers College Record*, *112*(5), 1443-1491. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi ew/742856628?accountid=10248

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). The landscape of qualitative research. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Dinkes R., Kemp J., Baum K. (2009). Indicators of school crime and safety: 2008 (NCES 2009– 022/NCJ 226343). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009022REV_1.pdf

Docksai, R. (2010). Teaching social skills. *The Futurist, 44*(3), 12-13. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi ew/218600982?accountid=10248

Dougherty, J., Harrelson, J., Maloney, L., Murphy, D., Smith, R., Snow, M., & Zannoni, D. (2009). School choice in suburbia: Test scores, race, and housing markets. *American Journal of Education*, *115*(4), 523. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/223994694?accountid=10248

Duim, J. A. (2013). What factors play a role in making the district of choice program fit a school district's educational mission?(Order No. 3563838). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1400478315). Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1400478315?accountid=10248

Eastman, N. J., Anderson, M., & Boyles, D. (2016). Choices or rights? Charter schools and the politics of choice-based education policy reform. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 36*(1), 61-81. doi:10.1007/s11217-016-9541-4

Egalite, A. J. (2016). How family background influences student achievement. *Education Next*, *16*(2) Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1768943029?accountid=10248

Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43, 13-35.

Epstein, J. L. (2006). Families, schools, and community partnerships. *YC Young Children*, *61*(1), 40. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/197603268?accountid=10248

Fahrenwald, NL & Stabnow W. (2005). Sociocultural perspective on organ and tissue donation among reservation-dwelling American Indian adults. *Ethn. Health 10*, 341–354.

Farrell, M. A. (2008). *The relationship between extracurricular activities and sense of school belonging among Hispanic students* (Order No. 3317811). Available from Education Database. (304689074). Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search .proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/304689074?accountid=10248

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(9), 1408-1416. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR /QR20/9/fusch1.pdf

Gagnon, D. J., & Mattingly, M. J. (2016). Advanced placement and rural schools. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 27*(4), 266-284. doi:10.1177/1932202X16656390

Garcia, D. R. (2011). The Achilles' heel of school choice policies: The obstacles to reporting school accountability results to parents. *Journal of School Choice*, *5*(1), 66-84. doi:10.1080/15582159.2011.548249

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.

Gerlinger, J., & Wo, J. C. (2016). Preventing school bullying: Should schools prioritize an authoritative school discipline approach over security measures? *Journal of School Violence, 15*(2), 133-157. doi: 10.1080/15388220.2014.956321

Giorgi, A. (2009*). The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Goldberg, A. E., & Allen, K. R. (2015). Communicating qualitative research: Some practical guideposts for scholars. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 77*(1), 3-22. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi ew/1651368442?accountid=10248

Greenbank, P. (2003), The role of values in educational research: the case for reflexivity. British

    Educational Research Journal, *29*: 791-801. doi:10.1080/0141192032000137303

Gregory, A., & Cornell, D. (2009). "Tolerating" adolescent needs: Moving beyond zero tolerance

    policies in high school. *Theory into Practice, 48*(2), 106. Retrieved from

    http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

    ew/218843436?accountid=10248

Grigg, J. (2012). School enrollment changes and student achievement growth: A case study in

    educational disruption and continuity. *Sociology of Education, 85*(4), 388-404. Retrieved

    from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org

    /docview/1086348215?accountid=10248

Gurin, P. (1999). The compelling need for diversity in education. *The University of*

    Massachusetts Schools of Education Journal, *3*: 36–62.

