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**PARENTAL CHOICE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES**

by

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DISSERTATION

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Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family whose unwavering support and encouragement served as a pillar of strength for me. For my wife, Temiloluwa Ilesanmi, thank you for your love, dedication, and understanding in this journey. Your encouragement was a source of my strength. I love you!

For my children, Toluwalase Ilesanmi, Damilare Ilesanmi, Oluwatoni Ilesanmi, and Oluwatobi Ilesanmi, you inspired me in many ways not to give up, even in the face of many challenges. Thanks for your patience, even when I spent very little time watching T.V with you and listening to your many exciting stories about friends and schools. You are my world. I love you all! You have your Dad back.

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So do not fear, for I am with you, do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10).

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ABSTRACT

For many decades, traditional public schools were the dominant public schools available for educating students, including those with disabilities. However, in the current climate of school choice, parents can now choose from a variety of educational options for their children. This study sought to explore the reasons parents of students with disabilities enrolled their children in charter schools. Research questions addressed the reasons parents considered when enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools, as well as their degree of satisfaction and experiences after enrollment in charter schools. A total of 108 parents of sixth-eighth grade middle school students with disabilities participated in this study. The quantitative and qualitative findings revealed the reasons that motivated parents to enroll their children in charter schools. Parents rated reasons that were related to academic and social outcomes for their children as critical in their decisions to enroll a child with a disability in a charter school. Parents in this study also reported a high degree of satisfaction and positive experiences with the charter schools. Throughout the study, parents reported that they felt that their children were achieving

academic, behavioral, and social improvements in their children's educational outcomes after enrollment in charter schools. The majority of the parents valued the opportunity charter schools offered to them to participate in their children's Individualized Education Program (IEP) processes and overall special education programs. Additionally, parents expressed appreciation for the individualized attention and personal engagement their children enjoyed in charter schools. A small percentage of parents expressed dissatisfaction with charter school programs and suggested ways charter schools could improve services for their children in the areas of evaluation for eligibility for special education and supports in math, reading, and writing. Implications for practice and future research are included.

Keywords: charter schools, disabilities, parents, special education, reasons, experiences

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	xiii
List of Tables	xiii
Chapter 1	1
Emergence of Charter Schools	1
Legislation Pertaining to Education of Students with Disabilities in Charter Schools.....	9
Charter Schools in New Mexico	12
Statement of the Problem	15
Purpose of the Study	15
Research Questions	16
Rationale/Importance of the Study.....	16
Theoretical Frameworks.....	17
Parental Self-Efficacy Theory.....	18
Parental Role Construction Theory	20
Researcher’s Experience and Positionality	22
Definition of Key Terms	23
Chapter 2 Literature Review	25
Historical Conceptual Framework of Parental Choice of Schools.....	25
Parent Advocacy Model	27
Systematic Review of Research-----	29

Locating Articles 29

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria 29

Review of Related Studies 30

Parental Choice of Charter Schools-----30

Parents of Students with Disabilities-----31

Parents of Students with and without Disabilities-----38

Parents of Students without Disabilities-----43

Parents of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students-----59

Conclusion-----63

Parental Experiences and Satisfaction with Charter Schools-----66

Conclusion-----76

Synthesis of the Reviewed Studies 78

Chapter 3 Methods 84

Settings 84

Participants 88

Research Design 89

Charter School Parent Survey 90

Study Procedures 91

Data Collection..... 93

Surveys 93

Data Analysis	93
Quantitative Data Analysis.....	94
Qualitative Data Analysis.....	94
Trustworthiness	95
Chapter 4 Results.....	97
Demographic Data.....	97
Demographic Characteristics of the Parent Responders	99
Research Question 1 Findings.....	100
Quantitative Data.....	100
Summary of the Quantitative Findings	106
Thematic Analysis.....	107
Summary of the Qualitative Findings	118
Synthesis of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings	119
Conclusion of the Findings	121
Research Question 2 Findings.....	121
Quantitative Data.....	122
Summary of the Quantitative Findings	128
Thematic Analysis.....	129
Summary of the Qualitative Findings	138
Synthesis of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings	139

Conclusion of the Findings 141

Chapter 5 Discussion 143

Discussion of the Findings 144

Previous Research Findings 154

Findings to the Research Questions in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks-----157

Recommendation for School Personnel and Parents of Students with Disabilities 159

Recommendation for School Personnel 160

Recommendation for Parents of Students with Disabilities..... 163

Recommendations for Future Research 163

Limitations 166

Conclusion..... 168

References 172

Appendix A 195

Appendix B 200

Appendix C 201

Appendix D 203

List of Figures

Figure 1: Question 10-----	102
Figure 2: Question 11-----	103
Figure 3: Question 12-----	103
Figure 4: Question 13-----	104
Figure 5: Question 14-----	104
Figure 6: Question 15-----	105
Figure 7: Question 16-----	105
Figure 8: Question 17-----	106
Figure 9: Question 20-----	123
Figure 10: Question 21-----	124
Figure 11: Question 22-----	125
Figure 12: Question 23-----	125
Figure 13: Question 24-----	126
Figure 14: Question 25-----	126
Figure 15: Question 26-----	127
Figure 16: Question 27-----	128

List of Tables

Table 1 Previous Charter School Studies-----	82
Table 2 Demographics of Students with Disabilities in New Mexico Charter Schools-----	85
Table 3 Student Demographics of Five Participating Charter Schools-----	86
Table 4 Parent Demographics-----	97
Table 5 Parental Ratings of the Reasons for Enrolling a Child in a Charter School-----	100
Table 6 Themes and Subthemes Research Question 1-----	108
Table 7 Parental Ratings of the Levels of Satisfaction with Charter School Services-----	122
Table 8 Themes and Subthemes Research Question 2-----	129

Chapter 1

The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* contributed significantly to the need for educational reforms in the United States (Hayes, 2004). This report authored by the National Commission on Excellence in Education led to the assertion that American schools were failing and suggested the need for changes in the country's educational system. In response to a growing dissatisfaction with public school education and the reports of *Nation at Risk*, major stakeholders in public education, including educators, administrators, and parents, became strong advocates for reforms in the American public education and suggested ways to improve educational quality at state and national levels. Former Presidents George W. Bush's and Bill Clinton's educational policies centered on an urgent need to reform public education due to the poor performance of public schools (Henig, 1999). The educational reform led to the development of charter schools, which has been among one of the most popular forms of choice for parents seeking non-traditional schools for their children (Bell, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014).

The Emergence of Charter Schools

Clearly, one of the most significant and potentially controversial educational reforms in the United States is the evolution of charter schools, a movement that has been in existence for nearly three decades (Bifulco & Buerger, 2014). The charter school movement has provided an opportunity for parents to educate their children in schools outside their neighborhoods (Hubbard & Kulkarni, 2009). Charter schools have specific missions that seek to engage specific populations of students and provide educational programs that are designed to meet the needs of their target students (Angelov & Bateman, 2016; Gross, 2011). Additionally, because of their ability to individualize educational practices and to meet the diverse needs of students, charter

schools offer the promise of serving groups of students who are traditionally marginalized in traditional public schools (Angelov & Bateman, 2016), including students with disabilities. The charter school movement began as a way to create a new public school environment with more autonomy and flexibility over instructional and operational procedures (Plate, 2013; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2001). The concept of charter school originated in the 1970s by the New England educator, Ray Budde (1988) when he suggested that groups of teachers should be given contracts or "charters" by their local school boards to explore new approaches to instructional delivery (Kolderie, 1990; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). In the 1980s, Albert Shanker, a former president of the American Federation for Teachers (AFT), advanced the charter school concept by discussing teacher-led laboratories of reform. He suggested new instructional practices and strategies that are subjected to rigorous evaluation and, if such instructional practices are successful, should serve as models for other public schools (Kaylenberg & Halley, 2014; Kolderie, 1990).

School choice advocates argue that providing parents the opportunity to choose among a variety of public schools promotes equity, giving students an opportunity to choose their academic environment irrespective of family socioeconomic, cultural, and racial backgrounds (Finn et al., 2000; Friedman & Freidman, 1980; Howe et al., 2002). On the other hand, charter school opponents like Chester E. Finn Jr., a former Assistant Secretary at the U.S Department of Education (1985-88) and Larry Cuban, a former high school teacher and a professor at Stanford University, have expressed concern about the impact of charter schools on the existing public education system, as they worried that charter schools potentially had the capacity to siphon much-needed funds from traditional public schools (Boyd & Walberg, 1990; Willis, 2002). Additionally, Ysseldyke et al. (1993) have warned that the charter school system has the potential for creating a two-tiered public school system, in which popular schools are well

funded and unpopular schools are allocated fewer resources. The emergence of charter schools has also drawn similar concerns from prominent educators and school board members. For instance, a Denver school board member and the president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, consistently condemned funding of charter schools as it was detrimental to public education and academic outcomes for all students (Finn et al., 2001).

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; 2014) has shown that for the last 26 years the number of charter schools has increased exponentially nationwide since the first charter school program began in Minnesota in 1991. Currently, 44 states and the District of Columbia have implemented charter school legislation (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools [NAPCS], 2018). Over 6,900 charter schools were in operation in the 2016-2017 school year, serving about 3.1 million students in the United States (NAPCS, 2018).

The population of students with disabilities in the U.S public schools has also increased significantly (NCES, 2018). In the 2015-2016 school year, the number of children and youth with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disability Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), Part B, was 6.7 million, 13% of all public school students (NCES, 2018). For instance, the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) 2013-2014 data, which represents the most recent national data on the percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in charter schools, (Rhim & Kothari, 2018) indicated that 712,000 (11%) of students with disabilities attended charter schools in 44 states and District of Columbia in the United States (Rhim & Kothari, 2018); whereas, the proportion of students with disabilities enrolled in the nation's traditional public schools was 12% (Rhim & Kothari, 2018). Despite the growth of charter schools and increased enrollment of students with disabilities in charter schools, proportionally, charter schools continue to enroll

fewer students with disabilities (Drame, 2010; Garda, 2012; Lake et al., 2014; National Center for Learning Disabilities [NCLD], 2010).

Research has shown that parents who choose schools for their children expressed more satisfaction than parents who are not involved in the process of choosing their children's schools. Parents who choose schools for their children tended to be more involved in their children's educational activities and place emphasis on educational priorities associated with positive academic outcomes and student achievement (Bulkley & Fisler, 2002; Julius, 2011; McGinn & Ben-Porath, 2014). The benefits of parental participation in children's education may take different forms that include volunteering in a classroom to helping with homework and communicating with teachers and school administrators (McGinn & Ben-Porath, 2014). Parental participation in children's education seems to result in higher test scores and improve students' behaviors (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Given the desire of many parents of students with disabilities to enroll their children in charter schools (NCLD, 2010), parental choice of charter schools for this group of students continues to generate attention among all stakeholders (Estes, 2009; Finn et al., 2006; Marcell, 2010). Parental participation in making educational decisions regarding their children with disabilities has increased significantly over the last two decades (Lake, 2010). Parents of students with disabilities have increasingly resorted to charter schools to provide an alternative educational setting for their children (Lake, 2010). As a result, a study of parental choice of charter schools for children with disabilities is of importance in educational research related to how well these schools are serving students with disabilities (Lake, 2010). Moreover, such research exhibits opportunities for "key stakeholders, including state policy leaders, authorizers,

charter school developers, and parents, to expand the potential of charter schools to successfully educate students with special needs” (Lake, 2010, p. 2).

Research shows that parents in schools of choice such as charter schools tend to be more involved in their children’s education than parents who decide to stay with assigned traditional public schools (Hausman & Goldring, 2000). Furthermore, research has documented various reasons that influence the decisions of both parents of children with disabilities and without disabilities in choosing a particular school for their children (Bell, 2009; Wilkens, 2011).

Primarily, these reasons include special education services and parental satisfaction with schools of choice (Estes, 2000, 2004; Finn et al., 2006; Fiore et al., 2000), disciplinary issues (Lange & Lehr, 2000), special education services (Estes, 2000, 2004; Finn et al., 2006; Fiore et al., 2000), small class size (Rhim et al., 2007), inclusive environments (Rhim & Kothari, 2018), safety issues, unique needs of individual students, and quality teachers (Fiore et al., 2000; Lange & Ysseldyke, 1998). Hence, charter schools have become an alternative public school choice for parents of students with disabilities (Estes, 2009; Hill et al., 2002; Nathan, 1996; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). Moreover, Collins (1999) and Estes (2009) noted that some parents who seek charter schools do so because they are not satisfied with their local public school and may seek higher academic standards, small class sizes, and a supportive environment for their children. Parents of students with disabilities continue to seek charter school programs for their children for a variety of reasons, including academic standards, discipline, and safety (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2017).

Regarding parental satisfaction with their children’s education, Swanson’s (2005) review of charter schools indicated that parents of students with disabilities who attend charter schools are satisfied with the quality of education, special education services, and positive school climate

that their children were receiving. Swanson pointed out that the charter schools' inclusive education models, small class sizes, and more individualized instruction resulted in the increased educational gains for students with disabilities and fostered a high-level of parental satisfaction. Swanson concluded that inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has also resulted in improved standardized test scores for these students.

Despite the increase in the number of parents seeking to enroll their children with disabilities in charter schools (Lake, 2010), only a few studies have investigated reasons leading to the parental choice of charter schools for students with disabilities and parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools. Most of the research on charter schools focuses on whether charter schools perform better than traditional public schools in academic achievement. For instance, in Donahoo's (2001) review of earlier charter school research, most of the charter school research focused on the following areas: impact of a charter school on student achievement (Cheung et al., 1998); enrollment, and service provisions for students with disabilities in charter schools (Fiore et al., 2000); comparison of state charter school legislations (Jennings et al., 1998); policies regarding education of students with disabilities in charter schools (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2000); and impact of charter schools' operations on traditional public schools (Nelson et al., 2000). In this current study, I address the dearth of research on parental choice of charter schools for students with disabilities and these parents' experiences and satisfaction with the charter schools in which they enrolled their child.

The President's Commission on Special Education (2002) recommended school choice, primarily charter schools, as a means of making the public education system more accountable to achievement goals that include students with disabilities. Finally, research has shown that more students with disabilities are served in general education or inclusive settings in charter schools

than in traditional public schools (Ahearn et al., 2001; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007; Wilkens, 2009). This tendency toward inclusive practices has been shown to result in positive academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities (Wagner et al., 2006).

Even though positive qualities of charter schools have been widely reported in school choice literature, charter school opponents have consistently argued that charter schools are ill-equipped to serve students with disabilities because they lack sufficient funds to staff special education teachers and related special service personnel (Swanson, 2005). Given the limited financial resources, many charter schools are concerned about the cost of serving students with disabilities (Heubert, 1997; Lange & Lehr, 2000; McLaughlin & Rhim, 2007). Additionally, charter school opponents express concern that students with disabilities have not always received legally mandated services in charter schools, such as Individualized Education Programs (IEP), which can result in potentially costly provisions associated with appropriate educational services for these students (Estes, 2000). Moreover, many charter school administrators and teachers have expressed challenges in educating students with disabilities because of these students' unique academic and social needs (Gross & Lake, 2014; Lake & Gross, 2012).

Zoller and Ramanathan (1998) noted that many charter schools discriminate in their enrollment practices by "counseling out" certain groups of students, especially, students with disabilities who seek placement in charter school programs. Thus, it has been common practice that many charter schools advising parents of students with disabilities to seek alternative schools that are better equipped to meet the learning needs of their children (Zoller & Ramanathan, 1998). Moreover, research has reported charter schools' discriminatory enrollment practices related to the severity of students' disabilities (Schneider & Buckley, 2006; Garcy, 2011). Most students with disabilities who attend charter schools have learning disabilities

(Garcy, 2011; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2001; Wilkens, 2011); whereas, students with more severe or low-incidence disabilities have low enrollment in charter schools due to cost and lack of trained personnel to serve these students (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2012). Even though charter schools enroll fewer students with severe disabilities, many parents continue to seek charter school programs for their children with disabilities (Estes, 2009). Miron (2014) has also noted that the low enrollment of students with low-incidence disabilities in charter schools has become a nationwide trend. Miron argued that students with disabilities constitute only 8 to 10 percent of a charter school's student population compared to 13.1 percent of this student population served by traditional schools.

Research indicates that parents of students with disabilities are seeking charter school programs for the same reasons as parents of students without disabilities (Estes, 2009). Furthermore, characteristics of individual charter schools and their mission statements tend to influence the parental choice of these schools (Estes, 2004, 2009; Fiore et al., 2000; Julius, 2011; Lange & Ysseldyke, 1998; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Merzell, 2010). Parents have also indicated that charter schools provide quality education and encourage parents to be actively involved in the education of their children (Finn et al., 2006).

Given parents' positive assessment of charter schools (VanderHoff, 2008), charter schools have become an attractive option for parents of students with disabilities who seek an alternative to traditional public schools (Lake, 2010; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Merzell, 2010; Stern et al., 2015). As Estes (2004) noted, parents of students with disabilities have been searching for something better than what traditional public schools offer their children. Given the need to improve educational outcomes for their children, many parents with children with disabilities have removed their children from traditional public schools and enrolled them in charter schools

with hopes that charter schools can better meet the exceptional needs of their children (Estes, 2004, 2009; Finn et al., 2006; Hawkins-Pammer, 2000; Lake 2010; Lake & Gross, 2014; Plate, 2013).

Legislation Pertaining to Education of Students with Disabilities in Charter Schools

Federal laws and policies regarding the education of students with disabilities emphasize the relationship between special education programs and delivery of services for students with disabilities and their families (Estes, 2000, 2004; Heubert, 1997; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was signed into law in 1975 by the United States Congress. The EAHCA later became the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA of 2004 was originally passed into law in 1990 by the Congress (Estes, 2004; Heubert, 1997; Rhim et al., 2001) and was amended in 1997 and 2004 (Rhim et al., 2001; Taylor, 2004). The two provisions added to the IDEA (1997) amendment specifically addressed public charter schools in the area of service delivery for students with disabilities (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). The first provision mandates charter schools to serve as their own local educational agencies (LEAs) and to (a) provide the same services to students with disabilities attending charter schools that their peers without disabilities receive in traditional public schools and (b) provide IDEA funds to charter schools like traditional public schools (IDEA 20, U.S.C §1413(a)(5)). Although the IDEA does not specifically address the LEA status of charter schools, the law clarifies that the legal requirements for the education of students with disabilities apply to charter schools that accept federal funds, regardless of their status as a LEA or a school operating under a local district (34 C.F.R. § 300.2(b)(1)(ii)). As a result, charter schools are required to meet the IDEA provisions for students with disabilities (Estes, 2000; Heubert, 1997; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007).

Yell (2012) noted that the IDEA outlines many specific rules and regulations for special education and related services that include free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). FAPE mandates that students with disabilities must have access to the same general education curricula that are offered to their peers without disabilities and guarantees their rights to due process (IDEA 20, U.S.C. § 1412(a)(1)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 300.17(b), (c)). Given this, the law requires charter schools to provide FAPE which meets the educational standards of state educational agency (SEA); and that is consistent with the student's needs, as indicated in the student's IEP (IDEA 20, U.S.C. § 1401(9); 34 C.F.R. § 300.17)). Additionally, IDEA requires school districts, including charter schools, to ensure that students with disabilities receive education in the LRE to the degree that such setting is appropriate for the child's educational needs and schools must make available a "continuum of alternative placement" to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (34 C.F.R. § 300.115)). Finally, IDEA makes it clear that students with disabilities and their parents retain their educational rights under IDEA in charter schools as is expected in traditional public schools (34 C.F.R. § 300.209(a)).

Additionally, on December 10, 2015, President Obama signed Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 (ESSA) into law (Hess & Eden, 2017; Russo, 2016). The ESSA is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and it replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Meibaum (2016) and Agoratus (2016) noted that since charter schools are publicly funded schools, they are required to comply with ESSA mandates. States must include all public charter schools in their accountability systems for the purpose of improving student achievement and success (34 C.F.R. § 200.12(a)(1)). Although the ESSA retains many of the NCLB's provisions, makes changes to some provisions, and adds new ones,

the law has significant implications for the education of students with disabilities (Agoratus, 2016). For instance, Agoratus (2016) and Russo (2016) noted that the ESSA requires that 95% of students enrolled in a school must participate in a state standardized assessment, however, 1% of students with significant cognitive disabilities may be exempted from state assessments and allowed to take alternative assessments (Section 1111(b)(2)(D)). Although students with cognitive disabilities may take alternative assessments, state educational agencies must ensure that alternative standards for these students align with the academic achievement standards. Additionally, students with disabilities attending public schools must have access to general education curricula and be on track for higher education and employment opportunities after graduation from high schools (Agoratus, 2016). Also, Russo (2016) noted that in section 9214(d)(2) of the ESSA, special education teachers in public schools must meet similar requirements as general education teachers in order to be classified as highly qualified teachers. Therefore, in compliance with the federal mandate, charter schools are required to recruit licensed general and special education teachers.

Public schools frequently face challenges related to maintaining positive learning environments and disciplining students who exhibit behaviors that are disruptive to learning (Rhim et al., 2015). Rhim et al. reported that CRDC 2011-2012 data indicate the use of exclusionary discipline in traditional public schools and charter schools. The CRDC data suggest that charter schools tend to suspend students with disabilities at a slightly higher percentage than their peers without disabilities relative to traditional public schools (7.40% vs. 6.88%) (Rhim et al., 2015). Losen et al. (2016) have also noted that charter schools suspend students with disabilities for minor infractions at a higher rate than students without disabilities. Given the discriminatory use of suspension in public schools, ESSA 2016 raised concern over disciplinary

issues in charter schools and the need to provide behavioral interventions that have the possibility of decreasing school suspension for students, including students with disabilities (Agoratus, 2016; Losen et al., 2016).

In addition, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Amendments of 1973) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) also protect the educational rights of children with disabilities in the United States (Estes, 2000, 2004; Heubert, 1997; Martin et al., 1996; Rhim et al., 2001). These laws prevent charter schools from discriminating and denying school-aged children with disabilities admission opportunity in their programs (34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(i), (3), (4)). Section 504 specifically prevents charter schools from asking prospective charter school applicants questions related to their disability status, unless such schools are chartered to serve students with a specific disability (USDOE, 2017). Like IDEA 2004, Section 504 mandates charter schools to provide FAPE to students with disabilities enrolled in their programs. Furthermore, Section 504 forbids charter schools from counseling out students from attending their schools because such students have disabilities (USDOE, 2017). The law also requires both traditional public schools and charter schools to provide to students with disabilities enrolled in their programs the same services and supports students without disabilities receive (34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b) (1) (ii)). Federal laws emphasize that children with disabilities must have equal access to school choice programs like their peers without disabilities (Heubert, 1997; Swanson, 2005).

Charter Schools in New Mexico

New Mexico was one of the early adopters of the charter school system in the United States (New Mexico Coalition of Charter Schools [NMCCS], 2015). The New Mexico Legislature approved public charter schools in 1992 and allowed some of the existing traditional

public schools to be converted to charter schools (NMCCS, 2015). The law allowed these early charter schools to have limited controls over their finances and hiring of personnel (Casey et al., 2002; NMCCS, 2015). The laws that impacted charter schools in New Mexico in 1999 required the prospective charter schools to seek authorization from their districts; and this law also created the opportunity for start-up charter schools in the state (Casey et al., 2002). The operations of charter schools in New Mexico are similar to other states. For example, New Mexico charter schools are schools of choice, publicly funded, and tuition-free for all New Mexico residents (NewMexicoKidsCAN, 2018). Like many other states, student enrollment into New Mexico charter schools is on a lottery basis due to the small size of many charter schools in the state. According to NewMexicoKidsCAN, the local education agencies (LEAs) in which the proposed charter schools are located and the Public Education Commission (PEC) have the capability to authorize charter schools in New Mexico. In New Mexico, the PEC supervises state authorized charter schools and the LEAs supervise locally authorized charter schools.