Hallett, R., & Venegas, K. (2011). Is increased access enough? Advanced Placement courses,

    quality, and success in low-income urban schools. *Journal for the Education of the*

    Gifted, 34, 468-487,544,546. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http:

    //search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/856977291?accountid=10248

Hanushek, E., Kain, J., & Rivkin, S. (2004). Disruption versus Tiebout Improvement: The Costs

    and Benefits of Switching Schools. *Journal of Public Economics*, *88*, 1721-1746.

    doi:10.3386/w8479

Heuer, R., & Stullich, S. (2011). Comparability of state and local expenditures among schools

    within districts: A report from the study of school-level expenditures. U.S. Department of

    Education. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED527141.pdf

Hill, K. D. (2016). A community-based parent group's collaboration to inform school choice in detroit: Findings from the first year. *School Community Journal, 26*(2), 185-214. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1862999653?accountid=10248

Hill, P. T. (2005). Doing school choice right. *American Journal of Education*, *111*(2), 141-150. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/223987557?accountid=10248

Holme, Jennifer, J. H. (2002). Buying homes, buying schools: School choice and the social construction of school quality. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*(2), 177-205. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/212302674?accountid=10248

Holt, N. L., Sehn, Z. L., Spence, J. C., Newton, A. S., & Ball, G. D. (2012). Physical education and sport programs at an inner city school: Exploring possibilities for positive youth development. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 17*(1), 97-113. doi:10.1080/17408989.2010.548062

Holt, N. L., Tink, L. N., Mandigo, J. L., & Fox, K. R. (2008). Do youth learn life skills through their involvement in high school sport? A case study. *Canadian Journal of Education, 31*(2), 281-304. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/215369956?accountid=10248

Howe, K., Eisenhart, M., & Betebenner, D. (2001). School choice crucible: A case study of boulder valley. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *83*(2), 137-146. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/218531128?accountid=10248

Howell, W. (2006). Switching schools? A closer look at parents' initial interest in and knowledge

about the choice provisions of no child left behind. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *81*(1),

140-179. doi:http://dx.doi.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/10.1207/S15327930pje8101_7

Howell, W. G. (2004). Dynamic selection effects in means-tested, urban school voucher

programs. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *23*(2), 225-250. Retrieved from

http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

ew/222436688?accountid=10248

Hoxby, C. M. (2003). *The economics of school choice*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Humble, Á. M. (2012). Qualitative data analysis software: A call for understanding, detail,

intentionality, and thoughtfulness. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 4*(2), 122-137.

doi: 10.1111/j.1756-2589.2012.00125

Husserl, E. (1965). *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy As Rigorous

Science, and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man. Translated With Notes and an

Introd. by Quentin Lauer*. New York: Harper & Row.

Jabbar, H. (2015). "Every kid is money": Market-like competition and school leader strategies in

New Orleans. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *37*(4), 638. Retrieved from

http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

ew/1752001599?accountid=10248

Jacobs, N. (2013). Understanding school choice: Location as a determinant of charter school

racial, economic, and linguistic segregation. *Education and Urban Society*, *45*(4), 459.

doi:10.1177/0013124511413388

Janson, G. R., & King, M. A. (2006). Emotional security in the classroom: What works for

    young children. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, *98*(2), 70-74. Retrieved from

    http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

    ew/218178476?accountid=10248

Jimerson, L. (2002). Interdistrict open enrollment: The benign choice? *The Clearing House*,

    76(1), 16-19. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search

    .proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/196877222?accountid=10248

John, W. S. and Johnson, P. (2000). The Pros and Cons of Data Analysis Software for

    Qualitative Research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *32*: 393–397. doi:10.1111/j.1547-

    5069.2000.00393.x

Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. Education, *18*(2),

    282-292. Retrieved 2017, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/R_Johnson3

    /publication/246126534_Examining_the_Validity_Structure_of_Qualitative_Research/lin

    ks/54c2af380cf219bbe4e93a59.pdf

Keiser, K. A., & Schulte, L. E. (2009). Seeking the sense of community: A comparison of two

    elementary schools' ethical climates. *School Community Journal*, *19*(2), 45-58. Retrieved

    from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org

    /docview/195466887?accountid=10248

Khalifa, M. (2012). A re-new-ed paradigm in successful urban school leadership: Principal as

    community leader. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(3), 424. Retrieved from

    http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

    ew/1022966002?accountid=10248

Klem, A. M. and Connell, J. P. (2004), Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student

    engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, *74*: 262–273.

Klepfer, K., Hull, J., (2012). *High school rigor and good advice: Setting up students to succeed*,

    Alexandria, VA: The Center for Public Education.

Koedel, C., Betts, J. R., Rice, L. A., & Zau, A. C. (2009). The integrating and segregating effects

    of school choice. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *84*(2), 110. Retrieved from

    http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

    ew/204872949?accountid=10248

Kotok, S., Frankenberg, E., Schafft, K. A., Mann, B. A., & Fuller, E. J. (2017). School choice,

    racial segregation, and poverty concentration: Evidence from pennsylvania charter school

    transfers. Educational Policy, *31*(4), 415-447.

    doi:http://dx.doi.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0895904815604112

Kozol, J. (1992). If money doesn't matter, why all the savage inequalities? *The Education*

    Digest, 57(7), 32. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search

    .proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/218161610?accountid=10248

Labaree, D. F. (2011). Consuming the public school. *Educational Theory, 61*(4), 381-394.

    Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-

    com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/887256870?accountid=10248

Lake, R. J., Jochim, A., & DeArmond, M. (2015). Fixing Detroit's broken school system.

    Education Next, 15(1) Retrieved from

    http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

    ew/1640605352?accountid=10248

Langeveld, M. (1983). Reflections on phenomenology and pedagogy. *Phenomenology +*
Pedagogy 1.1: 3–5.

Lareau, A., & Goyette, K. (2014). Choosing homes, choosing schools. New York, NY: Russell
Sage.

Lavery, L., & Carlson, D. (2015). Dynamic participation in interdistrict open enrollment.
Educational Policy, *29*(5), 746. doi:10.1177/0895904813518103

Ledwith, V. (2010). The influence of open enrollment on scholastic achievement among public
school students in Los Angeles. *American Journal of Education*, *116*(2), 243-262.
Retrieved from doi:10.1086/649493

Lee, D., Woo, J. & Mackenzie, A. (2002). The cultural context of adjusting to nursing home life:
Chinese elders' perspectives. *The Gerontologist*, *42*(5), 667-675

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lockwood, A., Haas, M., & Heideman, H. (2002). *School Finance Reform in Michigan Proposal*
A: Retrospective (Rep.). Retrieved 2016, from Office of Revenue and Tax Analysis
website: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/propa_3172_7.pdf

McDermott, K. A., Frankenberg, E., & Williams, S. M. (2013). Introduction: Contesting equity
in the twenty-first century. *PJE.Peabody Journal of Education, 88*(1), 1. Retrieved from
http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi
ew/1284159078?accountid=10248

McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory.
Journal of Community Psychology, *14*(1), 6-23. doi: 10.1002/1520-
6629(198601)14:13.0.CO;2-I

Michigan Department of Education. (2017). School Choice. Retrieved from

      http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530_30334-106922--,00.html

Militello, M., Metzger, S. A., & Bowers, A. J. (2008). The high school "space race":

      Implications of a school-choice market environment for a Michigan metropolitan region.

      Education and Urban Society, *41*(1), 26. Retrieved from

      http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

      ew/202712343?accountid=10248

MI School Data. (2017). Retrieved July 30, 2017, from

      https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles/StudentInformation/NonResidentSt

      atus.aspx

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for

      establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of*

      Qualitative Methods, *1*(2), 13-22. doi:10.1177/160940690200100202

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

      Publications.

Muthuswamy, N., Levine, T. R., & Gazel, J. (2006). Interaction-based diversity initiative

      outcomes: An evaluation of an initiative aimed at bridging the racial divide on a college

      campus. *Communication Education, 55*(1), 105-121. Retrieved from

      http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-

      com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/214118821?accountid=10248

Nadin, S. & Cassell, C. (2004). Using data matrices. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential*

      guide to qualitative methods in organizational research (pp. 271-287). London: SAGE

      Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781446280119.n22

National Science Foundation. (2010). Science and engineering indicators 2010. Arlington, VA.