Additionally, the New Mexico charter school law holds charter school authorizers accountable for student achievement in their authorized charter schools. Like other states, New Mexico charter schools are required to admit any student who applies to their programs, irrespective of the student's disability status, provided there is space. Like in other states, New Mexico charter schools must provide special education services to eligible students. In addition, New Mexico charter schools are responsible for identifying, evaluating and offering a free appropriate public education to all students accepted for enrollment in their respective schools. Like in many other states, New Mexico charter schools must follow state and federal laws concerning discipline for all students, including students with disabilities. Overall, the operations

of charter schools in New Mexico are similar to those of other states in providing services for students with disabilities and without disabilities.

According to B. Friedman of New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) Public Records (personal communication, October 14, 2020), 301, 632 students were enrolled in traditional public schools and 27, 189 students were enrolled in charter schools in the 2019-2020 school year. Of the 301, 632 students attending traditional public schools, 50, 864 (17%) were students with disabilities. On the other hand, of the 27, 189 students attending charter schools, 4, 281 (16%) were students with disabilities. The demographics of students attending charter schools in New Mexico include the following: Hispanic, 60%; Caucasian, 30%; Indian American, 6%; Black, 2%; and Pacific Islander, 0.27% (B. Friedman, NMPED Public Records, personal communication, October 14, 2020). Whereas, the demographics of students attending traditional public schools in New Mexico include the following: Hispanic, 61%; Caucasian, 25%; American Indian, 11%; Black, 2%; Asian, 1%; and Pacific Islander, <1%.

When examining funding sources related to charter schools, Rhim et al. (2015) noted that New Mexico's special education funding formula is based on the number of students with disabilities attending the charter school, the nature of the students' disabilities, and the types of services and placements that students with disabilities require. Charter schools authorized by the Public Education Commission (PEC) serve as their own local education agency (LEA) and receive their funds directly from both state and federal governments. On the other hand, the charter schools authorized through LEA are a part of the local school district and receive their special education funds through their LEA (Rhim et al., 2015). Rhim and colleagues also reported that New Mexico allows charter schools to contract with the school districts when

providing special education services to students, and the law protects charter schools by requiring that school districts provide those services at a reasonable rate.

Statement of the Problem

Prior to 1990s and the establishment of charter schools, parents of students with disabilities were only able to seek services for their children from traditional public schools or private schools. Today, many parents of students with disabilities, like other groups of parents, have increased choices from which to choose where their children can receive their education (Ahearn et al., 2001; Estes, 2004; Fiore et al., 2000; Lake, 2010). However, when charter school choice has been studied, students with disabilities are not commonly differentiated from students without disabilities; thereby leaving a paucity of information about how charter school choice plays out for this student population. Thus, a study is needed to investigate the reasons leading to parental choice of charter schools for children with disabilities and their experiences and degrees of satisfaction with various aspects of charter schools.

Purpose of the Study

The perspectives of parents with disabilities regarding charter school choice for their children are lacking in charter school research. The purpose of this study was to examine reasons influencing the parental choice of charter schools for middle school students with disabilities and parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools. Importantly, this study examined the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities because parents have an important role in decision-making related to the education of their children. To date, there is limited research regarding the reasons why parents of students with disabilities choose to enroll their children in charter schools and these parents' experiences and subsequent levels of satisfaction with charter schools. As the charter school movement continues to grow, there is a trend in the increased

number of parents of students with disabilities enrolling their children in charter schools across the nation (Rhim et al., 2015) Therefore, it would be helpful to gain an understanding as to why these parents have chosen to enroll their children in charter schools. Also, there is a dearth of research on parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools. It would be helpful to potentially learn about specific features of previous school experiences so as to learn the degree to which parents have been satisfied or dissatisfied with charter schools their children currently attend and how they perceive their experiences since their children started attending these schools. This information is beneficial for charter school administrators and educators who deliver services to students with disabilities. Additionally, this study adds to the body of charter school research that examines why parents seek charter school programs for students with disabilities and how they perceive their experiences and satisfaction with these schools.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

1. What do parents of students with disabilities report as reasons that they enrolled their children in charter schools?
2. What do parents of students with disabilities report about their experiences after enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools?

Rationale/Importance of the Study

Over the years, the enrollment of students with disabilities in the nation's charter schools has increased. While only a few studies have investigated the reasons that motivate parents of students with disabilities to choose charter school programs for their children, no study has specifically examined the reasons indicated by parents of students with disabilities for choosing to enroll their children in charter schools in New Mexico. Additionally, there is even no study

that has examined the experiences of parents of students with disabilities with New Mexico charter schools. Therefore, this current study addresses these two gaps in the charter school research and provides information on why parents seek to enroll their students with disabilities in New Mexico charter schools and their experiences after the enrollment.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is best understood when viewing parents of students with disabilities as key decision-makers who play important roles in the education of their children. Therefore, the theoretical frameworks, upon which the study is based, are parent self-efficacy theory and parent role construction theory. Parent self-efficacy and parent role construction theories influence parents' decisions to participate in their children's education and support their children to succeed in schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Specifically, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) highlighted a model for parental participation in children's education, which suggested that:

Most parents' fundamental decision to become involved in children's education is a function primarily of three constructs: (a) the parent's construction of his or her role in the child's life, (b) the parent's self-efficacy for helping her or his child succeed in school, and (c) the general invitations, demands, and opportunities for parental involvement presented by both the child and the child's school (pp.8-9).

These constructs reflect how parents of children with disabilities perceive their roles and ability to influence educational outcomes for their children. Given the relevance of these two theories to parental participation in children's education, the theoretical frameworks of parental self-efficacy theory and parental role construction theory guide the selection and review of relevant literature for this study.

Parental Self-Efficacy Theory

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) defined parental self-efficacy as “parents’ beliefs about their general ability to influence their child’s developmental and educational outcomes and about their own influence relative to that of peers and the child’s teacher” (p. 19). Also, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) noted that parents are likely to be more active in engaging in their children’s education “because they have a sense of personal efficacy for helping their children succeed in school” (p. 313). Lupiani (2004) also noted that parental self-efficacy beliefs refer to parents’ expectations of whether they can execute their parental responsibilities, especially in decision-making processes for their children’s education. This suggests that parents must see themselves as having requisite knowledge to execute their responsibilities regarding their children’s education. A sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school enables parents to believe that their involvement will produce positive educational outcomes for their children (Bandura, 1977; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parental self-efficacy has been linked to parenting behavior and may be an important construct for understanding the differences in how individual parents perceive their schooling responsibilities and making decisions and choices related to their child’s education (Lupiani, 2004).

Bandura (1977) first identified self-efficacy theory, which refers to the belief in one’s ability to perform a certain behavior successfully. Bandura (1977) defined personal self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of actions required to produce given attainments” (p.3). Bandura asserted that a high sense of personal self-efficacy could have positive effects on people so that they are more likely to undertake a challenging task, persist with that task until the task is complete, and put forth the effort needed to be successful in

accomplishing that task. On the other hand, individuals with low self-efficacy are likely to reduce their efforts or give up in the face of difficult situations or challenges (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, parents are influenced by their role in determining the choices they make in a given situation. Bandura also reported that parents' interpretation of their varied experiences in different situations is related to their beliefs about their abilities to control situations that affect their lives. In applying this to parental participation in children's education, the self-efficacy theory indicates that parents are influenced by perceptions of possible outcomes of actions they take regarding their children's education (Bandura, 1989). Given this, parents are likely to set goals and develop plans to achieve these goals, based on their capabilities (Bandura, 1989). Parents who perceive themselves to have a stronger self-efficacy in a situation tend to set higher goals and are more likely to have stronger commitment to achieving the goals (Bandura, 1989). Parental self-efficacy in helping children succeed in schools is grounded in Bandura's personal self-efficacy theory and has been perceived as a key factor for how parents perceived their ability or inability to influence educational outcomes for their children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Thus, a positive sense of perceived self-efficacy can help a parent persist in the face of difficult challenges and successfully deal with challenges related to their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The resilience in seeking positive educational outcomes can be especially useful for parents of students with disabilities who persistently seek educational programs that meet their children's learning needs. Thus, efficacy theory indicates how parents can support their children to succeed in school and achieve positive learning outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Given this, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler asserted that a strong sense of self-efficacy can help parents find ways to

work with their children beyond the traditional parental involvement in activities typically demanded by schools.

In addition, Eccles and Harold (1993) pinpointed the characteristics of the parents who become involved in their children's education. They described such characteristics to include social, financial, and psychological resources available to the parents, parents' perceptions of their child, characteristics of the child, and parents' attitudes about school. The neighborhood and experiences of the parent with school also affect the degree of parental participation in the child's education.

Parental Role Construction Theory

According to Biddle (1986), role theory defines roles as beliefs and expectations people have for their own behaviors. Roles are constructed socially and grounded in expectations for behavior that are learned mainly through social experiences (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 2002). Specifically, when applied to choices parents make about their child's education, role theory suggests that the groups to which parents are members, such as family, parents' workplace, and child's school, have certain expectations of parental role behaviors (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). These expectations primarily include parental participation in the child's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Given this, parents' construction of their roles and responsibilities in their children's education is informed by their experiences as parts of the schools, community, and culture that are relevant to their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2004). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) also noted that parental role construction is related to parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education. Likewise, parents choose to become involved and make certain decisions about their children's education because they believe such involvement and participation in their children's schooling is part of their role

and responsibility as parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The importance of parental role construction is also underlined in the activities and actions parents consider necessary that they need to take in relation to their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Given this, Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (2002) further highlighted that parental role construction provides insights into the ideas about behaviors parents should take regarding the success of their children in schools.

Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (2002) identified three major categories that are important to understanding parental role construction: parent-focused, school-focused, and partnership-focused role construction. The parent-focused role construction emphasizes parental responsibilities in the child's educational outcomes. The school-focused role construction emphasizes educators' responsibilities in educating the child. Finally, the partnership-focused role construction refers to the belief that the parent and teacher have shared responsibilities in the education of the child.

Also, Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997) identified three elements of parental role construction: (a) *group's expectations* for individual member's behavior: What do others expect of me in my role as the parent of a schoolchild? (b) *personal role conception* emphasizes the individual's personal understanding of behavioral expectations for persons in this role: What do I expect of myself in my role as a schoolchild parent? and (c) *role behavior* includes the behaviors the individual role holder performs: What do I do in my role as a schoolchild parent? According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2004) and Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997), parents' ideas and ideas of other key stakeholders about the goals of children's education influence parental role in children's education. Overall, these researchers suggest that parents' conception of their role and

responsibilities in the education of their children influence the decisions they make in relation to their children's academic lives and school choice.

Researcher's Experience and Positionality

In my role as a special education teacher, I have worked with students in special education and inclusion settings for 13 years. Over these years, I worked in two traditional high schools and a charter middle school on the east and west coasts as well as two private schools that served at-risk students in the southwest. Currently, I teach at a traditional public school in northern Virginia. As a special education teacher in my current school, I collaborate with general education teachers, school administrators, and social workers to ensure these school personnel accommodate and differentiate instruction for students with disabilities as well as provided related services documented in students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

To address my inherent bias as a researcher, I implemented the following components into my study. During the recruitment segment of the study, I enlisted the help of special education directors and principals from five charter schools. I did not have any affiliation as a special education teacher or an administrator in any of these charter schools. The charter schools' special education directors contacted potential parents of students with disabilities who could be interested in participating in my study and informed the parents that I was not part of their faculties. I took this step to reduce any unintentional coercion on my part for parents to participate or entertain fear that lack of participation could impact their children's grades.

In addition, I recognized that my background and experiences as a special education teacher who had the opportunity to work in traditional public schools and a charter school have the potential to influence my interpretations of the findings of this study (Creswell, 2012). Thus, in order to minimize possible bias, I asked for the support of a professor of literacy at a

university located in the Midwest and a doctoral colleague to work with the analysis of data. I used their support in interpreting the data and drawing conclusions from the study findings.

Definitions of Key Terms

Charter schools

Charter schools are autonomous, publicly funded schools (Rhim et al., 2007). Although exempted from local and state regulations, public charter schools must comply with federal laws regarding the education of students with disabilities because they are federally funded (Heubert, 1997; Lange & Ysseldyke, 1998; Lange & Lehr, 2000). The degree of independence, self-government, and self-sufficiency of charter schools differ across states because of variation in charter school legislation (Heubert, 1997), with some states providing broader powers to their charter schools than other states (Estes, 2000; Heubert, 1997; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2001; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). As a result, operations of charter schools can differ significantly nationwide (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). Although some charter schools are private, the focus of this dissertation proposal is on public charter schools in New Mexico.

Disability

Disability is an impairment that limits a person's ability from performing a major life activity and may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime (White, 2002). Federal laws such as IDEA 2004 provide the opportunities for children with disabilities to receive special services designed to meet their unique needs (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2012). IDEA 2004 identifies 13 categories of disabilities under which students may be eligible for special education services: autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance (ED), hearing impairment, intellectual disability (ID), multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment (OHI), specific learning disability

(SLD), speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2012).

Parents

The Section 300.30 of the IDEA 2004 defines parents of a child to mean the child's (1) biological or adoptive parent; (2) foster parent; (3) a guardian authorized to make educational decisions for the child's education; (4) grandparent, stepparent, or the child's relative, acting as a biological parent; or (5) a surrogate parent. If more than one individual meets the definition of a parent, the IDEA recognizes the child's biological or adoptive parent as the person authorized to make educational decisions for the child. However, this may not be the case if the child's biological or adoptive parent has no legal authority to make educational decisions on behalf of the child. Additionally, a judicial decree can identify a specific person as having the authority to make decisions related to the child's education; and in such situation, the authorized person must be recognized as the child's parent. In this study, the term "parent" refers to the child's legal guardian(s), foster parents, or biological parent(s).

School Choice

School choice refers to a parents' ability to select the school of their choice for their child (Bosetti, 2004). School choice policy is designed to reduce the restriction on students seeking enrollment in a school of their choice, including schools outside their districts (Finn et al., 2006; Lamdin & Mintrom, 1997). Charter schools are one of the most popular forms of school choice in the United States (Blackwell, 2012; NCLD, 2010; Ni, 2012; Orfield & Luce, 2016).

Traditional Public Schools

Traditional public schools are publicly funded schools. They are subject to local, state, and federal regulations, and are usually under the supervision of local school districts.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I began this review with research that addresses the historical background of parental choice of charter schools and the advocacy roles of parents of children with disabilities. In addition, the search for relevant studies and the review of selected studies are discussed in this chapter. The review includes the descriptions of the studies and key findings, followed by conclusions and a synthesis of key findings.

Historical Conceptual Framework of Parental Choice of Schools

Schools are one of the most important institutions in any society (Wolf, 2003). For nearly three decades, parents have had the opportunity to choose from a variety of public schools, including charter schools (Philips et al., 2012). Parents play a critical role in making decisions related to the education of their children and they have the right to express their preference for a school they want their children to attend (Yaacoob et al., 2014). Parents typically know their children's strengths and weaknesses better than school personnel and can determine if the school's level of performance is a good match for their children's needs (Harrison, 2005). Thus, when provided the opportunity, parents will likely choose schools that meet the educational needs of their children (Harrison, 2005). Furthermore, Harrison noted that parents know and understand their children best, spend the most time caring for their children, and will ultimately bear the responsibility for poor decisions regarding the education of their children.

The reports of *Nation at Risk* (1983) addressed the role of parents in public education (Jimerson, 1998). The reports clearly stated that parents have the right to demand a better education for their children and to participate actively in their children's education (Jimerson, 1998). Over the years, parents have become more vocal in demanding their rights in relation to the education of their children (Carnoy, 1993). Nathan (1996) noted that parents have gained

recognition of having a voice in public education and as a result, have become strong advocates by demanding more school choice opportunities and control over their children's education.

Epstein (2008) claimed that parents are actively seeking detailed information about school programs that may meet the needs of their children. For instance, in 1987, 52% of teachers who took MetLife Survey of the American teachers reported that parents showed interest in their children's education; whereas 65% of teachers who took similar survey in 2012 believed that parents took interest in their children's education (MetLife Foundation, 2012). The survey also revealed that although parents depended mostly on school personnel for information regarding schools, 74% of parent respondents utilized the internet for information related to schools and districts (MetLife Foundation, 2012). Therefore, as parents actively participate in making decisions about school placement for their children, it is important to understand the factors that influence their choice of schools, including experiences they have had related to their children's education.

Epstein (2001) described the relationships between schools and parents. Epstein noted six levels of parents' involvement in children's education: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Parenting is the support a school provides to encourage parents to create positive home environments that reinforce students to grow and succeed in school. For instance, some parents may need educational support that can enable them to assist their children to succeed in school. Helping parents to create a strong and supportive home environment can potentially produce positive personal values for children and respect for parents. Communication between parents and schools is a two-way process. Volunteering may require that parents give up time doing other things for involvement in their children's school activities. Children's learning at home may

require parents to engage in learning activities with their children, which are likely to include helping children with homework, assignments, or projects. Decision-making involves parents making decisions on issues related to their children's education and participating in parent organizations. Collaborating involves schools coordinating resources and services from the community for families and students for family improvement. Thus, overall, parental participation in children's education commonly results in improved academic and social outcomes (Epstein, 2001). Furthermore, Slentz et al. (1989) noted that parents of students with disabilities play different roles in the academic lives of their children, including advocates, learners and interventionists, recipients of services, and decision-makers. These roles shape their decisions regarding the choice of schools that supports the educational needs of their children (Slentz et al., 1989).

Parent Advocacy Model

Gartner et al. (1991) noted that parents of children with disabilities have increasingly advocated for public education for their children. The parents' advocacy efforts were supported by various parent organizations and strengthened by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA) and required parents to act as decision-makers regarding the education of their children with disabilities. Historically, parents of students with disabilities have been involved in the advocacy roles for their children (Trainor, 2010; Wang et al., 2004). Turnbull and Turnbull (1996) noted that the advocacy roles of parents of students with disabilities provided a foundation for the emergence of IDEA. To ensure student success, it is important to engage families in their children's education and decision-making process (Harvard Family Research Project [HFRP], 2012; Trainor, 2010). A greater level of advocacy is particularly important for parents of children with disabilities to ensure that their children are accessing the same level of

instruction as their peers without disabilities (HFRP, 2012). Additionally, children and youth with disabilities depend on their families to play an active role in advocating for their educational needs and to provide valuable information to teachers regarding their specific needs (HFRP, 2012). Thus, in addition to parenting responsibilities, parents of children and youth with disabilities find it essential to become involved in their children's schooling experience (Trainor, 2010).

Wolfensberger (1977) noted that advocacy is a means by which parents speak and act on behalf of their children with disabilities. Over the years, parents of students with disabilities have used advocacy as an avenue to ensure free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for their children (Trainor, 2010). While the terminology *advocacy* is not clearly stated in IDEA 2004, Turnbull and Turnbull (1982) argued that advocacy is a specific type of parent participation that is implied in IDEA. Trainor (2010) noted that the sections of the IDEA that specify parents' rights and responsibilities when seeking due process indicate that parents have the rights to advocate for their children's education. As a result, federal law, particularly IDEA, encourages parents to advocate continually for the needs of their children with disabilities (Yell, 2012).

Systematic Review of Research

Locating Articles

I conducted a comprehensive search for studies on parental choice of charter schools and parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools after enrollment of their students in charter schools to locate relevant articles. First, databases were accessed including Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) databases, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, PsychARTICLES, and PsychINFO. Peer-reviewed articles published between 1991 and 2020 were targeted. The following terms were combined to locate studies that

investigated parental choice of charters and parental satisfaction with charter schools in the databases: (a) *charter school enrollment, reasons, and parent choice*; (b) *school choice, charter schools, and parents*; (c) *parent choice, disabilities, and charter schools*; (d) *parental satisfaction and charter schools*; (e) *disabilities, charter schools, and parental satisfaction*; (f) *students with disabilities, parental satisfaction, and charter schools*; and (g) *parental experiences, students with disabilities, and charter schools*. Second, the reference lists of the articles that met the inclusion criteria were hand searched to locate articles that might have been missed through electronic database searches.

Using these terms in the electronic databases I found 190 articles. Majority of these articles examined private schools, cyber charter schools, homeschooling and special education services; and as a result they were not selected for review. Of the 190 articles, I selected 54 articles that examined various topics on charter schools for the initial review. A thorough review of these 54 articles produced 13 articles that specifically investigated the reasons parents chose charter schools and parents' satisfaction and experiences with charter schools. Finally, I conducted manual searches of the reference lists of the 13 selected articles. These searches yielded articles that were already found through the electronic database searches; and as a result, I did not find new articles through this search method.

Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) studies that were published in peer-reviewed journals in English between 1991-2020 (b) studies that examined parental choice of charter schools for students with and without disabilities in the U.S; (c) studies that examined parental levels of satisfaction and their experiences with charter schools after enrollment of students with

and without disabilities in charter schools; and (d) studies that investigated K-12 charter schools in the U.S.

The exclusion criteria were as follows: (a) studies that examined schools of choice such as private, magnet, sectarian schools, homeschool, cyber or virtual charter schools, vouchers, and tax credits; (b) studies that did not examine parent choice of charter schools; (c) studies that did not report parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools; (d) studies that addressed K-12 charter schools of countries other than the U.S; and (e) position/conceptual articles.

Review of Related Studies

I divided the review of the 13 studies into two sections that included (1) parental choice of charter schools and (2) parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools. First, I reviewed the studies that examined the reasons for parental choice of charter schools for their child, followed by studies that examined parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools.

Parental Choice of Charter Schools

Overall, 10 studies investigated the reasons parents chose charter schools for their child. I divided the review of these 10 studies into four subheadings: (a) parents of students with disabilities; (b) parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities; (c) parents of students without disabilities; and (d) culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents. I reviewed studies focusing on the reasons that motivated these subgroups of parents to enroll their child in a charter school. First, I reviewed the studies that investigated the reasons parents of students with disabilities enroll their child in charter schools. Second, I reviewed a study that addressed the reasons parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities chose charter schools. Third, I reviewed studies examining the reasons parents of students without disabilities

chose to educate their children in charter schools. Finally, a study examining the reasons culturally and linguistically (CLD) parents chose to enroll their child in charter schools was reviewed.

Parents of Students with Disabilities. Two studies examined parental choice of charter schools for students with disabilities. Finn et al. (2006) investigated the perceptions of seven parents of students with disabilities regarding special education service delivery in a college preparatory charter school located in the Midwest rural area and the reasons these parents enrolled their children in this charter school. The children's ages ranged between seven to 14 years. Three of the seven students had speech impairment, one student was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, one student had a behavioral disorder, two students had learning disabilities, and one student had ADHD. Specifically, Finn and colleagues wanted to know (a) the reasons these parents removed their children from traditional public schools to a charter school; (b) their level of satisfaction with the charter's special education programs; and (c) how they perceived the charter school's special education services and the services provided by their child's previous traditional public school. Finn et al. used open-ended structured interviews to obtain qualitative data from the participants. The authors gave the participants the same questions and in similar sequence in order to reduce and prevent bias. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed to parents by the charter school's special education. Telephone interviews were conducted for the seven parents who indicated interest in participating in the study, with each interview lasting for 30 minutes. The researchers audiotaped and took notes to for trustworthiness of the study. In order to ensure confidentiality of the participants, the authors destroyed the audiotape after transcription of the data. In their data analysis process. Finn et al. took the following steps that included identifying and writing down the initial codes, cutting and

dividing the transcripts into units to identify patterns related to the investigation, and sorting the patterns into specific categories.

Overall, three main themes emerged from the data: reasons for transfer, perceptions of special education services, and comparing services. Parents focused their reasons for transfer on the what they perceive as negative changes in their previous traditional public school, which included teaching and restructuring. Participants complained about clumping of grades for the entire school districts and elimination of neighborhood schools that prevented parents from having their elementary school kids in one school. Parents noted that the academic excellence in charter school and higher academic expectations for students were superior to the traditional public schools. Another reason cited by parents for moving their children from traditional public schools to a charter school was the inability of the traditional public schools to address the needs of students with disabilities and to provide testing that would determine whether a student had a disability and possible eligibility for special education services. These parents reported that the charter school's personnel addressed their children's needs and provided tests and services their children needed.

In the area of special education service delivery, parents rated the charter school's performance better than the traditional public schools their children previously attended. Parents cited effective communication between the special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities, especially through quarterly progress reports. Additionally, parents cited general education teachers' willingness to work with students with disabilities, teacher accessibility, and attentiveness to students' needs as reasons favoring the charter school. However, Finn et al. noted that parents were concerned about the charter school's faculty turnover, which could have adverse educational outcomes for their children with disabilities. In

addition to faculty turnover, parents were unhappy with the increase in the class size, which was a deviation from the small class size philosophy that the charter school had previously maintained. Parents felt that this change adversely impacted their students.

When asked to compare special education services at the charter school to the traditional public schools their children previously attended, some parents could not make the comparison because special education services were not offered to their children in previous schools. However, some parents noted the collaborative relationship in areas of special education between the charter school and family. They noted that charter school staff were accessible to parents, listened to parents' views about education of their children, and were willing and flexible in adjusting in the classroom that resulted in positive educational outcomes for their children. Although parents expressed concern about the growing size of the charter school, they admitted that the class size was still smaller than the class settings in traditional public schools. Parents noted that the small class size and small school size allowed their children to succeed both academically and socially.

The authors noted the limitations of the study. They noted that the small number of participants in the study and inclusion of a small charter school would affect the generalizability of the study's findings because the perceptions of only seven parents and one charter school may not truly reflect the views of other parents who choose to transfer their children to charter schools in Midwest. Also, the authors noted that participants might have provided the responses that they felt the authors desired.

Finn et al. noted that the study provided information related to what parents of students with disabilities looked for when choosing a charter school for their children. They pointed out that factors related to education outcomes such as small sized school, challenging curricula, high

academic standards, staff's willingness to provide services, and good communication were motivating factors for parents to educate their children with disabilities in charter schools. The authors also noted that parents were concerned about high special education teachers turnover rate and changes in charter school's educational focus.

While this study specifically investigated the reasons parents of students with disabilities chose a charter school over traditional public schools, the researchers did not address trustworthiness in this study. Although participation was voluntary and participants' consents were obtained, the researchers did not conduct a member checking by following up with the participants regarding the accuracy of the information provided. Furthermore, the analysis process was unclear and need additional information on how the authors concluded on the final themes. Finally, the structured interviews did not allow researchers to explore areas they had not anticipated. Semi-structured interviews would have given the opportunity to obtain further information about parents' perspectives on charter schools.

Waitoller and Super (2017) investigated the effects of Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) decision to close public schools in Black and Latino neighborhoods due to school restructuring and business expansion. The CPS's budget cuts, and school closure affected students with disabilities receiving special education services. The primary purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of Black and Latino parents of students with disabilities in enrolling their children in a charter school and the conflicts they experienced with such school. Specifically, Waitoller and Super sought to know (a) the reasons that influenced the decisions of Black and Latino parents to enroll their children with disabilities in charter schools and (b) how these reasons relate to restructuring of urban space. The researchers partnered with the Disability Legal Advocates (DLA), an organization that provided legal advice and support for individuals

with disabilities. The DLA contacted potential Black and Latino parent participants who received legal services from the agency in the prior year and explained the purpose of the study to the parents. Parents who indicated interest in participating in the study could either give DLA permission to provide their information to the researchers or contact the researchers directly. Of the possible 77 participants, 33 agreed to participate in the study. However, 24 of the 33 parents were interviewed for the study because nine parents were unavailable for interview. Four of the participants were Hispanic; 18 were African American; and two were biracial. Eighteen parents were male, and six parents were female; half of the parents had students enrolled in elementary schools; six in middle schools; and six in high schools. Twenty of the 24 students had their students enrolled in franchise charter school and four in the stand-alone charter schools. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted for all the 24 parents and each interview ranged from 55 to 140 minutes. Interviews were conducted in different settings that included participants' homes, public spaces, libraries, and researcher's office. The interviews were audiotaped, and identifiable information was protected to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The researcher used field notes to gather information such as participants' body posture, gesture, and facial expressions, which could not have been captured through recordings. The researchers also used school artifacts that included school applications, mission statements, student handbooks, school histories, and photographs of charter school advertisements as other sources of data for the study.

Data were analyzed in multiple stages. First, the researchers conducted a line-by-line, incident by incident and In Vivo codes of the 24 interviews. Second, the authors focus-coded the 24 transcripts and selected common codes that were relevant to their research questions. The codes were compared in order to identify relationships them and sort them into categories. The

two authors coded 18 of the 24 transcripts and wrote memos that highlighted stories told by the parents. This process was conducted for all the 24. Additionally, they conducted member checking that allowed participants to confirm if the researchers understood their stories. Finally, the codes were clustered under specific and larger categories.

Waitoller and Super found that socioeconomic status and geographical locations influenced parents' decisions to seek charter schools for their child and that these parents sought charter schools for almost similar reasons. Although twenty-five percent of charter schools were situated within their neighborhoods, these parents typically enrolled their child in a traditional public school until a significant percentage of their neighborhood schools were closed, resulting in the need to seek charter school programs for their child. The researchers noted that seven out of 10 parents living in the areas of extreme poverty sought charter schools for two reasons: safety and special education services. The safety issues centered on gang-related violence that made it unsafe for students to get to the neighborhood schools. Parents reported that they perceived charter schools would be safe for their students because of disciplinary policies in these schools; moreover, charter schools would give their child the opportunity to escape from violence in the neighborhood schools. Parents reported poor special education services, lack of behavioral supports and therapies, and lack of individualized attention due to overcrowded classrooms in neighborhood schools as reasons for seeking charter schools. Parents were desperate to enroll their child in charter schools because they felt these schools would address their child's special needs.

Waitoller and Super found that nine out of 10 parents living in the areas of serious economic decline also cited safety issues and poor academic performances in neighborhood schools as primary reasons for enrolling their child in a charter school. Parents reported that

neighborhood schools had low test scores compared to charter schools that had rigorous curricula, college preparation programs, and 100% graduation rates. Similarly, parents living in areas of gentrification, where residents were 64% Caucasian and 14% Black and Latino also cited safety and academic concerns in the neighborhood schools as reasons for moving their child to a charter school. Finally, parents living in the middle-class areas with 50% Caucasian, 20% Hispanic, and 24% Black. Only three percent of Chicago school closings happened in these areas, and the areas contained four percent of charter school campuses. Black and Latino sought charter schools for their student because the neighborhood schools would not accommodate the disabilities in general education settings; rather the districts insisted on placing their child in a segregated classroom. As a result, parents sought charter schools because of the smaller classrooms and small student-teacher ratios that they believed would benefit their child.

The researchers noted that the study has several limitations. First, the study's findings cannot be generalized because of the sampling strategies; moreover, the study was extracted from a previously conducted larger study that focused on the parents of students with disabilities who experienced conflicts with charter schools. Also, the study included only parents with knowledge and resources to seek legal services, while parents who did not have such opportunities were excluded from the study. Majority of the participants' students attended franchise schools while only two attended stand-alone schools. As a result, future research should investigate the reasons parents of students in stand-alone charter schools access charter schools. Lastly, data was collected for a short period of time; hence, only the experiences of parents who participated in the interviews were represented in the study.

Waitoller and Super noted that the study presents important information about the challenges and struggles Black and Latino parents experienced in Chicago in securing quality

education for their child with a disability. Their experiences are markedly different from the Caucasian parents of students with disabilities who did not have to go through similar troubles because neighborhood schools were not closed for expansion of charter schools. Furthermore, the study highlights the intersection between race and disability, and how they affect minority parents.

Waitoller and Super used multiple steps for coding the transcripts. The inter-coder and member check allowed for the trustworthiness of the study. I believe this is a good study that provides important information related to the uneven developments of neighborhoods and disinvestments in traditional public schools, which greatly affect minority students enrolled in these schools.

Parents of Students with and without Disabilities. One study specifically examined the reasons and experiences/satisfaction of parents with and without disabilities with charter schools. Lange and Lehr (2000) surveyed parents whose children attended charter schools in Minnesota. The surveys were sent to parents through mail or sent home with their children during the 1996-1997 school year. Parents were directed to mail back their completed surveys to the University of Minnesota in the prepaid stamped envelopes. Surveys were sent to 1,266 parents. However, 608 of these parents returned the surveys, making it 48% response rate. Of the 608 surveys that were returned, only 577 surveys were used, as remaining 31 surveys had some missing information. Response rates from the participating charter schools varied and ranged 14% and 100%. Although parents of students without disabilities were included in the study, specifically, the researchers wanted to know (a) the primary disabilities of children with disabilities attending the 16 charter schools in Minnesota; (b) parents' most important reasons for transferring their children with disabilities to charter schools; (c) the extent of changes parents saw in their

children with disabilities since enrollment in charter schools; (d) the extent to which parents were satisfied with various aspects of charter schools; and (e) how parents saw the difference between the charter school's special education services at their child's current school and previous school.

The survey used in the study was developed the University of Minnesota's project staff, using items from the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments, which was developed in 1996 by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and items from parents surveys that were developed by the Enrollment Options Project. The survey measured demographics of students and parents, reasons parents enrolled children in charter schools, changes in student behavior, and parental satisfaction with charter schools' programs and services, parental involvement and communication with school, and special education. Lange and Lehr used Pearson chi square test to compare the responses of parents of students with disabilities and parents of students without disabilities to the closed-ended questions. The written comments to the open-ended questions were coded and produced a list of 19 categories of responses. The codes were grouped into the emerging themes. Finally, the 19 categories were reduced to nine categories by a researcher who was knowledgeable about special education and charter schools.

Findings showed that 142 of the 577 (26%) parents who responded to the survey indicated that they had one or more children receiving special education services at a charter school. When asked whether their child had a primary disability, 48 of the parents (36%) who responded to this question noted that their child had a learning disability. Other primary disabilities reported by parents included deaf or hard of hearing (12%); speech-language impaired (10%); and emotional and behavioral disability (8%). Sixteen percent of the parents selected "other" disability that included ADHD, Asperger Syndrome, and Tourette's syndrome.

Furthermore, parents rated the reasons they selected charter schools on a scale of 1 to 5, one being not important and 5 being very important. Ninety-five percent of parents of students with disabilities and parents of students receiving services under Section 504 reported that considered the following reasons important or very important in their consideration for choosing a charter school: class size, staff members, academic programming, special education services, philosophy of charter school, discipline, school safety, child's special needs, and student population. Lange and Lehr also compared the percentages of parents of students without choosing a charter school for similar reasons. They found that four reasons were more significantly important for parents of students with disabilities. These reasons included special education services, child's special needs, dissatisfaction with previous school, and opportunity the charter school offered their child to start afresh. Interestingly, there were few differences in the reasons parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities considered important in their selection of a charter school.

Lange and Lehr also asked parents to rate their levels of satisfaction with various features of their child's charter schools. Parents were asked to rate these features on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. Ninety percent of parents of children with disabilities indicated that they were satisfied with the aspects of the charter schools including the quality of teachers, instructional quality and attention provided to their children, curricular offered in charter schools, school administrators, academic expectations for all students, communication between charter school and parents, parental involvement in school activities, support services such as family liaison, counseling, and social services offered at charter schools, and student discipline. The statistical analyses of the two groups of parents showed that parents of students without disabilities were satisfied with the same aspects of the charter schools as parents of students with disabilities.

When asked about the degree of change in their children since enrollment in a charter school, 31% of the parents indicated that it was the first year their child was attending a charter school; 48% indicated that their child had been attending charter school for a year or two years; and other survey respondents indicated their child had been enrolled in a charter school for four years. Overall, the qualitative analyses to the question revealed that 87% of parents reported some positive changes in their child since attending charter schools. Parents commented about self-esteem enthusiasm for school, and improved attendance rates. Additionally, 75% or more of the parents of students with disabilities noted some positive changes in their children since attending charter schools. The parents noted their children were motivated to learn, had confidence in their own abilities, were satisfied with their teachers, and demonstrated improved academic performance, while the amount of the time children with disabilities received the lowest rating of 31%. The chi square analyses also showed that parents of students without disabilities reported similar changes highlighted by parents of students with disabilities. In the area of special education services, 45% of the parents indicated that they were attracted to charter schools because of the special education services. The researchers also found that 72% of the parents were pleased with the special education services offered at charter schools, 61% noted that special education services were more available at charter schools, and 61% indicated a higher level of use of special education service at the charter school.

The qualitative comments also revealed how the parents felt about their child's charter school. Lange and Lehr found that while some parents were happy about the discreet ways in which charter schools addressed their child's disability, other parents reported not seeing any academic or social changes in their child. The researchers also found that parents, particularly parents of students with disabilities were happy with the teachers at charter schools. However, a

few parents were unhappy with the charter school staff. Lange and Lehr noted that parents commented extensively about their child's charter school programs. Parents were generally happy about the robust curricula in charter schools that focused on group work and what students needed to learn. Parents were also satisfied with the small class sizes at charter schools, which they considered would result positive educational outcomes for their children. However, parents were unhappy about lack of extra-curricular activities at charter schools. Additionally, Lange and Lehr found that parental perceptions of involvement in charter schools were mixed. While some parents were pleased with the level of involvement and communication with the schools, several other parents were complained about lack of involvement. Parents expressed dissatisfaction with the transportation system at charter schools, as they noted a long commute and poor funding for transportation. Parents also cited poor funding educational materials such as textbooks and outings for students.

Lange and Lehr noted some limitations for their study. They noted that only charter school parents participated in the study and parental decision to enroll their children in charter schools can only be seen through the lens of these parents and not through the views of traditional public school parents who may have different views about schools. Second, they noted that the study involved only the state of Minnesota and given that charter school legislations differ from state to state, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to charter schools nationwide. Lastly, the disability status of the students was not verified. Despite these limitations, Lange and Lehr noted that the study has some implications for charter schools and raised a few questions for charter school operators to consider when serving students with disabilities. Charter schools must be aware of the implications of special education law in the delivery of services for students with disabilities. Second, parents of students with disabilities are

accessing charter schools because they believe these schools would provide better educational services for their children. Hence, it is critical for charter schools to consider whether class size, which is one of the key features of charter schools would continue to result in same outcomes for students with disabilities. Lastly, the need to protect the rights of students with disabilities and ensure parents' access to school choice.

I found Lange and Lehr's study very comprehensive. The authors included parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities in their study and this allowed public school stakeholders---educators, administrators, and policy makers to understand the reasons these groups of parents enroll their children in charter schools. Additionally, I found that findings of this study suggested that all parents are seeking charter school programs for the same reasons. Overall, this study provides useful information about reasons parents choose charter schools and aspects of charter schools that are satisfying and dissatisfying to both parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities.

Parents of Students without Disabilities. Six studies examined parental choice of charter schools for students without disabilities. Lewis and Danzig (2010) sought to know the reasons African American parents chose to enroll their children in Armstrong Charter School with a predominantly African American student population. The school was located in the southern city with approximately 230, 000 residents. The city's demographics included: 44% African America, 46% Caucasian, and nine percent Hispanic with an average income of \$41,000. In 2007, Armstrong Charter School served 160 students from K-8. The student body composed of 94% African American, five percent Latino and less than one percent Caucasian.

African American parents were selected from a parent group. The participant parents were recommended by the group leader who also participated in the study. Overall, seven

females and one male participated. The key inclusion criteria included participants having a child attending the school for at least one year. Participants had children enrolled in grades one through seventh.

Lewis and Danzig obtained data through semi structured, in-depth interviews conducted for individual participants on Armstrong Charter School campus. Participants were asked the same predetermined questions that were also followed with probing questions to elicit additional information related to the reasons for choosing Armstrong Charter School for their children. The researchers transcribed verbatim the interview transcripts and used ATLAS.ti to analyze the data. They identified patterns and themes from the data which indicated that parents chose the school for a variety of reasons. Overall, three major themes emerged from the analysis: small school and classroom sizes, (b) a welcoming school environment and fitness with family values, and (c) quality of teachers, teacher ethnicity, and teachers' sociocultural experiences. The majority of the participants indicated that they were impressed with the small school setting and the small classroom sizes that allowed their students to receive individualized attention that was not available in their children's previous traditional public schools. Parents reported that the individualized attention resulted in positive educational outcomes for their children. Parents also cited a welcoming school environment and feeling comfortable with the school staff. They noted that the school staff spoke with them with respect. In addition, parents noted that they valued the faculty composition of the school, which included both African American and Caucasian teachers. They reported that the majority of the African American teachers were male who could serve as positive role models for their children. Parents also noted that African American teachers identified more with their children's cultural values and would work better with their

children than Caucasian teachers. Parents indicated test scores and academic indicators as reasons for choosing the charter school.

Lewis and Danzig noted that parents in their study chose a charter school for similar reasons as other parents. They noted that parents based their preference for this predominantly African American charter school on racial injustices and prejudice that African American students have experienced. These parents noted they were comfortable discussing their children's education with fellow African Americans whom they believed understand both their children's academic, social, and cultural needs.

The authors cited some reasons why their findings could not be generalizable to all African American parents seeking to enroll their children in charter schools. The study was based on the critical race theory, and racial issues are complex to generalize because they cut across economics and education. However, the researchers restated that African American parents chose a segregated charter school because of the effects of race on their children's education.

This study highlights the influence of race on parental choice of charter schools, which I believe adds interesting dimensions into why certain groups of parents may choose to educate their children in certain charter schools. This is the only study that has investigated the relationship between the charter school choice and race. However, I believe the author did not include all the study's limitations. One key limitation I found in the study was the sample size of nine parents and a focus on one charter school. The views of nine parents regarding racial issues in schools cannot adequately represent many African American parents who may not see a more segregated school as a solution for addressing their children's educational and social needs.

Villavicencio (2013) interviewed 13 Black and Latino parents from one homogenous charter school and one racially diverse charter schools. Both participating charter schools were in New York City and had been in existence for three years or more. The author described homogenous schools as schools serving 95%-100% Black and Latino students and racially diverse schools as those serving 75% or less Black and Latino students. Villavicencio's purpose was to discover different factors that influenced student demographics in charter schools because New York charter schools were less diverse. Thirteen Black and Hispanic parents from Collegiate Charter were interviewed and 12 Black, Hispanic, Caucasian, and Asian parents from Success Academy were interviewed. Success charter school's student composition was more diverse than Collegiate Charter's student body. Collegiate Charter served 600 students in grades 6-12 with 70% of students proficient in English Language Art and 85% proficient in math, and with average class size of 19 students. The school was located in Bronx and it focused primarily at serving at-risk students. Collegiate Charter's main challenge was the administrators and faculty turnover. Success Academy was located in Manhattan and served 400 students in K-6 with 75% of the students proficient in English Language Arts and 90% of the students proficient in math. The average class size was 24, and there was no teacher turnover. Success Academy was more racially and economically diverse than Collegiate Charter.

The parent participants were recruited during the schools' parent meetings. The interview questions measured six areas that included background information on family and students; school selection process; comparison of the charter schools to other schools; parental perceptions about their charter school; their school's student composition; and the criteria parents used in selecting their schools and process for remaining in the school. In addition to interviews, the author also conducted informal observations which included parent tours, parent association

meetings, grade-level meetings, and school-wide events. The author also included student demographic information, missions of the two schools, and student population in the data.

Data analysis involved multiple stages, as data was first coded on paper prior to using an Atlas.ti, a qualitative software. These multiple coding process resulted in solidifying the codes that resulted in themes. The author also coded data obtained through observations. While some codes were removed, others pertaining to the research questions were arranged into various categories. This process resulted in identifying patterns, categories, and themes in both interview and observation data.

Villavicencio found variations in parental income, social network, access to information, perceptions of the school and the quality of neighborhood schools influenced how parents chose a charter school, stayed, or removed their child from the school. While some parents were more careful and strategic in choosing their charter schools, other parents did not have the resources such as access to information to engage in a comprehensive search of charter schools for their child. The parents who had limited access to information related to charter schools chose a charter school based primarily on recommendation and proximity to home; whereas, those who were more selective and careful in their search described the search process as challenging. Villavicencio found that parents who enrolled their child at the inception of Collegiate Charter School and Success Academy were more selective and dedicated with the search than newer parents. The researcher also found that there were differences in the reasons parents selected a charter school. Majority of the parents at all Collegiate Charter parents cited dissatisfaction with former schools as a reason for choosing the school. Parents cited poor quality teachers, overcrowded classrooms, weak curricula, and violence as problems facing public schools they left. On the other hand, only two of the 12 Success Academy parents cited dissatisfaction with

previous schools as a reason for choosing the school. Majority of the parents cited the school's features as the main reason for their choice of the school. Success Academy parents noted that they were attracted to the school's mission that focused on the holistic education for students rather than a focus on only math and reading. Parents also cited multicultural education and a wide of range of subjects such as music, art, and dance as factors that drew them to Success Academy.

Villavicencio also found that parents showed different behaviors related to the decision regarding whether to keep their child enrolled in a charter school. She concluded that affluent parents who were Caucasian, Asian, and affluent parents were more likely to withdraw their child from a failing charter school than less affluent Black and Latino parents who were more likely to retain their child in a failing school because of the fear that they might end up enrolling their child in traditional public schools with worse academic performance. These parents believed that charter school options were better than traditional public school options.

Villavicencio's study highlights that not all charter school parents engaged in a thorough search of schools for their child. While older charter school parents tend to engage in comprehensive searches of charter schools for their child, newer charter school parents are particularly concerned about enrolling their child in charter schools closer to home, and with less concerns for the academic quality of the school. As a result, this study reveals that some charter school parents are not particularly concerned about academy quality of their school as previous studies have claimed. Moreover, test scores and academic performance seem less important to parents who enroll their child in more diverse charter schools; rather these parents are more concerned about education experiences their children could gain from these schools. Furthermore, Villavicencio noted that social network, information, and other resources available

to parents tend to influence schooling options for their child. Also, the study shows that low-income Black and Latino parents tend to have limited options, as they believe that charter schools are better than their neighborhood traditional public schools.

Villavicencio noted that the study has some limitations. The study included a small number of parents from each school. Thus, the experiences of these parents cannot be generalized to other charter school parents in New York City and other charter schools. Although Villavicencio used interviews and observations for data collection, she analysis did not conduct a member check to allow parents to confirm that their experiences were correctly presented. This process is important in qualitative research to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study.