Neely, E., Walton, M., & Stephens, C. (2015). Building school connectedness through shared lunches. *Health Education, 115*(6), 554-569. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org /login?url=https://search-proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1715874261 ?accountid=10248

Ni, Y., & Arsen, D. (2011). School choice participation rates: Which districts are pressured? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *19*(29). doi:10.14507/epaa.v19n29.2011

Nield, R.C. (2005). Parent management of school choice in a large urban district. *Urban Education*, *40*(3), 270-297. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi ew/200540206?accountid=10248

Orb, A., Eisenhauer, A., & Wynaden, D. (2000). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *33*(1), 93-96. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Laurel_Eisenhauer/publication/12078123_Ethics_in _Qualitative_Research/links/00b7d522f5660d8e36000000/Ethics-in-Qualitative-Research.pdf

Orfield, G.; Ee, J.; Frankenberg, E.; & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2016). Brown at 62: School segregation by race, poverty and state. *K- 12 Education. Integration and Diversity.* UCLA: The Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles. Retrieved from: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5ds6k0rd

Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 48-58. doi:10.3102/0013189x09357618

Palmer, R. T., Maramba, D. C., & Dancy, T. E. (2011). A qualitative investigation of factors

   promoting the retention and persistence of students of color in STEM. *The Journal of*

   Negro Education, 80(4), 491-504. Retrieved from

   http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

   ew/926550441?accountid=10248

Payne, A. A., Gottfredson, D. C., & Gottfredson, G. D. (2002). Schools as communities: The

   relationships among communal school organization, student bonding, and school

   disorder. *Criminology*, *41*(3), 749-778. Retrieved from

   http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

   ew/60105175?accountid=10248

Penner, C., & Wallin, D. (2012). School attachment theory and restitution processes: Promoting

   positive behaviors in middle years schools. *Canadian Journal of Educational*

   Administration and Policy, (137), 36. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/log

Peters, V., & Wester, F. (2006). How qualitative data analysis software may support the

   qualitative analysis process. *Quality and Quantity*, *41*, 635 – 659.

Phillips, K. J. R., Hausman, C., & Larsen, E. S. (2012), Students who choose and the schools

   they leave: Examining participation in intradistrict transfers. *The Sociological Quarterly,*

   53: 264–294. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2012.01234.x

Plank, D., & Sykes, G. (1999). How choice changes the education system: A Michigan case

   study. *International Review of Education*, *45*(5-6), 385-416.

   doi:http://dx.doi.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/10.1023/A:1003802302518

Polit, D. & Hungler, B. (1999) *Nursing Research: Principles and Methods*. Sixth edition.

   Philadelphia, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins.

Powers, J. M., Topper, A. M., & Silver, M. (2012). Public school choice and student mobility in

metropolitan phoenix. *Journal of School Choice*, *6*(2), 209-234. Retrieved from

http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

ew/1023530438?accountid=10248

Prichard, T. G., & Swezey, J. A. (2016). Factors affecting Christian parents' school choice

decision processes: A grounded theory study. *Journal of Research on Christian*

Education, 25(1), 3. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search

.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1777967588?accountid=10248

Prothero, A. (2015). School choice. *Education Week, 34*(18), 5. Retrieved from

http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

ew/1650157676?accountid=10248

Rabovsky, T. (2011). Deconstructing school choice: Problem schools or problem students?

Public Administration Review, *71*(1), 87-95. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc

.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/853426490?accou

ntid=10248

Reay, D., & Lucey, H. (2004). Stigmatised choices: Social class, social exclusion and secondary

school markets in the inner city. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, *12*(1), 35-51. Retrieved

from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org

/docview/964170653?accountid=10248

Richardson, L. (2013).School choice & competition: What is the impact on school leadership?

Available from ERIC. (1773218390; ED561681). Retrieved from

http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docvi

ew/1773218390?accountid=10248

Rumberger, R. W., Larson, K. A., Ream, R. K., & Palardy, G. J. (1999). The educational

consequences of mobility for California students and schools. Research series. (No.

PACE-99-2). Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest

.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/62398880?accountid=10248

Sadler, G. R., Lee, H., Lim, R. S., & Fullerton, J. (2010). Recruitment of hard-to-reach

population subgroups via adaptations of the snowball sampling strategy. *Nursing and

Health Sciences, 12*(3), 369-374.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1442-2018.2010.00541.x

Saevi, T. (2014). Phenomenology in Educational Research .*Oxford Bibliographies*.

doi:10.1093/OBO/9780199756810-0042

Saultz, A., & Yaluma, C. B. (2017). Equal access? Analyzing charter location relative to

demographics in Ohio. *Journal of School Choice*, *11*(3), 458-476.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15582159.2017.1345239

Scherrer, J. (2012). The negative effects of student mobility: Mobility as a predictor, mobility as

a mediator. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, *8*(1), 1-14.

Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx

.idm.oclc.org/docview/1413416174?accountid=10248

Schools of Choice Information. (2017). Retrieved March 18, 2017, from

http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_30334-106922--,00.html

Scott, J., & Quinn, R. (2014). The politics of education in the post-brown era: Race, markets, and

the struggle for equitable schooling. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *50*(5), 749.

Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx

.idm.oclc.org/docview/1622310134?accountid=10248

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (Third ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Snelgrove, S. R. (2014). Conducting qualitative longitudinal research using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Nurse Researcher (2014+), 22*(1), 20. doi:http://dx.doi.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/10.7748/nr.22.1.20.e1277

Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. Guilford Press.

Stein, M. L., & Nagro, S. (2015). The readability and complexity of district-provided school-choice information. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *20*(3), 199. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1705515764?accountid=10248

Stone, D. 2011. *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making (3rd ed.)* New York, Norton, NY

Thompson Dorsey, D. N. (2013). Segregation 2.0 The new generation of school segregation in the 21st century. *Education and Urban Society*, *45*(5), 533-547. doi:10.1177/0013124513486287#articleCitationDownloadContainer

Thompson, D. R., Iachan, R., Overpeck, M., Ross, J. G., & Gross, L. A. (2006). School connectedness in the health behavior in school-aged children study: The role of student, school, and school neighborhood characteristics. *The Journal of School Health*, *76*(7), 379-86. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/215672635?accountid=10248

Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, *11*(1), 80-96. doi:10.1177/1473325010368316

United States. (1978). *The Belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research*. Bethesda, Md.: The Commission.

University of Southern California. (2016). Research guides: Organizing your social sciences research paper: Limitations of the study. Retrieved December 11, 2016, from http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/limitations

van Kaam, A. (1969). Existential foundations of psychology. Garden City, NY: Image Books.

van Manen, M. (1990). Beyond assumptions: Shifting the limits of action research. *Theory into Practice*, *29*(3), 152-157. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/stable/1476917

Walker, J. (2011). Communication for commitment (Order No. MR95906). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1496776275). Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1496776275?accountid=10248

Wall, C., Glenn, S., Mitchinson, S., & Poole, H. (2004). Using a reflective diary to develop bracketing skills during a phenomenological investigation. *Nurse Researcher*, *11*, 22- 29.

Walton, A. (2013). Even more racially isolated than before: Problematizing the vision for "diversity" in a racially mixed high school. *Teachers College Record*, *115*(11), 1. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1426359373?accountid=10248

Waters, S., Cross, D., & Shaw, T. (2010). Does the nature of schools matter? An exploration of selected school ecology factors on adolescent perceptions of school connectedness. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *80*(3), 381-402. doi:10.1348/000709909X484479

Welsch, D. M., Statz, B., & Skidmore, M. (2010). An examination of inter-district public school transfers in Wisconsin. *Economics of Education Review*, *29*(1), 126-137. doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2009.07.00

Wright, T. S. (2011). Countering the politics of class, race, gender, and geography in early childhood education. *Educational Policy, 25*(1), 240. Retrieved from http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/851363227?accountid=10248

Yates, E.L. (2000). Helping students build bridges across racial division. *Black Issues in Higher Education.*, *17*: 36–38.