This study addresses the challenges that minority parents encountered when searching for schools for their children. Only a few studies have examined experiences of minority parents in relation to school choice. Hence, I believe this study provides important information on how key factors such as social network, capital and accessibility to information influence how parents choose charter schools for their children.

Vanderhoff (2008) sought to know whether test scores played in the decision of parents to enroll their students in New Jersey charter schools. Vandrehoff's study was informed by the increase in the number of students on the charter schools' admission wait lists in many of the New Jersey's charter schools. Data was obtained from the New Jersey School Report Card, which provided school and district-level data for the state's traditional and charter schools. The Report Cards consisted of information such as test scores, student demographics, schools' resources and learning environments, school finances, and teacher/staff information. Parents could access the Report Cards through mails, newspapers, and the state's department of education websites. The information in the Report Cards allowed parents to make decisions

related to school choice for their children. The data set comprised of 203 observations for the 1999/2000 to 2005/2006 school years for 42 elementary and middle school charter schools.

Vanderhoff noted that the number of observations for each charter school was differed because of various factors that included emergence of new charter schools each year and the closing of some charter schools for financial reasons and low student enrollment. Vanderhoff also analyzed special needs districts, which comprised of 36 out of 42 schools the author analyzed. Given this, parents had the school options between traditional and charter schools and among charter schools that served various grade levels. The 42 New Jersey charter schools had average waitlists of 184 students with only 40 slots for new students; indicating parental desire to educate their children in a charter school system. The schooling factors examined in the study were academic effectiveness, school resources, and the characteristics of students and schools for both charter and traditional public schools.

Vanderhoff's study showed interesting findings that highlighted differences between New Jersey charter schools and traditional public schools. First, traditional public school students performed better than charter school students on state's assessments. However, student compositions in charter schools are more diverse than traditional public schools. Eighty percent of minority students, typically, Black and Latino attended charter schools, compared to 78% of Black and Latino students in traditional public schools. While 60% of charter schools qualified for reduced lunch, 62% of traditional public school students qualified for this benefit.

Vanderhoff noted that New Jersey charter schools also spent less on students with \$11, 310 per student, compared to traditional public schools that spent \$13,790 per student. Moreover, charter schoolteachers earned far less than traditional public school teachers. Charter schools maintained smaller class sizes and impressive teacher-student ratios, compared to traditional public schools

with bigger class sizes. Finally, charter schools had more instructional time with 382 minutes than traditional public schools with 339 minutes. Hence, Vanderhoff noted that New Jersey charter schools that placed emphasis on academic excellence tended to have approximately 75% more students on their waitlists, as these parents valued increased instructional time in charter schools. Furthermore, Vanderhoff found that charter schools suspended students at a higher rate than traditional public schools. Furthermore, both poor and minority students tended to be on waitlists in the state's charter schools.

Vanderhoff concluded that while many parents in New Jersey were desperate to enroll their child in a charter school primarily for academic reasons, research has shown that charter schools do not perform better academically than traditional public schools. Additionally, Vanderhoff's findings revealed that certain characteristics draw parents to a charter school; and as result, parents differ in their valuation of New Jersey charter schools. Also, because New Jersey parents tend to choose charter schools for academic reasons, an increase in charter school test scores result in increased number of students on the waitlists for charter schools.

Vanderhoff's study shows interesting differences between traditional public schools and charter schools. It is one of the few studies that have examined some areas in which traditional public schools perform better than charter schools. Traditional public schools are better funded and have access to more resources than charter schools. I think these findings are interesting and have some implications for both charter school and traditional public school administrators and parents. Although, the researcher did not indicate the study's limitations, this study has a few limitations. First, the researcher obtained data only through the state report cards, which were available online. Surveys or interviews were not conducted that could allow parents to indicate

the reasons they preferred a charter school to a traditional public school. Also, the analysis of the report cards which was the primary source of data was not explained comprehensively.

Adzima (2014) investigated various factors that parents in Pennsylvania considered when enrolling their children in charter schools. Adzima's study focused mainly on charter school students in grades 3-6 for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. The author analyzed the annual report cards of 86 charter schools that made their information available online and conducted 497 observations. The data were made available by Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). Forty-nine urban charters in the Philadelphia City School District and 37 charter schools located throughout Pennsylvania were included in Adzima's study. Cyber charter schools were excluded because these schools did not usually have waitlists. All the 86 charter schools included in the study had waitlists, different educational philosophies, and served different student populations. For example, one charter school focused served low-income and underserved families; some charter schools focused primarily on science, math and technology; and some charter schools focused on college preparatory programs. Additionally, these charter schools differed in academic performances in reading and math. However, Adzima noted that charter schools in Philadelphia had better scores in math and reading than Philadelphia city school district. Similarly, charter schools located outside Philadelphia performed slightly better in math and reading than traditional public schools. Additionally, charter schools had 41% of White students compared to local school districts with 62%.

Adzima found that approximately 578 students were on waitlists in charter schools located within Philadelphia and approximately 219 students on waitlists for charter schools located outside Philadelphia area. Also, Adzima found that a number of factors were responsible for how parents valued charter schools that have subsequently resulted in increased demands for

charter school programs for their children. Parents valued academic performance that was closely tied to the test scores. Local school districts' poor test score accounted for the increase in the number of students in charter schools' waitlists. Charter schools that emphasis project-based instruction in the charter school mission statements were less valued by parents; whereas, parents valued charter schools whose mission statements fostered parental participation in a child's education. In addition, parents valued lunch subsidies attendance rates at charter schools, but placed less value on schools with free lunch and teacher certification. Adzima also found that charter schools located in the urban areas had larger waitlists than those in the rural areas. Factors such as instructional hours and student-teacher ratio, and number of years the charter school has been operating were insignificant to the charter school waitlists.

Adzima noted that this study draws an awareness to the reasons parents considered in selecting charter schools for their children. Importantly, the author advises charter school stakeholders and education policy makers to pay attention to reasons for increased number of students on the Pennsylvania charter school waitlists. While I find Adzima's study interesting because it clearly investigated factors that parents valued the most in charter schools located in Pennsylvania, the study has a number of limitations that were not addressed by the researcher. The author did not explain clearly how data were collected and analyzed. Adzima mentioned 497 observations; however, there were no clear explanations about how these observations were conducted.

Kleitz et al. (2000) conducted telephone surveys for 1,100 subgroups: Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, low-income, moderate-income, and high-income households whose students were attending charter schools in Texas. The surveys were conducted in 1997 and 1998 by the Survey Research Center of the University of North Texas and was designed to elicit how important

factors such as educational quality, class size, child's safety, school location, and social network such as friends were important parents in their selection of charter schools for their children. Of the six subgroups, Caucasian and higher-income households were the highest respondents to the surveys despite the researchers' efforts to increase participation from other subgroups. The surveys were analyzed, using descriptive statistics. The surveys were ranked based on the percentage of parental responses to each factor.

Kleitz et al found that all parental subgroups considered educational quality important or very important when choosing a charter school. The ranking for this factor ranged between 93%-96% among all the subgroups. Parents also rated class size, which was viewed as an indicator of quality education. The only noticeable difference in the ranking for this factor was among low-income and high-income parents, with 5.3% percentage points. The authors noted that all the subgroups considered class size an important factor in their decision to enroll their children in charter schools. Ranking for class size ranged between 83% to 88%. While there was a general consensus among all the six subgroups regarding quality education and class size, there were differences in the way these subgroups considered safety in schools. Racial and income differences play a role in participants' perceptions of safety. Although all the six subgroups in the study noted that safety was important in their consideration for a charter school, African American and Hispanic parents rated safety as important or very important than Caucasian parents whose rating was at 63%. 80% of Hispanic respondents and 74% of African American respondents rated safety important or very important. Also, low-income and moderate income households considered safety important or very important than high-income households. The ratings of safety indicate that Hispanic, low-income and moderate income families considered safety a more important than other three subgroups. Kleitz et al. noted the differences in how the

parents saw safety was due to neighborhoods in which their students attended schools. African American and Hispanic parents were more likely to have their students attend schools in dangerous urban cities, compared to Caucasian parents whose students were likely to attend schools in safer neighborhoods. All the subgroups expressed concern about school location; however, there were differences in how they perceived and rated school location. 78% of Hispanic parents expressed more concern about school location than 70% of African American parents compared to 53% of Caucasian parents. Also, 79% of low-income parents considered school location more important than 71% of the moderate-income parents who also considered location more important than 63% of the high-income parents. All the six subgroups did not consider having friends in charter schools an important factor in educating their children in charter schools. However, Hispanic parents (49%) and low-income parents (51%) noted that it was important or very important for their children to attend charter schools where they had friends.

Kleitz et al. noted that parents, irrespective of ethnicity and economic status considered quality education and class size almost equally important in their decisions to enroll their children in charter schools. Although, parents considered other safety, location, and friends factors as important, the racial and economic differences among the subgroups indicated they perceived these factors differently, as African American, Hispanic, low-income, and moderate-income families were more likely to rate these three factors more important than Caucasian and high-income families. Kleitz et al. noted that this study's study limitation was the use of survey for data collection.

This study adds interesting insights into the charter school research because key factors such as quality of education, class size, safety, and location that parents usually consider when

selecting a school for their child was examined. However, I think parents would have had the opportunity to provide additional comments for why they considered these factors important if the authors had included open-ended questions in the surveys. I also realized that the researchers failed to provide trustworthiness of the study; therefore, making the findings questionable.

May (2006) conducted a survey to investigate the reasons parents transferred their children from traditional public schools to independent charter schools in the Midwest Ohio. The researcher reported that 795 students withdrew from traditional public schools to attend charter schools within a two-year period. May used cross-sectional telephone interviews to survey the reasons parents/guardians chose to exit traditional public schools for charter schools. Ten trained conducted structured telephone interviews for 260 elementary and junior high urban parents/guardians whose children must have exited traditional public schools and enrolled in a charter school for at least two years. Each interview lasted seven to 15 minutes. Of the 260 parents/guardians who indicated interest in participating in the study, 237 were parents, nine were grandparents, and 14 were relatives. Participants' demographics included: 164 African Americans, 71 Caucasians, six Hispanics, 9 Other, and 10 participants did not declare their ethnicity.

The interview instrument consisted of nine major questions with five sub-questions designed to answer four research questions on (a) reasons parents/guardians provide for withdrawing their children from traditional public schools to charter schools; (b) what parents/guardians cited as motivating factors when choosing charter schools; (c) what reasons parents/guardians reported for reenrolling their children in charter schools; and (d) what factors would attract parents back to the public school. May reported the survey responses as percentages. The standard error of the mean, Confidence Interval and probability level were also

calculated. Additionally, she examined the commonalities in the parental responses that allowed for the description of the reasons parents cited for removing their children from traditional public schools and enrolling them in charter schools.

Parents cited a number of reasons for transferring their children from traditional public schools to charter schools. May presented these reasons in percentages according to the order of importance to parents who responded to her survey. Thirty-one percent of the parents noted that quality education played a key role in their decision to remove their children from a traditional school to a charter school while 16% of the parents cited safety as a key factor in their decision. Also, 12% of the survey respondents noted that disciplinary problems in traditional public schools was a reason for withdrawing their children from a traditional school and 12% cited class size as a reason. Ten percent and eight percent of the survey respondents cited individual attention and administration/or teaching staff in traditional public schools respectively were the reasons for removing their children from a traditional public school. Only six percent of the parents who responded to the survey mentioned that parent-teacher communication was a reason for their decision to withdraw their children from a traditional public school. Quality education, safety and discipline concerns, and class size were the top four reasons parents left traditional public schools for charter schools. Parents expressed concerns about reenrolling their children in traditional concerns. These concerns centered on lack of individualized attention (31%), poor education (22%), safety (21%), and poor discipline (14%). Sixteen percent of the parents indicated that they did not have any concerns and 12% indicated they would not reenroll their children in traditional public schools. Eighty percent of the parents assigned a grade of A or B to their charter school because they believed that the charter school had quality education, positive image and good teachers. May also reported that 78% of the parents reported that they had a

better experience at charter schools and were satisfied with the quality of education charter schools offered their children while 17% reported that their experiences at a charter school and a traditional public school were the same. Only 6% of the parents reported having a better experience at a traditional public school. Parents cited factors such as improved test scores, individualized attention, after school care, and disciplined setting as factors that could attract and motivate them to reenroll their children in traditional public schools. However, majority of the (79%) of the parent respondents noted that they would reenroll their children in charter schools while 17% noted that they would not put their children back in a charter school, and five percent were unsure.

May offers a number of recommendations to traditional public schools in area of meeting the needs of parents leaving for public schools for charter schools. She noted that traditional public schools have established means and resources to provide effective educational services for parents. May noted that charter schools were successful because they maintained smaller class sizes and provided individualized attention that typically lure parents into charter school programs. She advised traditional public schools to have the features that endear parents to charter schools.

I believe May's study offers useful insights into charter school literature. This is a broad study that looks critically into why parents believe they are more satisfied with charter schools; however, it is only the affective factors such as small classroom, individualized attention, and perceived safety at charter schools that have actually drawn to these schools, not that charter schools are actually more effective than their traditional school counterparts. Moreover, as May noted, research has not proven that charter school students perform academically better than traditional public school students. Additionally, this study used a robust sample of 260 urban

parents. This will make the findings generalizable to parents who seek urban charter schools for their children.

Parents of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students. One study investigated the reasons parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students sought charter school for their child. Whitting and Feinauer (2011) conducted a survey research study to investigate the reasons parents chose to enroll their children in SunnyCreek Elementary School, a two-way immersion (TWI) charter school that provided instruction in both English and Spanish languages and whether household characteristics in the school community correlated with the reasons parents chose to enroll their child in the school . The school was in a low-income, predominantly Latino neighborhood in Utah. The school's mission statement boasts of promoting biliteracy and bilingualism in Spanish and English and creating multicultural awareness. Instructions were provided evenly between English and Spanish. The student population was diverse with 50% Latino and 50% Caucasian; hence half of the parents spoke English and half spoke Spanish as primary languages.

The researchers sent surveys to all households that had children enrolled in the charter school. The survey was developed by Lindholm-Leary and Hargett (2006) and was adapted for the study by the researchers. Overall, 287 parents returned completed surveys, making it 79% return rate. The sample size and response rates for both Spanish and English-speaking parents were about the same. The survey measured school attitudes, background characteristics, educational and language experiences and the reasons parents chose the charter school. Parents were also instructed to respond to the open-ended question that asked them to list the reasons for choosing to enroll their child in SunnyCreek Elementary School. Three hundred and forty-one responses were provided for the open-ended question.

The researchers used SPSS to analyze parental reasons for choosing the charter school and characteristics of the parent participants. Two bilingual assistants translated the Spanish responses to English version. Chi-square statistics and correlational analyses were used to show the relationships between the reasons parents cited for enrolling their child in a charter school and household characteristics. Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed by three different researchers, using the open-coding strategy. The codes that emerged from the open-ended responses were categorized into major themes that highlighted reasons parents chose TWI school.

The demographic results revealed that 70% of the TWI parents were Hispanic while 25% identified as Caucasian. This result suggests that many of the Hispanic parents no longer spoke Spanish. Additionally, majority of the parents earned between \$21,000 to \$40,000, while only 13% earned over \$80,000 annually. Forty percent did not have post-secondary education and approximately 60% had some form of post-secondary education. Further, results indicated that while some parents travelled a long distance to bring their child to school, others lived within the school neighborhood.

Parents in the study cited bilingualisms/biliteracy, educational experiences, future and career opportunities, cultural immersions/diversity, preserving heritage, and proximity to home as reasons for choosing to educate their children in TWI charter school. Parents also reported many positive outcomes that emerged from enrolling their children in the TWI charter schools. They cited bilingual instruction and future career opportunities for their children, cultural and heritage preservations, proximity to home, and overall positive educational experiences with the school as primary reasons they chose a dual-language charter school. Of the 143 parents who responded to the open-ended question, 132 cited bilingualism and opportunity for biliteracy as a

key reason for enrolling their child in a dual-language school. Whiting and Feinauer highlighted that parents were excited about the opportunity the TWI charter school offered their child to learn English and Spanish. Sixty-six of the respondents cited educational experiences as a reason for choosing the school. These parents reported that their child would learn more and had better educational opportunities and received individualized attention. Thirty respondents noted they were attracted to the school because of culture and diversity. Parents reported that their child would have the opportunity to learn about other cultures, other than their own cultures. Furthermore, 36 of the 143 parents cited preservation of cultural heritage as a factor that motivated them to choose the TWI programs for their child. These parents noted that they wanted their child to stay connected to family culture and language. Ten parents also reported proximity to school as a reason for choosing TWI charter school. Parents noted that being close to school provided some convenience for them.

Regarding whether household characteristics correlated with parental reasons for selecting to educate their child at the school, the researchers found that 90%-100% of parents who identified with a particular religion cited bilingualism and biliteracy as a factor for choosing the charter school compared to 33% of non-religious parents. In addition, Caucasian parents cited educational opportunities as a major reason for enrolling their child in TWI charter school programs than Hispanic and other groups of parents. Also, parents with high school and graduate education attainments cited educational experiences and opportunities as a reason for enrollment in TWI charter school than parents with some college and vocational trainings. The researchers also found that two-parent household reported future and career opportunities as a reason for selecting the TWI programs for their child than other categories of households in the study. Interestingly, 40% of English-speaking parents cited culture and diversity as a reason for

choosing TWI charter school; whereas, only 12% of Spanish-speaking parents, and 14% of Hispanic parents reported choosing to enroll their child in the school for this reason. Similarly, parents with highest incomes and parents with bachelor's degree and graduate education cited culture and diversity at a higher rate for choosing the school. a charter school for culture and diversity present in the school. There were no differences among the households regarding preserving heritage as a reason for enrolling a child in a charter school. Lastly, there were major differences among households that reported proximity and convenience as a reason for choosing TWI. Eight to 10 percent of Caucasian and Hispanic parents cited this reason at higher rate than four out of 10 parents in other ethnicity category. It should be noted that 33% of the parents who cited this reason were single parents or households with two to three adults, which made up of 29% of the parents that reported proximity as a reason for selecting the school. Moreover, 30% of the parents who cited proximity as a reason lived within one mile to the school.

This study has notable implications for charter schools and culturally and linguistically diverse parents. Findings show that despite cultural diversity and household characteristics, majority of the parents value inherent advantages bilingualism and biliteracy offer students. Parents noted that bilingualism and biliteracy not only provide positive educational experiences for their child, but also opens the door for opportunities for future careers. This perception accounts for the reason 92% of the parents in the study rated bilingualism and biliteracy as the most important reason for choosing to educate their child in two-way immersion programs. Moreover, opportunity for multicultural education attracts parents to the school. This study also highlights the importance Caucasian parents place on diversity and interaction with students from other cultural backgrounds. Therefore, these parents will not hesitate in enrolling their child in a school that offers multicultural education and diversity in order to provide diverse and

linguistic education for their child. Moreover, this study enlightens us that minority parents are not one monolithic group but may consist of English-speaking parents who may also be Hispanic, as evidenced in this study. Finally, the study provides useful information to policy makers and charter schools that schools that offer two-way immersion programs are likely to attract different groups of parents.

Whitting and Feinauer did not mention any implications of the study. However, one notable implication is the inclusion of only one two-way immersion charter school. The experiences and reasons parents in the study chose the school may not be reflective of the reasons why parents in other two-way immersion programs chose to enroll their child in such school. Hence, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other schools that offer dual-language programs.

The authors utilized chi-square statistics to show relationships among the six reasons parents chose TWI programs and analyzed the responses to the open-ended questions qualitatively. The multiple ways in which data were obtained and analyzed provided for the trustworthiness of the study. Only a few studies have specifically investigated the reasons culturally and linguistically diverse parents access charter schools; hence, I believe this study adds valuable insights into factors that drive this subgroup of parents into charter schools.

Conclusion. Overall, 10 studies highlighted the reasons parents chose to educate their child in a charter school. Finn et al. (2006), Waitoller and Super (2017) and Lange and Lehr (2000) specifically focused on the reasons parents of students with disabilities accessed charter school programs for their child. However, Lange and Lehr (2000) included both parents of students with and without disabilities in their study. The other eight studies focused primarily on parents of students without disabilities. Whitting and Feinauer (2013) was the only study that

investigated the reasons culturally and linguistically diverse parents enrolled their child in a charter school. Studies that examined the reasons parents of students with disabilities sought charter schools for their child have common findings. In all these three studies, parents commonly cited academic excellence, special education services, small school/class sizes, school-family communication, disciplinary/safety, and dissatisfaction with former schools as key reasons for enrolling their child in a charter school accessed charter school programs for their child shared common findings. As I previously stated, only Lange and Lehr included both parents of students with and without disabilities in their study; however, it is important to note that besides special education services factor, parents of students without disabilities chose charter schools for similar reasons as parents of students with disabilities. Although only two of the three studies, Finn et al. (2006) and Lange and Lehr (2000) noted the categories of disabilities in which students were receiving services, it is evident that students with learning disabilities, hearing impairment, speech impairment, emotional disturbance, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and Asperger syndrome sought charter school programs at higher rates than students in other disability categories. The eight studies that investigated parental choice of charter schools for students without disabilities also have common findings. The top reasons parents cited accessing charter schools for their child included quality education, small class size, safety, and disciplinary policies of charter schools.

While there are similar findings in the eight studies, it is important to note some differences in the eight studies. Studies like Vanderhoff (2008) and Adzima (2014) specifically noted that parents sought charter schools mainly for improved test scores for their child. Hence, parental perceptions of academic performance or quality education focused primarily on good test scores. Additionally, of all the eight studies, Vanderhoff (2008) and Adzima (2014) obtained

data through the analyses of the charter school report cards to determine the reasons for increased numbers of students in the charter schools' waitlists. Evidently, unlike other six studies in this category, there was no direct involvement of parents in these two studies. Although all the eight studies included parents of students without disabilities; it is worth pointing out that only Kleitz et al. (2000) sought the reasons various subgroups of parents including Caucasian, Black, Latino, low-income, moderate-income, and high-income parents sought to educate their child in a charter school. Kleitz and colleagues noted that although all groups of parents considered quality academic performance important in their decision to enroll their child in a charter school, minority, low-income, and moderate-income families were more concerned about safety and school locations. Such diverse parental perspectives about charter schools were lacking in other studies that I reviewed for this study. It is important to note that only Whitting and Feinauer included culturally and linguistically diverse parents enrolled their child in a charter school. Although the researchers included Caucasian parents, it was interesting to know that both Caucasian and Latino parents valued bilingualism and multicultural education. Similarly, Lewis and Danzig (2010) examined the impact of race theory on parental choice of charter schools; and how parents could be drawn to certain charter schools because of their racial background. These two studies provide some differences from the other studies reviewed as there is a limited research on why CLD parents and African American parents choose charter schools for their children.

Overall, I reviewed 10 studies that utilized various methods to investigate the reasons parents chose charter schools for their students. Four studies used interviews to obtain information pertaining to reasons parents enrolled their child in a charter school; two studies analyzed the charter school report cards, which were available online; and four studies used

surveys. Of the four studies that used surveys, three studies included open-ended questions in the surveys that allowed parents to provide written responses.

Finally, the top commonly cited reasons for parental choice of charter schools in all the 11 studies reviewed under parental choice of charter schools were: quality education, small school/class sizes, disciplinary policies/safety, special education services, and school-family communication.

Parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools

Three studies examined parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools. Julius (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study using an on-line survey and on-site focus group interviews to examine the experiences of New Hampshire charter school parents and their perceptions about charter schools. Of the 690 charter school families in the New Hampshire's 10 charter schools, 300 surveys were sent to the families; however, 295 families returned completed surveys, while five skipped some questions in the survey. The return rate was resulting in the 43%. Nine out of 10 New Hampshire charter schools participated in the study. Julius sought to collect the following information: (a) demographics of the household, parents, and children, (b) parents' experience prior to and after enrolling a child in a charter school, and (c) parent's perceptions about charter schools. Julius visited each of the participating chart school and conducted focus group interviews to hear directly from the parents regarding their experiences with their child's school. The most attended focus groups had 12 parents, while no parents participated in two schools. Information from the interviews allowed for clarification of the parents' responses to the open-ended questions in the survey. The qualitative data analyses included the audiotapes of the interviews and descriptive. The author tallied positive, neutral, and negative responses to the open-ended questions. This was followed with coding and identifying

common themes. Descriptive analyses for each question was conducted, using the online software Survey Monkey.

The demographic data revealed that 80% of New Hampshire charter school parents were college-educated; 87% lived in two-parent /guardian households; 78% were over 40 years old; 90% were Caucasian, and 84% had an annual household income of \$50,000 and above. Additionally, 76% of the participants had a child in a charter and 81% of the students were in 7th grade or higher. Seventy-four percent 74% the New Hampshire charter school parents had previously enrolled their children in traditional public schools and 40% of the parents had their child in a charter school for at least one year.

The top four reason parents rated as their reasons for choosing New Hampshire charter schools were philosophy of the school, academic reputation of the school, dissatisfaction with previous school experience, and ability of the school to meet their child's special needs. The least reason for choosing a charter school was convenience. The four top aspects in which parents expressed satisfaction with the charter schools were academics, quality teaching overall school culture, and meeting child's needs. Parents rated on-line resources, facility, and non-academic opportunities as the least satisfying aspects.

Furthermore, the open-ended question allowed parents to provide additional comments about their experiences with charter schools. 156 of the 300 parents wrote positive and negative comments. Parents indicated they were satisfied with the personal attention charter schools offered for their child's needs. Parents also indicated they were pleased with the academic and social culture at the charter school and that their child was appreciated by the school staff. Parents indicated they were satisfied with their child's progress at the charter school. Parents noted that they were dissatisfied with the funding process at charter school, administration and

infrastructure at the charter school, lack of after-school programs, and problems related to open enrollment.

Julius noted that the study has some limitations. First, schools with the highest response rates were unknown; and as a result, some participating charter schools could be underrepresented. Second, lower-income families could also be underrepresented in the study because at least three of the schools had 20 percent of the families qualify as low-income families. Lastly, the author depended on the school administrators to remind parents to complete the on-line survey; hence, the frequency of reminders varied from school to school.

Julius noted that New Hampshire charter schools were satisfied with the charter schools and reported that their experiences with the schools were generally positive. However, they were unhappy with the poor funding and infrastructures at the charter schools. The author advised that parents should be informed about the operations of charter schools in New Hampshire. Most of the participating parents reported having inadequate information about charter schools but based their decisions to enroll their children in charter schools on faith.

This is a good study that used mixed-methods approach to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. Although focus interviews were conducted, the author did not conduct member checking to confirm the information obtained from the parents. There were no clear indications of the trustworthiness of the qualitative data.

Almond (2013) investigated the reasons African American parents removed their children from traditional public schools and enrolled them in Micro-Enterprise Charter Academy (MECA), a minority charter school located in Long Beach, California and parental satisfaction with the school. The school had a student population of 112 parents and served grades six through eight. The student population was predominantly African American (84%) and female

(56%). Almond wanted to know: (a) factors that influenced African American parents' decisions to transfer their children from traditional public schools and enrolled them in charter schools; (b) African American parents' degree of satisfaction with their decisions to enroll their children in charter schools; and (c) how parents identify their satisfaction with the charter school environments.

Almond obtained data through surveys that were completed anonymously by 71 parents who indicated consent to participate in the study. Majority of the survey respondents were mothers (55) and married (22). Also, majority of the survey respondents were between the ages of 45-49 and the majority of the respondents (23) reported earning less than \$20,000 annually. Other survey respondents incomes ranged between \$20,000-\$50,000 or more annually. The surveys were given to parents in paper form through their students and by the researcher at a parent meeting. The survey consisted of 41 items and consisted of 28 items that asked parents to rate questions 1-12 and 28-30 on a Likert scale of 1 to 3, with one being not important and 3 being very important while parents were asked to rate questions 13-25 on a Likert scale of 1 to 4, with one being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree. The survey also consisted of five closed-ended questions, one open-ended questions, and seven demographic questions.

Almond found that 76% of the parents transferred their students from a traditional public school to a charter school; 7% from a private school to a charter school; 13% from a charter school; and 4% from homeschooling. Parents cited a number of reasons that were somewhat important to them for enrolling their child at a charter school. Parents reported that they enrolled their child at MECA because they were dissatisfied with the previous school, poor academic performance at previous school, current charter school's proximity to home, and diversity at their child's current school. Parents noted the following reasons as important or very important in

their decisions to choose MECA for their child accordingly: the schools' focus on technology and entrepreneurship, safe learning environment, positive information about charter schools and MECA's mission of preparing students for college, and desire for school choice options for their child.

In the areas of satisfaction with the charter school, Almond found that 85% of the parents reported that they were satisfied with MECA while 15% reported they were dissatisfied with the school. Also, 84% of the survey respondents noted that they would recommend the charter school, and 16% felt otherwise. Additionally, 80% of the parents were satisfied that the school paid attention to their child's needs and 20% reported that MECA did not address their child's needs. Furthermore, Almond found that 76% of the MECA's parents were pleased with the expectations the school placed on their child, while 24% of the parents were dissatisfied. Also, 80% of the parents were satisfied with how their child took ownership of their own learning; whereas, 20% felt dissatisfied in this area and noted that their child was more engaged academically at previous schools. Almond also found that 60% of the survey respondents noted that their child's former school placed less emphasis on college preparation while 40% felt otherwise. Additionally, 85% of the parents were satisfied with MECA's emphasis on testing and 15% were dissatisfied. Also, 63% of the parents were dissatisfied with their child's grades at previous school, while 37% were pleased with their child's grades. Also, 86% of the parents were satisfied with the small class sizes at MECA, compared to 14% who expressed a dissatisfaction. Lastly, 91% of the survey respondents indicated that it was important that their child attend college and six percent indicated it was somewhat important.

Almond noted some limitations with the study that impact the generalizability of the findings. The study used a small size of one school with only 112 students; therefore, findings of

the study were not generalizable to the entire charter schools and African American community. Almond also noted that participants included diverse racial/ethnic groups, and, as a result, it was not targeting only African American students. Finally, the study highlighted only the experiences of parents of middle school students; therefore, the perspectives and experiences of elementary and secondary school students were lacking. Thus, the study could not be said to represent the views of these groups of parents.

Almond asserted that the findings of the study indicate that parents are generally satisfied with the charter schools their child attends. She noted that the study confirms previous research findings that have consistently noted that smaller class sizes and safe environment account for major reasons parents choose to educate their child in a charter school. The author draws awareness to the reasons African American parent are seeking charter school programs for their children. Almond noted that emergence of charter schools has been able to address academic challenges and poor academic performances of African American students through provision of conducive and safe learning environments that attract African American parents.

This study provides important information on why African American parents seek charter school programs for their children. However, I believe the researcher failed to include parents' responses to the open-ended question she claimed was included in the study. I also did not see any difference between research questions 1 and 2. As seen in the study, the researcher eventually answered only two research questions. I feel research question in the study was redundant.

Saatcioglu et al. (2011) investigated the relationship between parental expectations and satisfaction with charter schools. The authors surveyed 396 Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic parents of children attending charter schools in a large Midwestern city school district. The

participating charter schools were sponsored by a local university. The local university set similar curricular and performance standards for all the schools; however, each school had the autonomy to focus on specific areas such as science, commerce, technology, and religion. The data collection process involved multiple stages that included the sponsoring university giving permission to its 10 charter schools to participate in the study as long as the researchers maintained anonymity of the participating schools; each charter school's principal were required to permit the researchers access to parents; and surveys were administered to parents during the parent-school conference. Seven charter schools participated in the study from which 396 of the 1,082 responded to the surveys. However, six of the surveys could not be used; thereby, making it a response rate of 36%. Two of the participating charter schools enrolled K-5 students; two enrolled K-8, and the remaining three enrolled six-eight graders. The average enrollment for the schools was 155 students. Parents who had more than one student were instructed to respond only for their oldest student. Demographic information such as student gender, race/ethnicity, family income, parents' educational backgrounds, and household structure were collected in the survey. Majority of the participants were African American (54%) while parents who identified themselves as Asians, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders under the category of "other" were the least (9%). Majority of the students lived in a single-parent household (56%), and 46% of the students were male. The survey also measured how long students had been attending the charter school, and whether parents were willing to move out of the district if a charter school was not available. Parents were instructed to indicate their response on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly preferring to stay and 5 being strongly preferring to move. The researchers asked parents to rate their degree of satisfaction with how their charter child's charter school was doing its job. Parents were instructed to rate their degree of satisfaction on a Likert scale of 1-5, with

one being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. Additionally, parents were asked to rate 15 different expectations of their child's charter school in order of importance on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very unimportant and 5 being very important. The expectation items in the survey included parental involvement, teacher quality, peer quality, curricular benefits, location, reputation, success of graduates, safety, social atmosphere, facilities, extra amenities, innovativeness, school culture, athletic activities, and non-athletic activities. Additionally, parents were asked to respond briefly to an open-ended question regarding the most important improvement they wanted to see at their children's charter schools. Specifically, the researchers sought to know (a) aspects of parental expectations and satisfaction with their child's charter school; (b) if parents considered these expectations more important than others in determining satisfaction; and (c) whether survey items such as education, race, and social-economic status influenced parental satisfaction with charter schools.

The researchers employed factorial analysis to analyze the 15 parental expectation questions to find out if there are other underlying dimensions of parental expectations. In addition ANOVA tests were conducted for the mean differences of parental expectations across race/ethnicity, income, family structure, and mother's level of education. Finally, the open-ended question was analyzed qualitatively, using the thematic coding that involved two different coders. The coders reached approximately ninety percent agreement and finally came up with themes that emerged from the question.

In the answer to parental expectations from charter schools, Saatcioglu et al. noted parental expectations in three areas accordingly: academics, school context, and extracurricular. Parents had high expectations for academics, which encompasses factors such as opportunities for parents to participate in schools activities, quality and effectiveness of teachers, post-

secondary success for students, and student safety. For school environment, parental expectations included supportive learning environment, effective facilities for instructional and noninstructional activities, and innovativeness. Parental expectations for extracurricular activities included athletic activities like football or baseball and non-athletic activities like debate team or choir. Parents expressed a higher degree of satisfaction with academic expectations, followed by school context expectations, and extracurricular expectations.

In the answer to whether expectations from charter schools differ by parental backgrounds, findings showed that satisfaction levels were high Caucasian, Black, Hispanic parents and parents in “other.” Similar levels of satisfaction were reported for family’s income, mother’ education level, and family structure. This finding suggests that charter school parents were happy and satisfied irrespective of their social economic and family backgrounds. Similarly, the researchers found that, parents, irrespective of backgrounds had similar expectations from charter schools. Additionally, irrespective of family’s income, education, and race, parents in this study had similar expectations from their children’s charter schools. However, Hispanic parents had higher expectations for extracurricular activities and considered it more important than other groups of parents in the study. Whereas, higher-income parents considered extracurricular activities less important than lower-income parents.

Regarding the areas where charter schools need to make improvements, parents differed in their responses. Eighteen percent of Caucasian parents with below academic expectations noted that their charter school needed to improve facilities and after-school facilities. They needed improvements in the quality of lunch, cafeteria, and sports and art activities. Whereas, 24% of Black parents with below average social context expectations reported that their charter

school needed to improve athletic programs and parent-teacher relationships. Hispanic parents noted cited that charter schools needed to improve on student discipline and safety.

Saatcioglu et al. noted that findings from the study has some important implications for charter school parents. Charter school parents have certain expectations from their charter school, and in this study these expectations were analyzed in three categories that included academic expectations, school context, and extracurricular activities. Their findings revealed not only did charter school parents maintained a high level of expectations in these three areas, they expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their charter school in all the three areas. Interestingly, the parental expectations and satisfaction with the charter schools spawned across all parents, irrespective of socioeconomic status or race/ethnicity. Although expectations from parents were uniform, it should be noted that parents from different race/ethnicity considered certain expectations from charter schools more important in determining satisfaction. This study provides important information and insights into factors charter school parents consider satisfying. Moreover, the study sheds light on what parents expect from the charter schools and how these expectations are tied to levels of satisfaction. Given this, this critical finding does not provide information for charter schools on how to continually attract parents, but also allows traditional public schools to understand the ways to compete with charter schools and lure fleeing parents and students back to traditional public schools. Given that Black and Hispanic parents placed emphasis on school context and extracurricular activities respectively, it may be helpful for traditional public schools to expend their resources to improve these areas in order to attract parents. However, Caucasian parents who have high academic expectations and base their satisfaction on such expectations may be dissuaded from seeking traditional public schools for their children.

This is one of the few studies that have specifically investigated parental expectations and how these expectations relate to parental satisfaction with charter schools. I believe this is a robust study that utilized multiple tools for data analysis. The authors used factorial analysis, ANOVA, and multiple regression to analyze quantitative data. This provides for the reliability of the quantitative findings. Additionally, the use of two coders for the analysis of qualitative comments and ninety percent agreement on the final themes indicates the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. One downside of this study is that the authors did not indicate the study's limitations. Including parents of students with disabilities and rural parents would have provided important insights into what all groups of parents expect from charter schools and parental levels of satisfaction with the expectations.

Conclusion. The three studies that I reviewed under this section highlighted the experiences parents had with their child's charter school and their degree of satisfaction with the school. These three studies share common findings. Majority of the parent participants in all the three studies (Almond, 2013; Julius; 2011; Saatcioglu et al., 2011) reported that they were drawn into charter schools because they were dissatisfied with the traditional public schools their child previously attended. Other common findings include parental satisfaction with the academics and instructional quality at charter schools. Additionally, across the studies parents expressed satisfaction with student safety at the charter school and the smaller class sizes in these schools. Parents also expressed satisfaction with the way charter schools paid attention to individual student's needs. In all the three studies, parents were satisfied with their child's charter school college preparatory programs and post-secondary expectations charter schools placed on all students. Although parents were generally pleased with the charter schools, parents in two of the

three studies (Julius, 2011; Saatcioglu et al., 2011) expressed dissatisfaction with poor facilities/infrastructures and lack of extra-curricular activities in charter schools.

All the three studies used surveys. Unlike Julius (2011) and Saatcioglu et al.'s (2011) studies in which open-ended questions were included in the surveys, Almond's (2013) study did not include open-ended questions. Data analyses were more comprehensive in studies that used surveys with both closed and open-ended questions, as the analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics and coding and identifying themes for quantitative and qualitative data respectively. It is also important to note that both Almond (2013) and Julius (2011) used percentages to identify the degree in which parents expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction with various characteristics of their charter school, compared to Saatcioglu et al. that used various statistical analyses to identify parental expectations and satisfaction with aspects of their charter school.

Although all the articles have common findings regarding the areas in which parents were pleased with charter schools and highlighted their positive experiences with these schools, there are few notable differences in these studies. Saatcioglu et al.'s study included Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic parents. Hence, this study was able to project the experiences and the degree of satisfaction of diverse parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. On the contrary, Almond's study examined only the experiences and satisfaction levels of only African American parents in one single school, while 90% of the participants in Julius's study were Caucasian. Hence, parental experiences and perspectives regarding satisfaction in these two studies are limited to parents from certain ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Synthesis of the Reviewed Studies. Previous studies that have investigated the reasons parents are choosing charter schools for their child have found that parents are selecting these

schools for a number of reasons. Although the reasons for parental choice of charter schools are similar across the existing research, it is important to note that quality academic programs play a critical role in the parental choice of charter schools. Other commonly cited reasons that motivate parents to choose charter schools include smaller school/class sizes, student safety/disciplinary policies, opportunity for parental involvement, and school-family communication. The few charter school studies that examined the reasons parents of children with disabilities enrolled their child in charter schools have specifically noted that special education services, individualized attention, small classroom settings, and effective communication between parents and schools were fundamental reasons this group of parents access charter schools. Although parents of children with disabilities considered all the aforementioned reasons important in their selection of charter schools, special education services are a major reason for their decisions.

Although only Lange and Lehr investigated the reasons parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities chose charter schools, the findings of these researchers clearly indicate strongly support previous research (Estes, 2004, 2009) that parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities are accessing charter schools for several reasons. Besides special education services, there were no significant differences in the reasons that motivated these two groups of parents to educate their child in a charter school. Although there are commonalities in the reasons both parents of children with disabilities and parents of children without disabilities access charter schools, these are differences in the ways they reported their experiences and of satisfaction with charter schools, particularly in the areas related to academic outcomes for their child. For instance, parents of students with disabilities were more satisfied with their child's confidence in ability, child's teachers, higher educational goals, and

relationship with friends. These findings are not surprising given that children with disabilities are often more academically and socially challenged in schools than their peers without disabilities. This is not to say that parents of children without disabilities were unhappy with these aspects of their child's charter school. It is important to note that of the 13 studies I reviewed, only Lange and Lehr's (2000) critically examined reasons parents of students with disabilities and parents of students without disabilities chose charter schools and the degree in which these parents were satisfied with these schools after enrollment. This suggests the need for additional research in these two important areas in charter school research investigating the topic of parental choice of charter schools for children with disabilities. While Finn et al. (2006) and Lange and Lehr (2000) provided information regarding the disability categories included in their studies, such information was lacking in Waitoller and Super's (2017) study. Parents of children receiving special education services under the 13 disability categories were included in the studies; however, the disabilities that had major representations included specific learning disabilities, hearing impairments, speech impairments, attention deficit hyperactive disorders, Asperger syndrome, and emotional disturbance. Other disabilities were minimally represented at less than five percent. Although the reviewed studies examined parental reasons and satisfaction with charter schools, only Whitting and Feinauer (2013) included culturally and linguistically diverse students. Parents of these students expressed important perspective regarding bilingual and multicultural education that they considered important for positive educational outcomes for their children. Importantly, this study highlighted the desire of parents of bilingual students for their child be bilingual and experience multicultural education in a diverse school setting.

Studies that investigated parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools strongly noted that parents reported having positive experiences with the charter schools.

Majority of the parents cited academics, quality teaching, small school/class size settings, and higher expectations for students and focus on post-secondary education as the areas in which they were mostly satisfied with charter schools. Lack of infrastructures and extracurricular activities were cited as least satisfying aspects of charter schools.

Twelve out 13 (92%) of the reviewed studies were conducted in urban settings in which six were in the midwestern; five in the eastern; and one in the southern areas of the United States. Of the 13 reviewed studies, only Finn et al.'s (2006) study was conducted in a charter school located in the rural area in the Midwest, indicating a total of seven studies conducted in the Midwest. The dearth of charter school research focusing on parental choice of charter schools in rural settings and suburban settings is evident in charter school literature, as majority of the research examining the reasons parents choose charter school focus mainly on charter schools located in the settings.

Most of the existing research on the topic of reasons parents enroll their child in charter schools often use quantitative methods. In this review of literature, nine studies used the quantitative methods. Two of these nine studies used the charter school report cards that were made available online by the state departments of education. The remaining seven studies survey instrument for collecting data. Five of the seven studies included open-ended questions in the surveys, while two studies did not include open-ended questions. The remaining four studies were qualitative in which interviews were conducted to obtain information relevant to parental choice of charter schools and subsequent experiences and satisfaction with charter schools.

As I previously stated, research regarding parental choice of charter schools and subsequent parental experiences and satisfaction with charter schools is rare. The existing research strongly supports that parents have varied reasons for enrolling their child in charter

schools. Each reviewed study has built on the previous studies that parents seek charter schools for academic excellence and other factors such as small class size, individualized attention, and student safety that are closely related to academic achievements for students. Although only one study included both parents of students with and without disabilities, it is interesting to note that both groups of parents sought charter school programs for the same reasons. I found it useful information that parents in Finn et al. (2006) and Villavicencio (2013) expressed serious concerns about the faculty turnover rates in charter schools, and how such problem could adversely affect educational outcomes for students with disabilities. In areas of satisfaction, besides poor infrastructures and lack of facilities, parents were satisfied with the academic gains their child made in charter schools.

Although based on the findings of the existing research, parents were generally happy with their experiences with charter schools and reported high degrees of satisfaction with most of the features of their children's charter schools, there are areas of concern with the instruments that a few of the studies used to obtain data. I believe that analysis of the charter school report cards by Adzima (2014) and Vanderhoff (2011) to determine the reasons parents sought charter schools was unsuitable to address such important topic in charter school literature. Furthermore, the absence of triangulation and member checking in four of the qualitative studies call for concerns about the trustworthiness of the studies' findings. In addition, the absence of open-ended questions in some surveys denied parents the opportunity to highlight their reasons for choosing a charter school and their subsequent experiences with these schools. According to May (2006), school choice remains one of the most debated issues in public education and the emergence of charter school system has even remained more contentious. As a result, I believe

that research examining the reasons parent are implementing their school choice rights should be disseminated for the benefits of public education stakeholders.

Finally, choosing a child's school can represent a complicated process for parents to navigate. While many believe that children with disabilities are directly affected by school choice policy, there is little research on what reasons motivate parents of students with disabilities to choose one school over another. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research focusing on parental experiences and satisfaction after enrolling their child with a disability in a charter school.

Table 1 highlights studies that examined parental choice of charter schools and parental satisfaction with charter schools.

Table 1

Previous Studies that Examine Parental Choice of Charter Schools and Parental Satisfaction with Charter Schools

Author	Number of Participants	Setting	Method
Adzima	n/a	Pennsylvania charter schools	Analysis of charter school report cards
Almond (2013)	N=71	MECA charter school, CA	Surveys
Finn et al. (2006)	N=7	Midwest rural area	Interviews
Julius (2011)	N=295	NH charter schools	Surveys & focus group interviews
Kleitzi et al. (2000)	N=1, 100	Texas charter schools	Surveys
Lange & Lehr (2000)	N=608	Minnesota charter schools	Surveys
Lewis & Danzig (2010)	N=8	Armstrong Charter School, Southern city	Interviews

May (2006)	N=260	Ohio charter schools	Surveys
Saatcioglu et al. (2011)	N=396	Midwest	Surveys
Vanderhoff (2008)	n/a	New Jersey charter schools	Analysis of report cards
Villavicencio (2013)	N=25	Collegiate Charter & Success Academy, New York City	Interviews
Waitoller & Super (2017)	N=24	Chicago Public Schools	Interviews
Whitting & Feinaur (2011)	N=287	SunnyCreek Elementary School, Utah	Surveys

Chapter 3

Methods

Over the years, the charter school system has gained increased attention at state and federal levels. Many parents, especially parents of children with disabilities, are eager to enroll their children in charter schools; however, the reasons motivating these parents to make such educational decision and their subsequent experiences with charter schools have not been fully examined in charter school literature. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of reasons parents consider in choosing to educate their children with disabilities in charter schools and their subsequent experiences after enrolling their children. The specific research questions addressed in this study were: (a) What do parents of students with disabilities report as reasons that they enrolled their children in charter schools? and (b) What do parents of students with disabilities report about their experiences after enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools?