Appendix A: Interview 1 Protocol

60 minutes

Time of Interview:
Date:
Location:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Opening statement/brief description of project: [READ]:

"I would like to start out by thanking you for your participation in this study. As you know, the purpose is to identify the experiences of parents who have utilized school choice to move from their original school district, and have since either moved to a second new school, or back to the original. I'm looking forward to hearing about your experiences, and I hope to make the interview as comfortable for you as possible. I would like to thank you for agreeing to three separate interviews; I believe this structure will help us get a full description of your experiences, without the process seeming rushed or overwhelming. Do you have any questions for me?"

"Please remember that your private information will be kept confidential, and that if you feel the need to stop participating at any time, you can just let me know. Thank you for signing the consent form. You will have access to the final report, as discussed. Could you please verify that I have your permission to record these interviews?"

Questions

1. Tell me about your personal views surrounding education.
    a. Prompts:
        i. What are some priorities you have when it comes to your child's schooling?
        ii. What components of a school community are most important to you?

2. How did you find yourself making the decision to remove your child from their assigned school?
    a. Prompts
        i. What were some reasons you left your assigned school?
        ii. What were some things that attracted you to another school?
        iii. Do you recall any specific instances or stories that would help explain your decision to leave?

Appendix B: Interview 2 Protocol

60 minutes

Time of Interview:
Interview length
Date:
Location:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Opening Statement (READ):

"Welcome back, and thank you for joining me for this second interview. I am looking forward to continuing the discussion we began last week, and to hearing all about your experiences. Last session, we focused on your own views and priorities when it comes to education, and the experiences that led you to choosing a new school for your student."

*At this stage, if transcripts from the first interview have been reduced down to profiles or summaries, member checking could occur.

"I would like to thank you again for agreeing to the recording of this interview. Let's begin."

Questions:

1. Your child was enrolled at a new school after you left your assigned district. What was your experience like?
   Prompts:
   1. What were your experiences with getting enrolled, and getting used to routines at the new school?
   2. Were there any experiences that stood out to you as unusual about this new school?
   3. Were there any emotions or concerns that you experienced?
   4. Please share a story about your description.

2. Please tell me about your relationships with teachers, administrators, and other parents at the school.
   .   Prompts:
   1. What was the school community like?
   2. What was it like to establish relationships with new teachers and principals?
   3. What was it like for your child getting socialized in a new place?

3. How did you find yourself making the decision to move your child (back to your original school) or (on to a new school of choice)?

Appendix C: Interview 3 Protocol

60 minutes

Time of Interview:
Date:
Location:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Opening statement/brief description of project: [READ]:

"Welcome to our third and final interview. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you one last time for your participation and detailed descriptions of your experiences. I have enjoyed working with you, and value the time you have given. Last session, I asked you to describe your experiences when you enrolled your child in a new school."

*If transcripts have been reduced to profiles from interviews 1 and/or 2, then member checking can occur at this time.

"I'd like to thank you for agreeing to the recording of these interviews, and to remind you that your personal information will remain confidential. Let's begin."

Questions:

1. Given what you have said in these interviews, how do you understand school choice options now?
   a. What does it mean to you as a parent to have options when it comes to education?
   b. How would you explain school choice to other parents looking for options?
   c. How have your enrollment decisions helped you to keep the priorities you have for your child's schooling?
   d. Can you describe any ways in which your enrollment decisions have made it difficult to reach the education goals you have for your child?

2. Given your experiences, what do you see in the future for your family's educational needs?
   a. What factors have influenced the way you will choose schools for your child in the future?
   b. Which of your stories would you refer to when giving advice to parents considering a school move?

Appendix D: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University- Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Deanna Marie Coleman–Weathersbee

Digital Signature

Deanna Marie Coleman-Weathersbee

Name (Typed)

10/01/2018

Date