Settings

To set the context of the population for this study, I reviewed data obtained from B. Friedman of NMPED Public Records regarding the demographics of students with disabilities attending New Mexico public schools. Data indicates that 27, 189 students attended charter schools in the 2019-2020 school year (personal communication, October 14, 2020). Of the 27, 189 students, 4, 281 were students with disabilities, indicating that 16% of New Mexico charter school students were receiving special education services under various disability categories. Also, 301, 632 students enrolled in New Mexico's traditional public schools in the 2019-2020 school year (personal communication, October 14, 2020). Of the 301, 632 students, 50, 864 were students with disabilities, indicating that 17% of the students in traditional public schools were receiving special

education services. Table 2 highlights the demographics of students with disabilities attending charter schools in New Mexico.

Table 2

Demographics of Students with Disabilities in New Mexico Charter Schools

Demographics	Percentage (out of 4,281)
Gender	
Female students with disabilities	38%
Male students with disabilities	62%
Ethnicities with disabilities	
American Indian	6%
Asian	0.3%
Black or African American	2%
Caucasian	25%
Hispanic	65%
Multiracial	2%
Native Hawaiian	0%
Primary disability enrollments	
Autism	7%
Deaf-blind	0.2
Developmental delay	3%
Emotional disturbance	5%
Hearing impairment	0.9%
Intellectual disability	2%

Multiple disabilities	0.4%
Orthopedic impairment	0.2%
Other health impairment	11%
Specific learning disabilities	59%
Speech or language impairment	11%
Traumatic brain injury	0.32%
Visual impairment	0.35%

Students with high-incidence disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, autism, other health impairment, emotional disturbance, and speech impairment have the largest representations in New Mexico's charter schools than students with low-incidence disabilities. Given that over half of the New Mexico residents are Hispanic, it is not surprising that majority of the charter school students are Hispanic.

Table 3 highlights the demographics of students enrolled in the five charter schools selected for this study. For confidentiality, the names of the schools were not used. I referred to the schools as Charter Schools A-E.

Table 3

Student Demographics of the Five Participating Charter Schools

Charter School	Grades Served	Percentage of Student Ethnicity
Charter School A	K-12	Hispanic, 92%
		Native American, 1%
		Asian, 1%
		Black, 1%

		Caucasian, 6%
		Two or more races, 2%
Charter School B	K-12	Hispanic, 77%
		Caucasian, 13%
		Native American, 4%
		Black, 3%
		Asian, 1%
		Two or more races, 1%
		Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, <1%
Charter School C	6-12	Native American, 94%
		Hispanic, 6%
		Anglo, 1%
Charter School D	6-8	Hispanic, 92%
		Caucasian, 4%
		Black, 2%
		Asian, <1%
		Native American <1%
		Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, <1%
		Two or more races, <1%
Charter School E	K-12	Hispanic, 52%
		Caucasian, 38%
		Black, 3%

Asian, 2%

Native American, 20%

Special education academic services are provided in the general education settings at these charter schools. Mathematics and most reading classes used a co-teaching model with general education teacher and special education teachers sharing instructional, assessment, and classroom management responsibilities. Some reading classes, as well as science, social studies, and elective classes used a collaboration model of inclusion, with general and special education teachers collaborating on a weekly basis outside of class to address differentiation, modification, and other learning needs of students with disabilities. However, these charter schools pulled out students for related services that included counseling, speech therapy, and occupational therapy.

I selected these five schools for the following reasons: (a) the schools were less than 10 miles from my previous workplace; thus it was easier to commute to the schools; and (b) I had professional relationships with the selected charter schools' special education directors; therefore, it was easy for me to set up meetings with the special education directors and in some occasions with the principals; and (c) all five schools were ones in which I was not teaching.

Participants

Parents of middle school students with disabilities who were receiving special education services under the eligibility of the disability categories defined by IDEA (2004) were recruited for the study from the five charter schools in Albuquerque. In order to be included in the study, parents were required to (a) have a middle school child with a disability enrolled in a charter school at the time of this study; (b) have a child who qualified for special education services based on the eligibility of any disability category under IDEA 2004; and (c) be able to read and write in English.

The following were excluded from the study: (a) parents of gifted students; (b) parents of students enrolled in charter elementary or high school; (c) non-charter school parents such as private, magnet, sectarian, and traditional public schools; and (d) parents who could not read and write in English. Surveys were distributed to 202 parents of middle school students who met the inclusion criteria in the 2018-2019 school year. Of the 202 surveys sent to parents, 108 surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 53%. Response rates for individual charter schools were: Charter School A, 73%; Charter School B, 23%; Charter School C, 55%; Charter School D, 84%, and Charter School E, 84%. Although with smaller number of students with disabilities enrolled, both Charter Schools A and E reported the highest response rates of 73% and 84% respectively, while Charter School B recorded the lowest response rate with 23% despite having the highest number of students with disabilities.

Research Design

Pallant (2016) described the importance of careful planning and execution of research. Pallant asserted that data can be obtained for research in many ways, depending on the nature of the research. I used survey research design as the methodology for this study, eliciting both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey included closed-ended and open-ended questions. It appears many studies investigating the parental choice of charter schools or other school choices tend to rely on survey data for information regarding reasons parents consider when choosing a school for their child. In these studies, parents were able to respond to “yes” or “no” to questions (Goldring & Hausman, 1999). Other studies have asked parents to rank their top reasons for choosing a school (Armour & Peiser, 1998; Bosetti, 2004; Tedin & Weihr, 2004). Additionally, parents were asked to apply a variety of scales to determine the reasons they choose schools for their children (Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Moe, 2001) or rate series of reasons for choosing a private

school (Kleitz et al., 2000; Bukhari & Randall, 2009). Given the ease of responding to a survey, the selection of survey design for this study was to increase parental participation. Admittedly, use of survey runs the risk of not having an interviewer to answer parents' questions on any of the items in the survey. This can potentially lead to parental misinterpretation of a question, avoidance of a question altogether, or researcher's misinterpretation of the written responses. Huck (2008) notes that a lack of response could create a non-response bias, which can negatively affect whether there is enough data collected to generalize the results. Despite these potential disadvantages, the use of a survey for data collection presents several advantages for this study. First, completing a survey takes parents less time than if they were to sit with an interviewer. Second, parents may feel more capable of being honest when completing the survey, as they may not feel being judged by the interviewer or seek to please the interviewer with their answers (Tourangeau et al., 2004). Lastly, Rea and Parker (2005) noted that one of the main advantages of using a survey to gather data is its capability to be replicated by other researchers.

Charter School Parent Survey

Based on the findings from the previous studies such as Finn et al. (2006), Lange and Lehr (2000), and Julius (2011), an Opinio online survey was developed for this study called "*Charter School Parent Survey*." (See Appendix A). To assess the survey's validity, a professor of literacy who recently graduated from the University of New Mexico and a doctoral colleague who has taken qualitative research classes completed the survey prior to conducting the study. They are both familiar with my study and offered several useful suggestions on how to make the survey items unambiguous to the respondents. The survey consisted of three parts. Part one of the survey contained seven demographic questions that requested information about parents' ethnic background, relationship to the child, child's gender, child's enrollment history, child's

current school, child's grade level, and child's disability. Part two of the survey sought information about the reasons parents considered important in choosing a charter school for their child with a disability. Part two began with open-ended questions, followed by closed-ended question items. The two open-ended questions provided parents the opportunity to explain their reasons for choosing a charter school for their child with a disability. Part two included eight statements for parents to rate on a five-point Likert scale: (1) very unimportant; (2) unimportant; (3) neutral; (4) important; or (5) very important. Part three of the survey requested information regarding parents' experiences and level of satisfaction with their child's charter school. Part three began with two open-ended questions that specifically asked parents to describe their experiences after enrolling their child in a charter school. These open-ended questions were followed with a set of eight closed-ended question items that sought information regarding parents' level of satisfaction with their child's charter school. Parents' response options to the closed-ended questions also include a five-point Likert scale: (1) very dissatisfied; (2) dissatisfied; (3) Neutral; (4) satisfied; and (5) very satisfied.

Study Procedures

Maxwell (2013) suggests the need to seek the support of "gatekeepers" in research sites. After obtaining permission from the University of New Mexico's Institutional Review Board, I sent invitation letters to the directors of special education of individual charter schools, explaining the purpose and procedure of the study, requesting their school's participation in the study, and their role as gatekeepers. I presented my study to one of the schools prior to the principal's permission to contact and distribute surveys to potential parent participants. The principals and directors of special education of the four other charter schools requested that I meet with them to provide additional details and information regarding the study.

I emailed the survey link, consent form (Appendix B), invitation letter (Appendix C), and a flyer (Appendix D) that detailed the purpose of the study and targeted participants to the special education directors of individual schools after the approval letters (Appendix E) were obtained from these schools. Subsequently, the special education directors sent these documents to the potential participants, who were parents of middle school students with disabilities. A week after the start of the study, I sent an email to the special education directors, asking them to remind their parents to complete the online survey. Due to a low response at the initial stage of the study, the special education directors suggested the use of paper surveys, which could potentially generate more responses from the parents and provided parents the time and convenience to complete the surveys. They noted that most of their parents worked two jobs and may not have time to complete an online survey. Additionally, some parents may have limited access to the internet. Following the suggestions of the special education directors, I obtained the IRB's approval to provide hard copies of the surveys to the study participants. I included the hard copies of the survey, consent form, invitation letter, and flyer in a sealed envelope. Reminders were sent to the special education directors bi-weekly on multiple occasions, asking them to remind the parents to complete and return the surveys to schools. The completed surveys were returned in sealed envelopes and given directly to either the special education teachers or the directors of special education in individual charter schools. The surveys were sent home with students to deliver to their parents. These steps resulted in higher return rates from all the five participating charter schools. I collected completed surveys in sealed envelopes directly from the schools' special education directors at the end of the school year. Based on the suggestion from a special education director, a "Thank You" \$10 Walmart gift cards were given to teachers in one of the charter schools as an appreciation for distributing and reminding parents to complete and

return the surveys. This request was not made by special education directors from the other four charter schools; and as a result, gift cards were not offered to teachers in these schools.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through surveys that included both the Likert-scale questions and responses to the open-ended questions. Participants had the option of completing either the online or paper survey. Participants' responses to both closed- and open-ended questions were entered in the Opinio, a UNM online survey software. I read all parental responses carefully, particularly as I entered them in the Opinio, and I took brief notes in the researcher's journal. This process allowed me to be familiar with the data and importantly, to develop an understanding of reasons parents enrolled their students in charter schools and their subsequent experiences after the enrollment. Thus, the researcher's journal and electronic spreadsheet were used to collect participant responses to survey questions, analyze data, and answer the research questions.

Surveys

The survey, labeled "*Charter School Parent Survey*" was administered from March to June 2019 to parents of middle school students with disabilities in five selected charter schools in Albuquerque. Most of the parents completed the hard copies of the surveys while only a few parents completed the surveys in the Opinio. The surveys were officially closed to parents in mid-June. In total, 108 parents of middle school students with disabilities from the five charter schools completed the surveys by the end of the 2018-2019 school year.

Data Analysis

I began analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data after receiving all the surveys from the five participating charter schools. I read through all the surveys and made notes and

reflections in the researcher's journal. Additionally, I calculated percentages for each of the survey items that measure reasons parents chose charter schools for their children with disabilities and parental level of satisfaction with their children's charter schools.

Quantitative Data Analysis. After all the completed surveys had been received, I combined Likert/quantitative data for each survey question. I constructed bar charts that showed how parents rated each of the survey items that influenced their choice of a charter and the degree of satisfaction after the enrollment. The Opinio software generated the descriptive statistics that included the percentage of each survey item that was used to draw conclusions about the data. Additionally, the descriptive statistics were used to summarize and describe the quantitative data collected from the surveys (i.e., the Likert-scale data).

Qualitative Data Analysis. I analyzed written responses provided by the parents qualitatively, using an inductive method of coding (Corbin & Straus, 2013) and a thematic analysis approach to analyze responses to the open-ended questions. Creswell (2013) noted that there are various ways to narrative qualitative data. I began the analysis by reading responses to all the four open-ended questions carefully for familiarity with the data (Creswell, 2013). This thorough analysis of the data allowed me to interpret and reflect on the research questions related to this study (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). One of the most common analysis practices within qualitative research is coding (Creswell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Coding is an ongoing process that seeks to identify "a word or short phrase that captures and signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some more general analysis issue" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 282). Once I began to review the data and developed an understanding of the extent and context of the perspectives and experiences of the parents in this study, I began to develop a list of potential codes to identify excerpts from the data to be coded and to tag excerpts with codes.

Following the consensus reached with both a doctoral colleague and a professor who were included as team members in the Institution Review Board document, keywords, and common ideas were cut and pasted from the transcripts onto the index cards with different colors for thematic coding. For instance, recurring ideas and keywords such as “small class size,” “small school,” and “good student-teacher ratio” were pasted in a red index card and assigned a code. I finished the coding process when no new concepts emerging from the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Finally, I began the process of moving from codes to themes, which involved clustering codes into categories. Thematic analysis is used to identify, analyze, and report recurrences (themes) in data and relates more to interpreting than describing data sets in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I categorized similar codes under a theme, and each theme was named and defined. Furthermore, I used constant comparisons to sort responses that enabled me to develop overarching themes and subthemes as they emerged in the data.

Trustworthiness. I addressed the trustworthiness of this study in multiple ways. First, I used multiple sources of data to address triangulation. I used quantitative data which was obtained through Likert-type survey questions. Qualitative data was obtained through short answers to open-ended questions, as well as a researcher’s journal that contained notes and reflections of the research process (Bazeley, 2013). Using these multiple sources allowed for the confirmation of themes and findings across data sources, therefore, strengthening the credibility of the results for this study. To further ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I used inter-rater agreement that involves multiple people in the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This practice of analyzing qualitative data aligns with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) suggestion of using best practices to safeguard a study’s trustworthiness. Throughout the qualitative analysis process,

the second and third reviewers reviewed the sorting of participant responses to the open-ended questions to allow for agreement or disagreement in our findings. Individually, we sorted the responses into multiple codes and finally into themes (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). We reached a consensus to use different colors for the codes and eventually for the themes. Finally, we compared the codes and themes, looking for agreement and for potential discrepancies. We discussed our perspectives regarding the discrepancies related to the themes, negotiated agreement, and arrived at a consensus. This resulted in an agreement on final themes and subthemes. This thorough and careful analytical process allowed for the reduction of potential bias in determining the key themes across data sources, further strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings for this study (Bazeley, 2013). Additionally, using multiple coders mitigated the interpretive bias of a single coder (Bazeley, 2013; Walther et al., 2013). The trustworthiness formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings of this study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), inter-rater agreement of 80% agreement between coders on 95% of the codes is enough agreement among multiple coders. I counted the number of agreements on both the codes and emerging themes, and it was approximately 90%. The three coders coded all the transcript. In this study, agreements and disagreements among coders were individually tallied for each survey participant by directly comparing the codes.

DeSourza (2004) suggested that one of the ways of fostering trustworthiness was the need for researchers to disclose their social and cultural positions and the misrepresentations that may affect the study. Thus, to further ensure trustworthiness, in Chapter 1, I made clear of my positionality and possible sources of bias.

Chapter 4

Results

In this chapter I present the results obtained from the Charter School Parent Survey and how parent responses addressed the two research questions:

1. What do parents of students with disabilities report as reasons that they enrolled their children in charter schools?
2. What do parents of students with disabilities report about their experiences after enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools?

To address these research questions, the survey labeled “Charter School Parent Survey” was administered to parents over a four-month period. A total of 202 surveys were sent to parents of middle school students with disabilities. One hundred and eight parents of middle school students with disabilities in five charter schools completed the survey representing a 53% return rate. The next section presents demographic information about parents who participated in this study.

Demographic Data

The following information about parent demographics is represented in Table 4 and included the child’s gender, parent’s relationship to the child, the child’s school, the child’s grade level, the child’s disability, and parent’s ethnicity. Some parents noted that their children had more than one disability. Also, some parents identified with more than one ethnicity.

Table 4

Parent Demographics

Demographic Category	Demographic Responses	Percentage of Parents	Number of Parents
Child’s Gender	Male	64%	69

	Female	32%	35
	Undeclared	4%	4
<hr/>			
Relationship to	Mother	67%	72
Child			
	Father	25%	27
	Guardian	3%	3
	Stepfather	3%	3
	Stepmother	0%	0
	Foster Parent	2%	2
	Foster Grandparent	1%	1
<hr/>			
Child's Disability	Specific Learning Disability	71%	83
	Emotional Disturbance	16%	19
	Autism	4%	5
	Other Health Impairment	3%	4
	Speech or Language Impairment	3%	3
	Deaf-Blindness	1%	1
	Hearing Impairment	1%	1
	Visual Impairment	1%	1
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Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino	54%	61
	American Indian or Alaska	29%	32
	Caucasian	15%	17
	Black or African American	1%	1

	Native Hawaiian or another Pacific Islander	1%	1
Child's School	Charter School A	10%	11
	Charter School B	15%	16
	Charter School C	31%	33
	Charter School D	25%	27
	Charter School E	19%	21
Child' Grade Level	6th	27%	30
	7th	42%	45
	8th	30%	32
	Unreported Grade Level	1%	1

Demographic Characteristics of the Parent Responders

The demographic data in this study were consistent with the data obtained from the NMPED public records which showed that parents of students with specific learning disabilities enrolled their child in a charter schools at a higher rate than parents of students with disabilities in other disability categories. Although this study included only five schools, 71% of the parents reported that their children were receiving special education services under the eligibility of specific learning disabilities. This finding supports the data obtained from the NMPED which showed that students with specific learning disabilities had the largest enrollment (59%) in New Mexico charter schools. However, unlike the NMPED's data, 17% and four percent of parents of students with emotional disturbance and autism respectively sought charter schools for their children. Additionally, this study also supports NMPED's data that indicated charter schools

enrolled fewer students with low-incidence disabilities such as traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment, and deaf-blindness. Like this study, enrollment for this group of students were lower across New Mexico charter schools in the 2019-2020 school year.

Research Question 1 Findings

I sought to explore in research question 1 the reasons that motivated parents to enroll their children with disabilities in charter schools. Responses to each of the closed-ended questions addressing the reasons parents considered when choosing charter schools are presented in Table 5. Parents’ short answers that highlighted parental reasons for a choice of charter schools were analyzed for themes. Responses to the eight closed-ended questions and the short answers helped to answer research question 1.

Quantitative Data

In order to address this research question, parents were instructed to rate various survey items (Questions 10-17) about their decisions to enroll their children in charter schools on a Likert-scale that included: *1 = Very Unimportant, 2 = Unimportant, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Important, 5 = Very Important*. Of the 108 parents, 101 parents completed the survey questions 10-17, asking parents what they considered important or unimportant when enrolling children with disabilities in charter schools. Seven parents did not respond to the questions. Table 5 shows how parents rated the reasons that motivated them to enroll their children in charter schools.

Table 5

Numbers of Parental Ratings of the Reasons that Influenced Decision to Enroll a Child with a Disability in a Charter School

Survey Items	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
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The school provides better educational services than my child's previous school(s)	1	0	8	24	68
Special education teachers inform me of my child's academic progress better than my child's previous school(s)	1	0	11	31	58
Special education services are provided for my child in general education classrooms at this school better than my child's previous school(s)	1	0	9	24	67
The school seeks my input in the development of my child's individualized education program (IEP) more than my child's previous school(s)	2	2	11	31	55
The school has more extra-curricular activities such as sports clubs, etc. than my child's previous school(s)	5	8	18	26	44
My child is safer at this school than at previous school(s)	1	0	11	26	63

This school has a smaller class size than my child’s previous school(s)	1	0	8	28	64
There are fewer discipline problems in this school than my child’s previous school(s)	2	0	6	21	72

In addition to the table, the bar-graphs highlight parental responses to the survey items that influenced parental choice of charter schools for children with disabilities.

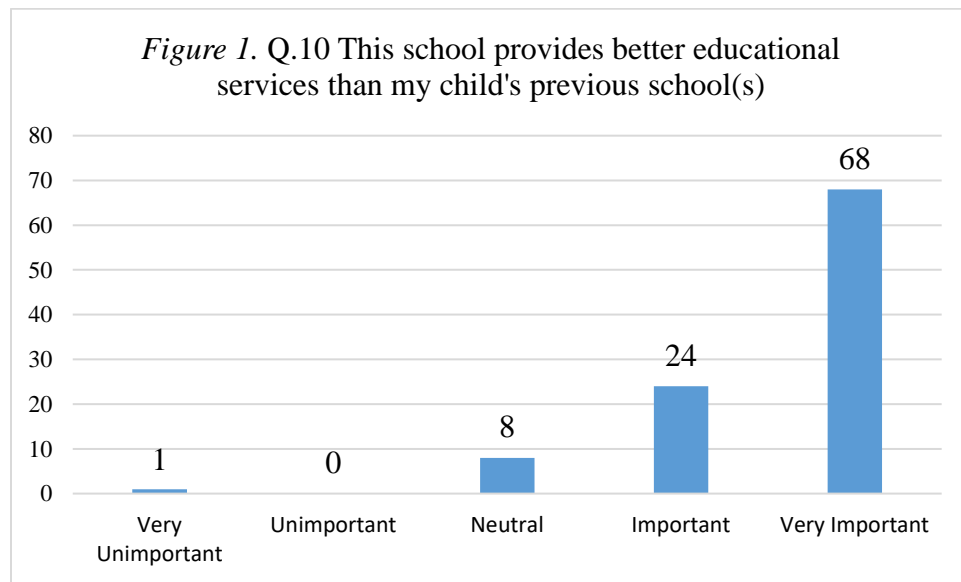
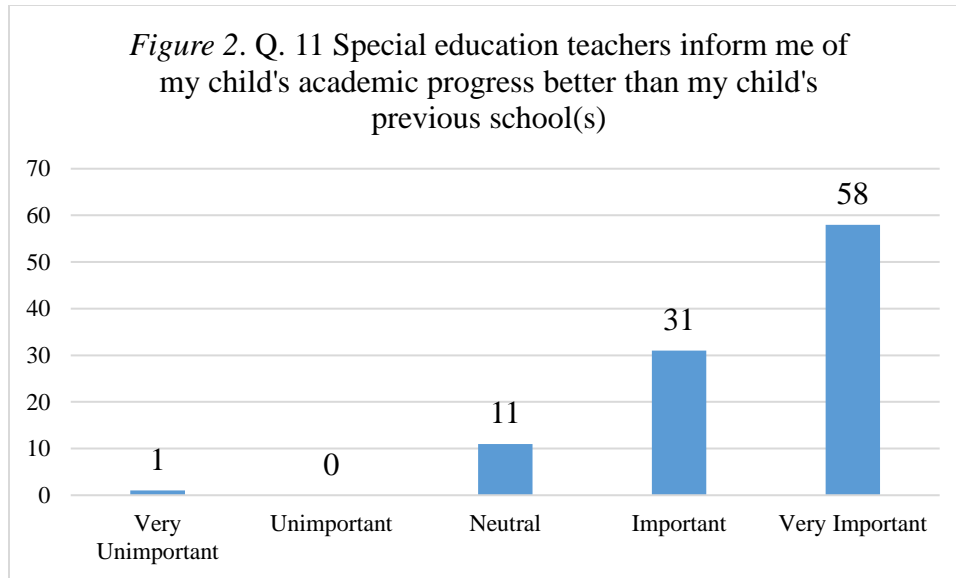
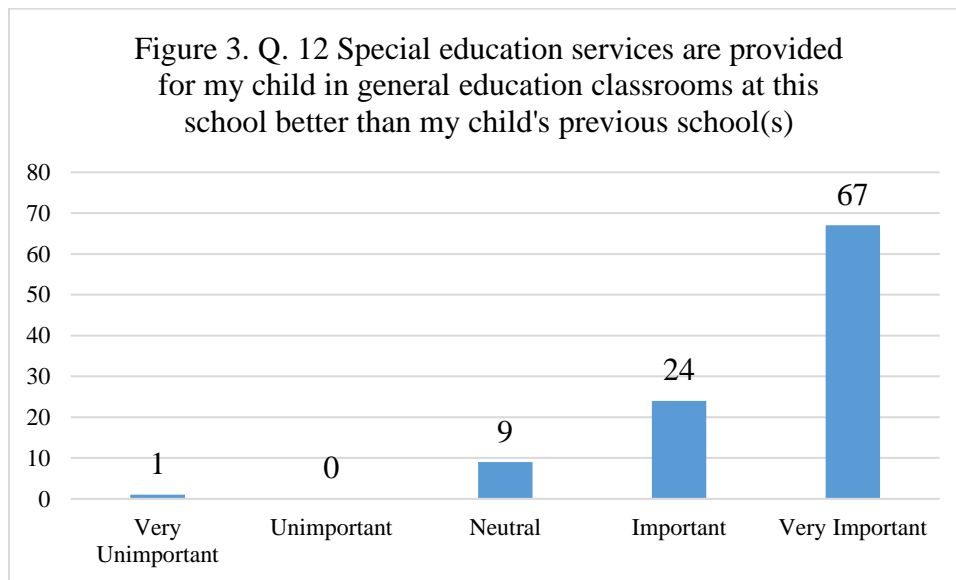


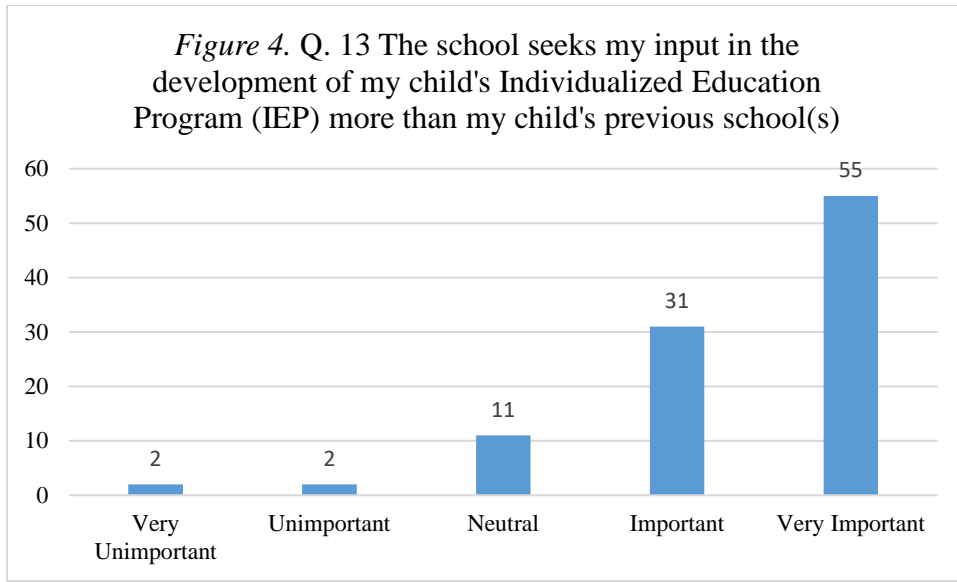
Figure 1 shows that nearly all the parents (91%) indicated that it was important/very important that the charter schools provided better education services for their children, with only 1% indicating that this was very unimportant.



As figure 2 shows, 88% of parents indicated that the provision of information related to their children’s academic progress was important/very important to them. Whereas, only 1% of the parents indicated that it was very unimportant.



As shown in figure 3, the majority of the parents (90%) noted that it was important/very important for their children to receive special education services in the general education settings. In contrast, only 1% considered educational services provided in general education settings as very unimportant.



As illustrated in figure 4, 85% of the parents reported that it was important/very important that charter schools sought their input in the development of their children’s IEPs, with 4% of the parents indicating that it was very unimportant/unimportant for schools to seek their input.

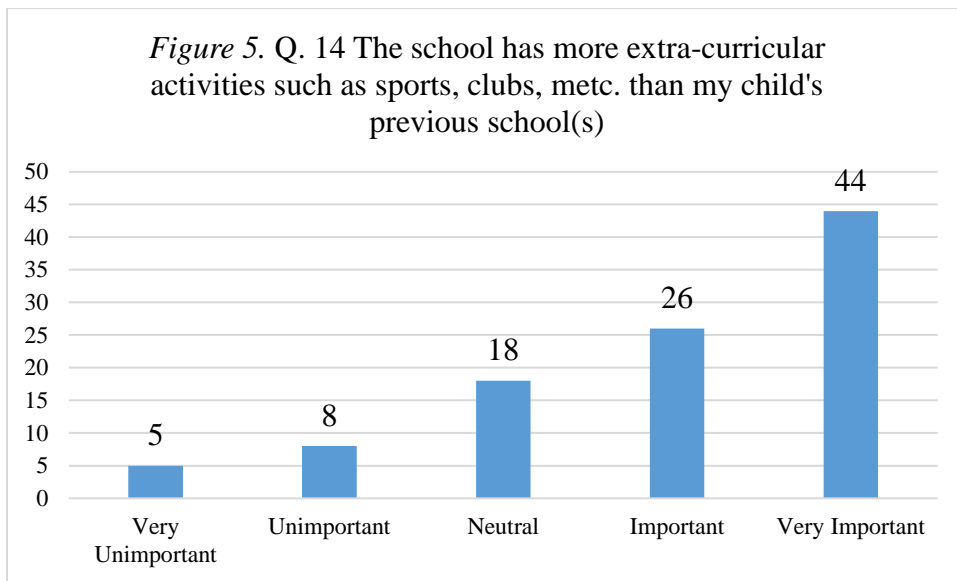


Figure 5 shows that 69% of the parents indicated that it was important/very important that charter schools provided extra-curricular activities for their children. In contrast, 13% of the parents considered extra-curricular activities unimportant/unimportant.

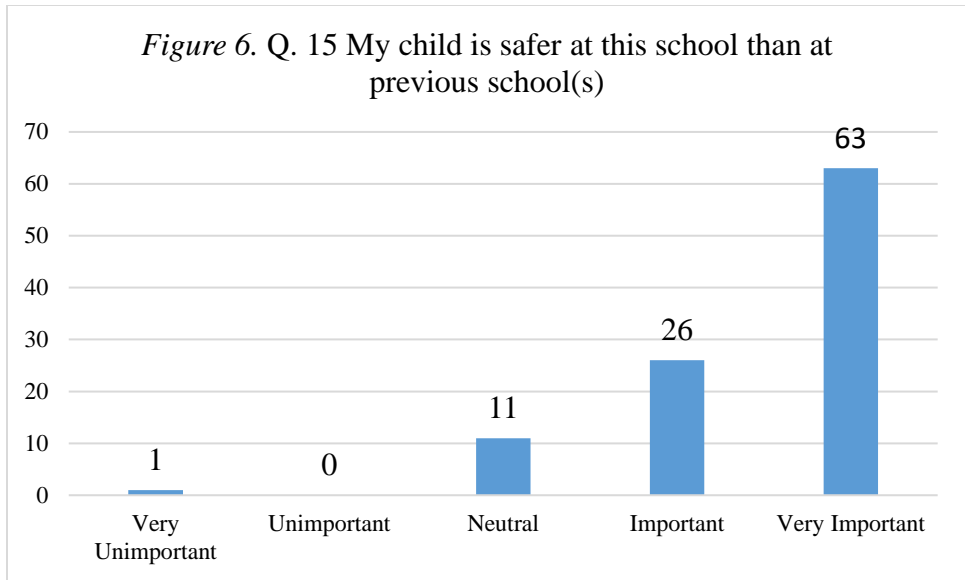


Figure 6 illustrates that 88% of the parents indicated that safety was important/very important when considering enrolling their children in charter schools, with only 1% reporting that safety was very unimportant in their selection of charter schools.

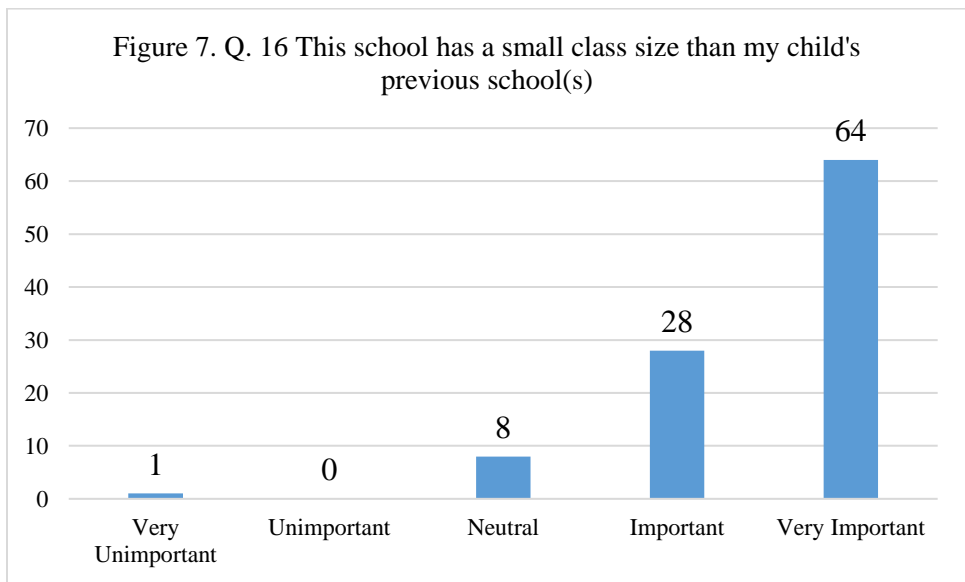
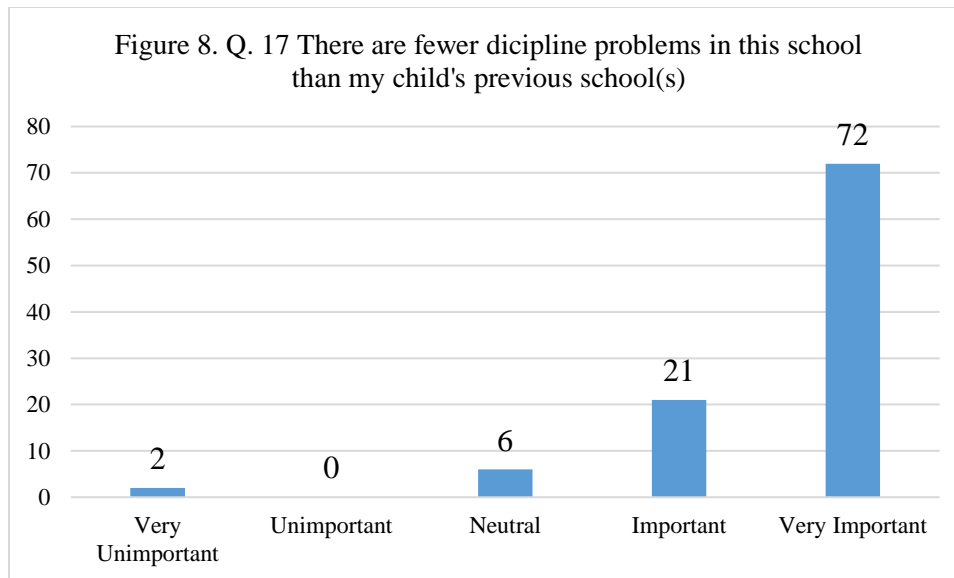


Figure 7 reveals that the majority of the parents (91%) rated small class size as important/very important when considering charter schools for their children. On the other hand, only 1% of the parents indicated that this aspect of the charter schools was very unimportant in their choice of charter schools.



As figure 8 shows, the majority of the parents (92%) reported that discipline was an important/very important consideration for choosing to enroll their children in charter schools. Only 2% of the parents indicated that discipline was very unimportant in the selection of charter schools for their children.

Summary of the Quantitative Findings. In reviewing the descriptive analysis for the parent survey, parents of middle school students with disabilities accessed charter schools for several reasons. Parents rated the survey items that motivated them to enroll their child in a charter school in the following order of importance: fewer discipline problem (92%), better educational services (91%), smaller class size (91%), special education services in general education settings (90%), child safety (88%), input in child's IEP (85%), and extra-curricular activities (69%). Based on the ratings of these eight items, it is apparent that discipline, provision of better educational services, small class size, and special education services in general education settings were the top reasons parents in this study sought charter school enrollment. Given the high ratings for these four survey items, data from this study indicates that parents of children with disabilities seek schools that can provide educational and behavioral services that

meet their children's needs in both smaller and general education settings. Parents' ratings also reflect the importance of having special education teachers reporting their children's academic progress. In contrast, safety, involvement in IEP input, and extra-curricular activities were considered less substantially important. These findings are consistent with the previous research that has reported that academic and social improvements tend to motivate both parents of students with and without disabilities to make charter school decisions for their children (Bosetti, 2004; Caruthers, 1998; Finn et al., 2006; Lange & Lehr, 2000). Although parents rated extra-curricular activities lower than other reasons for choosing to educate their children in charter schools, nevertheless, they rated it an important consideration in their decision-making process for charter school programs.

Thematic Analysis

Parents were also given the opportunity to provide short answer comments on questions related to the reasons that influenced their choice of a charter school. Across all the five charter schools selected for this study, parents provided similar reasons for enrolling their children in charter schools. Eighty-one of the 108 parents provided short answers to the open-ended questions seeking information on the reasons they enrolled their children in charter schools and whether the schools provided services that were not offered in the schools their children previously attended. The short answers were coded and categorized to identify common themes. Overall, five overarching themes were identified: Individualized Student Support, School Culture, Inclusive education, Parent-School Communication, and Academic Value. The following subthemes emerged under three main themes: Accommodations (Inclusive Education), Academic Support, Behavioral Support, and Individualized Instruction/Engagement (Individualized Student Support), and Student Safety and Small Class Size (School Culture).

Table 6 highlights themes and subthemes that emerged from parental responses to the open-ended questions.

Table 6

Themes and Subthemes Research Question 1

Themes	Subthemes
Inclusive Education	Accommodations
Individualized Student Supports	Academic Supports
	Behavioral Supports
	Individualized Instruction/Engagement
School Culture	School Safety and Security
	Small Class Size
Academic Value	
Parent-School Communication	

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education happens when all students, irrespective of any academic or behavioral challenges they may have, are placed in the general education settings and provided with support and interventions that allow them to access general education curricula (Alquraini, 2012; Casserly et al., 2020). Across all the five charter schools, the most frequent area addressed in the comments was inclusive education. The vast majority of the parents who responded to the open open-ended questions stated that their children were served in inclusive settings. One of the parents stated that:

Kid is not being ignored. Kid able to participate in classroom activities/lessons. Kid not made to feel different by teachers and staff---and not having only the troubled kids to be around Special ed in regular class able to stay in class because the teacher is not so overwhelmed by number of students in class and higher level of teaching.

Many parents reported that providing services for their children in inclusive settings motivated their children to learn and invariably increased the desire for school. Parents noted the inclusive education in the charter schools was different from what they experienced in the traditional public schools their children previously attended. For example, a parent noted that “my child went to a different classroom for his special education services in the previous elementary school he attended.” Additionally, parents made comments such as: “My child is in the same class with other students,” “Doesn’t get separated from other students for special education,” “Not separated or pull aside like in other schools,” and “This school puts my child to learn with others.” In addition to including students in general education settings, parents overwhelmingly reported that special education teachers worked with their children in general education settings within charter schools. For example, a parent noted that “the special education teachers help him in that class.” Many comments reflected that parents valued the inclusion of their children in the general education settings. For example, a parent reported that:

The teachers do so much to help my child. This is one of the reasons we wanted her to continue with the middle school at this school. We also value the inclusion model of the school. My friend’s daughter at a regular public school spend most time in a resource classroom.

A parent noted that the “school provides support for my child’s IEP program through inclusion of my child in general education classrooms. The previous school used to pull my child out of

class.” Given such parental comments about inclusion, the parents’ comments reflected that they considered inclusive education as an important reason for enrolling their children in a charter school.

Accommodations. A subtheme of inclusive education that emerged throughout the survey was the charter schoolteachers’ use of accommodations in inclusive settings. Scanlon and Baker (2012) defined accommodations as minor changes in how instruction is delivered to students without substantially changing curriculum or learning expectations for students. In all five participating charter schools, most of those who responded to the open-ended questions reported that charter schools accommodated their children’s learning needs and often referred to their children’s IEPs when providing services. According to a parent, “they use the accommodations in her IEP to teach her.” In addition to providing accommodations for students learning in general education settings, parents also consistently mentioned “differentiated instructions” and “modified work.” One of the parents stated specifically that teachers “offer my child study period and several accommodations with homework and classwork if needed.” The value that parents placed on accommodations was further expressed by one of the fathers who participated in this study:

Every school offers the same supports, but unfortunately regular schools do not present the supports correctly or implement them to actually make a difference in a child’s education. I have had to fight for all of my children to get what they need in regard [regarding] to disabilities and trying to get my children pushed forward or placed in honors class. I ended up putting all my children in charter schools because regular schools just categorize our children and let the system do what it does, and our children

feel incompetent and unintelligent. This school was one of our last options. I told my son if this school didn't work out for us then his last option would be school on wheels.

In all five schools most comments about accommodations were consistently positive. Nonetheless, a small number of parents expressed frustrations with their children not receiving enough accommodations which prevented them from accessing general education curricula. A parent commented that "accommodations are all similar [in] each school we have worked with and he is still having problems in school." Additionally, parents wrote a few comments like "still the same," and "not making much progress," reflecting that parents did not think that their children's learning needs were adequately accommodated.

Individualized Student Supports

Individualized supports are specific supports provided to students based on the unique behavioral and academic needs of individual students (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2019). A large majority of the parents in all five schools who answered the open-ended responses indicated that their children's schools provided supports designed to address their children's needs. Specifically, parents identified academic support, behavioral support, and individualized instruction and engagement as forms of specific supports the charter school provided for their children.

Academic Supports. Academic supports are programs and strategies that are used by schools in the effort to help students improve their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in school; the strategies often include extra tutoring (Peterson et al., 2014). Academic support was one of the subthemes that emerged under individualized student support. The majority of the parents in all five schools who provided responses to the open-ended questions reported that teachers were helpful and provided needed

supports for their children. Parents consistently commented that tutoring and after-school programs helped their child academically by improving grades and increasing participation in school-related activities. One parent stated that “supports like tutoring and after school programs have helped him to learn better and to enjoy school more. No such supports in previous schools.”

Parents also stated that both special and general education teachers “modified” work for their children. A parent noted that teachers gave her daughter work that was more appropriate for her ability, but “teachers at the previous school would just leave her to struggle.” Another parent remarked that her daughter “gets a lot of supports because there are more than [one] a teacher in each class.” Most of the parents stated that their children “soared academically” because they were provided needed academic supports.

Although comments about academic supports for students were generally positive, some of the parents in all five schools who responded to the open-ended questions commented that “teachers still need to work closely with special needs students.” Almost all the parents across all five charter schools acknowledged that their children were served in the general education classrooms and provided “grade-level work,” they noted that their children still had difficulty with reading. One of the parents stated that “the teachers help my child a lot, but they can do more to improve my child’s reading. Still [child] struggles with reading and writing.” Parents wrote comments that reflected their child had difficulty coping with schoolwork: “It’s been good so far. The teachers need to help more with work,” “Honestly, he is not doing well I am in the process of moving him to another public school,” “Still the same,” “Same experience” “Not much progress. Still okay,” and “I don’t see much difference from previous schools.” While parental concerns related to math and science were not as extensive and consistent as reading, a small number of parents were concerned that their children were not progressing in math and

science. For instance, a parent commented that “I have seen some improvement in reading. But he needs more support in math and science.” Additionally, some parents also expressed concerns that their children regressed due to uncondusive learning environments: One of the parents wrote that:

My child has always been a good student. His academics have remained constant. His confidence has increased. His self-confidence has increased. He no longer says that he does not like school. But [he] has said the he has difficulty concentrating in his classrooms as they can get disruptive. I am grateful for his social improvements but concerned over his learning environment. It does not seem so stable anymore. He will be going to a public school next year.

Behavioral Supports. Historically, teachers find behavioral issues as one of the most significant and pervasive challenges in school settings (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2019). Thus, behavioral supports are individualized intervention supports that teachers and other school personnel provide to address problem behaviors in school settings (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2019). Across the five schools, the majority of the parents responded to questions about behavioral supports that charter schools offered to their children. A parent of a child with ADHD commended the school for “good behavior support for students with ADHD,” and another parent stated that “no supports from the regular public schools, but teachers at this school [School E] provide support to help her with her behaviors.” Parents also reported the negative experiences they had regarding their children’s behavior in previous schools. In contrast, they stated that the charter schools were supportive by using the behavioral plans in their children’s IEPs. One parent stated that her daughter “transferred to the school in 7th grade because of too many problems at the previous school. They always suspended her and not using her behavioral plans.”

The majority of the parents also reported that their children were doing well behaviorally in charter schools than in previous schools. One parent commented that her son “is doing much better now with his behavior and does not get in trouble like he used to in APS schools.”

Individualized Instruction/Engagement. Individualized instruction and engagement may be one-on-one instruction or small group instruction based on students’ needs and is commonly provided via accommodations for students with disabilities (Scanlon & Baker, 2012). Across all five charter schools, the majority of the parents who responded to the open-ended questions noted that teachers provided instructions in small group settings that met their children’s learning needs. A parent stated the school provides “one-on-one support for my son with a slow pace instruction so he can learn.” Also, one of the parents mentioned that her child’s charter school has “great staff, personalized engagement, and small classroom settings that allow her to learn.” A similar view was shared by another parent who wrote that “It [the school] has personal engagement that helps my child to learn better.” Comments such as “personalized instruction” were mentioned consistently in the data.

Parents indicated that personal engagements of students allowed teachers to know their students well. For example, one of the parents commented about the “good learning environment and supportive teachers that understand our son’s disability and [their readiness] to work with us,” while another parent acknowledged that “they [teachers] understand my child’s needs because they follow the plans well. The previous school did not help my child. They kinda [kind of] giving up on my child.”

Clearly, the majority of the parents in the participating charter schools noted that teachers in charter schools supported their children academically and behaviorally. However, several parents commented that charter schools did not offer services that were uniquely different from

the services offered at the schools their children previously attended. These parents did not express serious concerns and did not elaborate on the reasons related to why the charter schools did not provide academic and behavioral supports for their children.

Parent-School Communication

Another major theme that emerged was parent-school communication. Just as Mathews et al. (2017) noted that an important part of the school-parent relationship was the interaction between parents and school personnel, so too was the school-parent relationship noted as important in this study. Parent-school communication may occur at home or through activities taking place at school (Mathews et al., 2017). In all five charter schools, parents who answered the open-ended questions provided consistent comments about communication between parents and schools. These parents were complimentary about the charter school's responsiveness to the inquiry related to their children's disabilities and special education services, stating that "teachers have very good communication with parents to help students" and "teachers always communicate with me always."

In addition to effective communication, parents reported that both special education and general education teachers at their children's charter schools were not only responsive to their inquiries, but also made themselves readily accessible. For example, one of the parents stated that "teachers are always available for questions," while another parent wrote that "teachers reach out via emails and text messages about student progress." Furthermore, a parent noted that the school provides "updated information about students to parents, and teachers always communicate with me." Parents commented on the school personnel's efforts to create relationships with families of students with disabilities. Most parents indicated that

communication between school and parents created opportunities for involvement in their children's education.

Academic Value

Wilson and Corr (2018) defined academic value as an intellectual wealth created by an academic institution. A small number of parents who responded to the open-ended questions in Charter Schools B and D indicated that the schools utilized rigorous curriculums and had high academic expectations for all students, including those with disabilities. These parents noted that in their children's previous schools the curricula were watered down, and grade-level instructions were not provided for their children. A parent noted that she sent her daughter to a charter school so she "can get a better education." Another parent mentioned that his child's charter school has "great curriculum, awesome teachers" while yet another parent said that "The reasons I enrolled my son to this school is because I heard that this school is a great academic school." One parent mentioned that:

My child has more opportunities to get at [supports] school for homework/project assistance online. There is also homework assistance with live teachers to chat with. Our school has an online support system. Teachers, social workers, and staff actually are at their school. In regular public schools, if you pay attention only about half of the staff truly care about their students. The other half are worried about protecting themselves and each other from the students. This school is the only school that made me feel that they cared about my son and teaching him skills to manage his disability so that he can get the most out of his school day.

One of the parents stated that the charter school "has been an excellent academic program. It has excellent educational staff." Parents asserted that "they [school] have a great program to help

them [students] with continuing [on to] college and getting them ready for college. Working closely with a child and parent.”

School Culture

Harris (2018) defined culture as “normative behaviors within organizations.”

Specifically, parents identified student safety and small class size as a cultural climate that their children’s charter schools have developed. The vast majority of the parents in all five schools who answered the open-ended questions noted that charter schools had a positive climate that promoted student safety and learning.

Student Safety and Security. When asked about school culture, the majority of the parents in all five charter schools reported that they felt their children were safe and secure in charter schools. They noted that their children’s schools had effective systems of keeping students safe in and outside classrooms. A parent narrated her experience at her first visit to a charter school:

After touring the school 3 years ago, I liked how the students do not have passing periods or unescorted bathroom breaks. I know several stories of middle school aged kids performing lewd acts and other opportunities during unsupervised breaks. I feel the school [School B] prevents these issues our children are facing this day and age.

Similarly, another parent noted, “student safety because students are escorted to the bathrooms and less bullying unlike his former school.” Parents felt that “dress code” and appropriate behavior expectations” foster student safety and minimized bullying. Additionally, parents mentioned that “both faculty and other staff control traffic to ensure students are safe.” Across all the charter schools, parents consistently identified safety as an important factor in enrolling their children in charter schools. In general, parents’ responses regarding their charter schools include:

“Safe environment for my kids,” “Feels safe in this school,” “Secure and safe,” “Less bullying,” and “Good learning environment.” Specifically, several responses focused on the efforts of the charter school personnel in keeping the school safe and secure for all students.

Small Class Size. Class size refers to the number of students a teacher provides instruction for during a given period. Comments regarding class size were one of the most frequent areas addressed. Across all five schools, the majority of the parents who provided responses to the open-ended questions described being put off by the large numbers of students in the classrooms and the disproportionately high student-teacher ratios that they found at their children’s previous schools. One parent commented about a “good teacher-to-student ratio.” Similarly, another parent commented about “smaller class sizes and more teacher one-on-one” provided by her child’s charter school. A parent also noted that “small class sizes and good teacher-student ratios provided “more time to help struggling students.” Parents wrote comments like: “Smaller classes,” “Smaller groups in classes,” and “Teachers are patient with my child due to smaller classes.” Many parents were more specific about how the small class size factored into their decisions to educate their children in charter schools. One parent reported that:

I chose to enroll my child in this charter school because of the smaller school and classroom size. I feel teachers can give each student a better education by more one on one time with each student because of the smaller classroom size. Teachers might get overwhelmed in bigger classrooms and can’t give each child the education they need.

Summary of the Qualitative Findings. The short answer responses revealed that parents in all the five schools sought a different educational option through charter schools for their students as a result of the negative experiences their students had in their prior school settings, particularly in the areas of inclusive education, accommodations for disabilities, and academic and behavioral

supports. Furthermore, the data from this study reflected that parents sought charter schools for the supports that teachers provided for their children in areas of individualized academic supports in the forms of tutoring, small group instruction, and classwork and homework assistance.

Although parents provided short answers that reflected many reasons for choosing to enroll their children in charter schools, it is noteworthy that the majority of the parents in this study indicated that the inclusion of their children in general education settings was highly important. These parents noted that they chose a charter school that accommodated their children's disabilities, provided academic support, and that provided access to teachers in small class settings in general education settings. Furthermore, parents indicated they considered updated information provided at charter schools regarding their children's academic progress and opportunities for involvement in their children's special education programs as part of the motivating reasons for choosing a charter school.

The next section presents how findings are triangulated when looking at how the short answers parents provided to the open-ended questions related to their responses to the Likert scale questions.

Synthesis of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The focus of research question 1 was to determine the reasons parents of middle school students with disabilities enrolled their children in charter schools. Both the short answers and Likert scale answers provide similar findings. In addition to ratings of the survey items, the most telling were parents' short answer comments, which provided additional information into why the rated items were important in the parents' selection of charter schools for their children.

Special education services in general education settings

Parents provided comments related to special education services at their children's charter schools. Most of the parents commented that inclusive education was one of the main reasons they decided to have their children attend charter schools. These parents made several comments related to the provision of accommodations that allowed their children to access general education curriculum. Additionally, parents consistently noted that their children's work was modified by general education and special education teachers. Based on the comments and experiences highlighted in the short answers, parents perceived that their children's special needs were adequately met at the charter schools. The high number of parental comments related to inclusive education theme clearly supported the parents' high survey rating (90%) of the provision of special education services for their children in general education settings as important or very important in their decision to educate their children in charter schools.

Better Educational Services

The theme of individualized student support aligned closely with parents' rating of better educational services (91%) for their children in charter schools. The majority of the parents made comments related to individualized academic and behavioral supports the charter schools offered their children. Parents' comments reinforced the fact that charter schools maintained a high priority for following the educational and behavioral plans in children's IEPs.

Student Safety and Small Class Size

The school culture theme also aligns with how parents rated these items. The majority of the comments that parents provided related to student safety and smaller class settings. These parents indicated that they were pleased with the safety measures in their children's school and the small class sizes. Parental comments related to safety and small class size support the

parents' ratings of small class size (91%) and safety (88%) as important or very important in their decision to educate their children in charter schools.

Input in Child's IEP

Most parents wrote comments related to effective parent-school communication. These parents mentioned that charter schools provided updated information about their children's special education programs and academic progress and that charter schools actively sought their involvement in the IEP process. These parental comments were reinforced by parental ratings (89%), which indicated that parents considered participation in their children's IEP process important.

Conclusion of the Findings. Both quantitative and qualitative data for this study indicated that the reasons parents noted for accessing charter schools for their middle school students with disabilities were similar. While the ratings of most of the survey items were high, parents also provided several comments related to each of the survey items. However, it must be noted that though not unimportant, parents were least concerned about extra-curricular activities in their child's charter school as reflected in both quantitative and qualitative data for this study. Parents were more concerned about survey items leading to positive academic and behavioral outcomes for their children. It was also noted that parents considered their child's safety important at school and within the environments in which educational services were provided. Parents most frequently mentioned inclusive settings and small class sizes as the two survey items related to producing positive educational outcomes for their child.

Research Question 2 Findings

I examined parents' degree of satisfaction with charter school services and experiences with the charter schools after enrolling their children with disabilities in research question 2.

Responses to each of the closed-ended questions addressing parents' level of satisfaction with their charter schools were presented in Table 6 and discussed. Parents' short answers that highlighted their experiences after enrolling their children in charter schools were analyzed for themes. Responses to the eight closed-ended questions and the short answers helped to answer research question 2.

Quantitative Data

In order to address research question 2, the next set of survey questions asked parents to rate their level of satisfaction on a Likert-scale that included: *1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied*. Table 7 illustrates how parents rated the eight survey items (Questions 20-27) that measured their degree of satisfaction with various aspects of their children's charter schools. Of the 108 parents, 101 parents completed the survey questions 10-17. Seven parents did not respond to the questions.

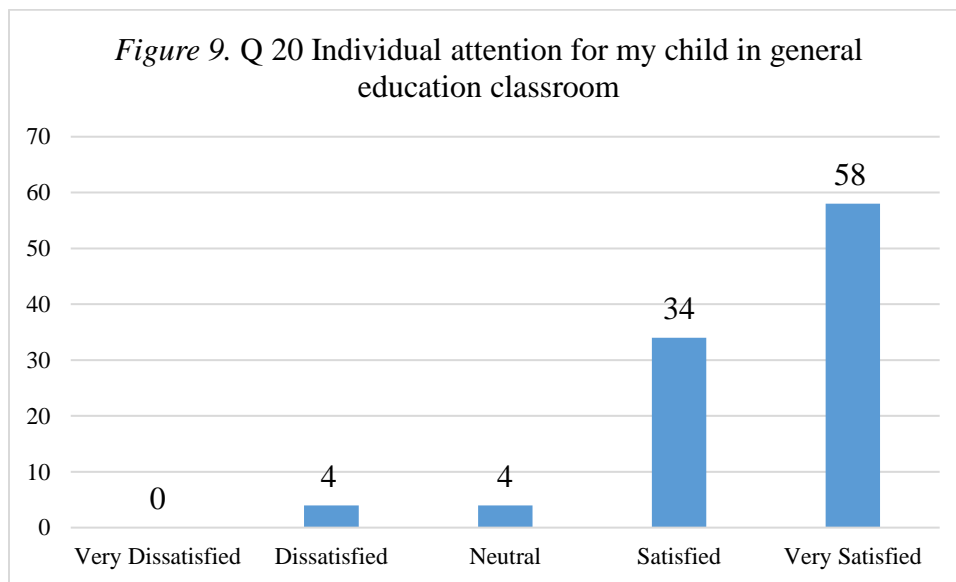
Table 7

Numbers of Parental Ratings of the Levels of Satisfaction with Services Provided for a Child with a Disability in a Charter School

Survey Items	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Individual attention for my child in general education classroom	0	4	4	34	58
Quality of academic studies/programs (e.g., instructional strategies, grading, assignments/projects, curriculum, and subjects offered)	0	3	10	31	56
Academic progress of my child	0	5	5	37	53

Opportunity for my child to practice social/or behavioral skills	0	0	9	23	68
Quality of the school’s facilities (e.g., bathrooms, cafeteria, library, etc.)	2	11	23	20	44
Quality of special education services delivered to my child	0	6	3	30	61
Participation in my child’s IEP process	0	4	8	29	59
Communication with my child’s teachers	6	6	11	23	54

In addition to the table, the bar graphs present information regarding parental Likert-scale ratings of the survey items that measured their degree of satisfaction with their children’s charter school programs.



As illustrated in figure 9, the majority of the parents (92%) reported that they were satisfied/ very satisfied with the attention given to their children in the general education

classrooms. Also, 4% of the parent respondents indicated they were dissatisfied, and no parents express that they were very dissatisfied with the attention charter schoolteachers provided to their children.

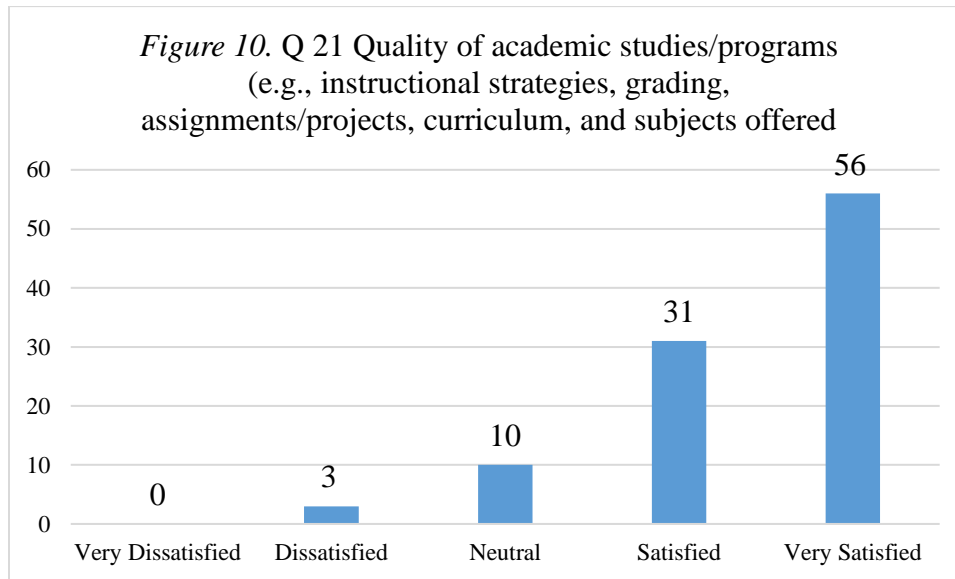
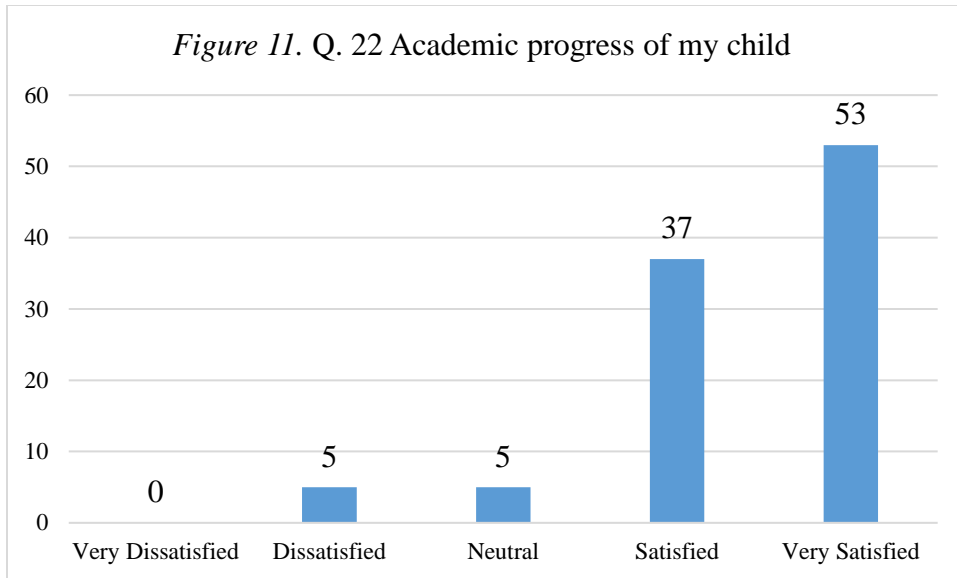


Figure 10 shows that 87% of the parents who responded to this question were very satisfied or satisfied with the academic programs provided at their children's charter schools. Conversely, only 3% of the parents were dissatisfied in some way with the academic programs offered at their children's charter schools, while no parent reported complete dissatisfaction with the quality of the academic programs at the charter schools.



As shown in figure 11, the majority of the parents (90%) noted that they were satisfied/very satisfied with the progress their children made in charter schools. In contrast, only 5% of the parents indicated that they were dissatisfied with their children’s academic progress. Parents did not express that they were very dissatisfied with this aspect of their children’s schools.

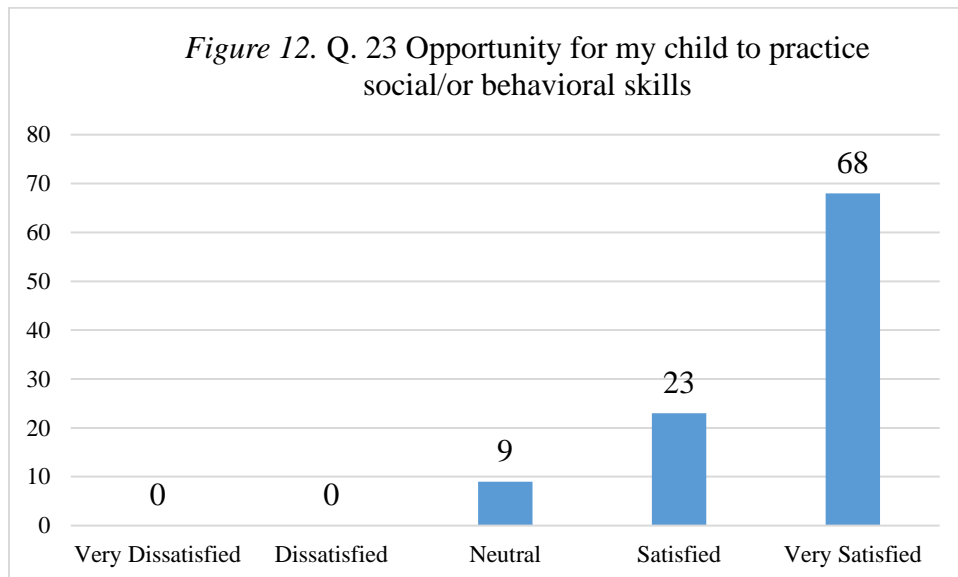
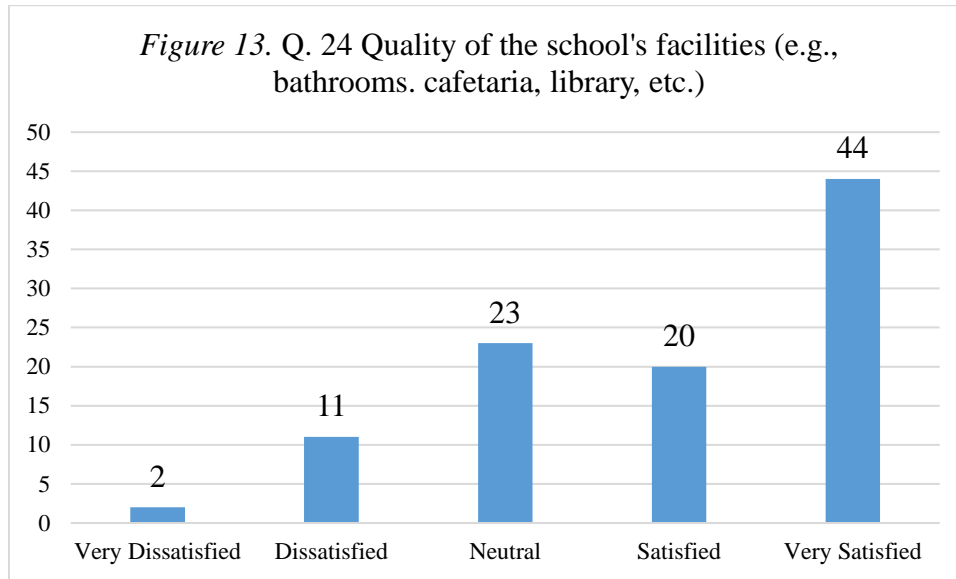


Figure 12 shows that the majority of the parents, with 91% reported that they were satisfied/very satisfied with the opportunities the charter schools offered their children to practice

both social and behavioral skills. However, there were no parents that indicated they were dissatisfied with this aspect of their charter schools.



As illustrated in figure 13, 64% of the parents expressed that they were satisfied/very satisfied with the facilities provided at their children’s charter schools. This contrasts with 13% of the parents who expressed dissatisfaction with the facilities in their children’s schools. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of the respondents were neutral about the school facilities.

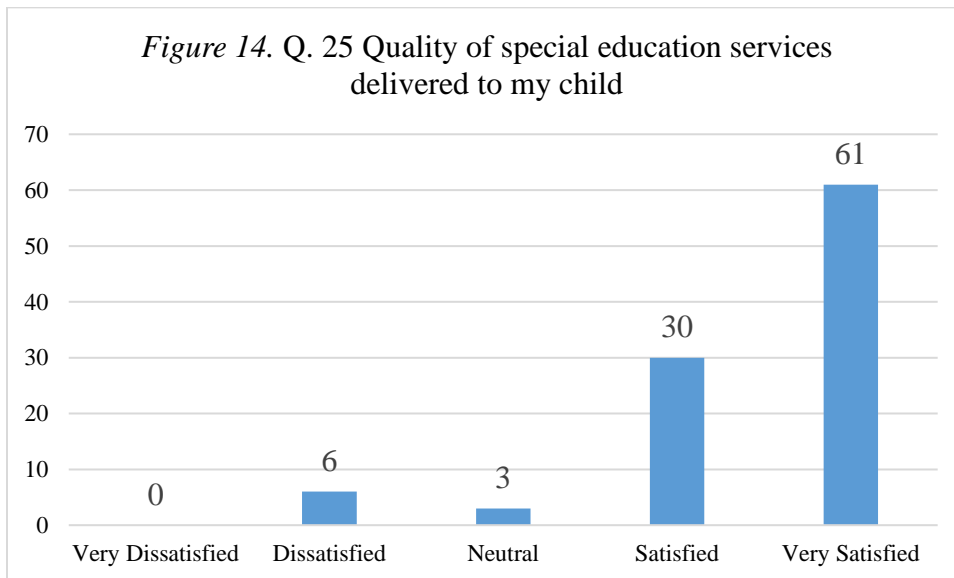


Figure 14 reveals that the majority of the parents (91%) were satisfied/very satisfied with the special education services their children received at the charter schools. Only 6% of the parents expressed dissatisfaction with the special education programs offered at their children’s charter schools, while none of the parents indicated that they were very dissatisfied.

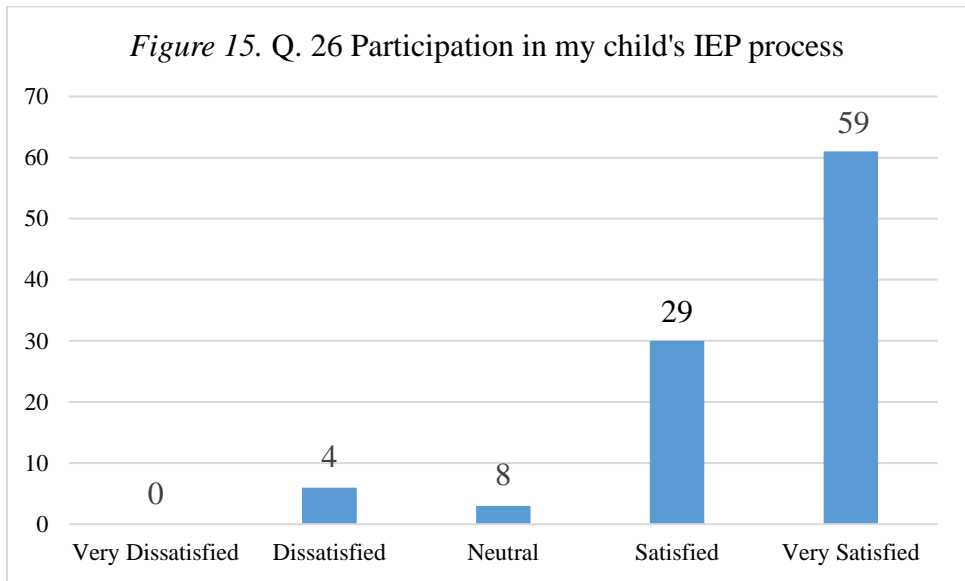
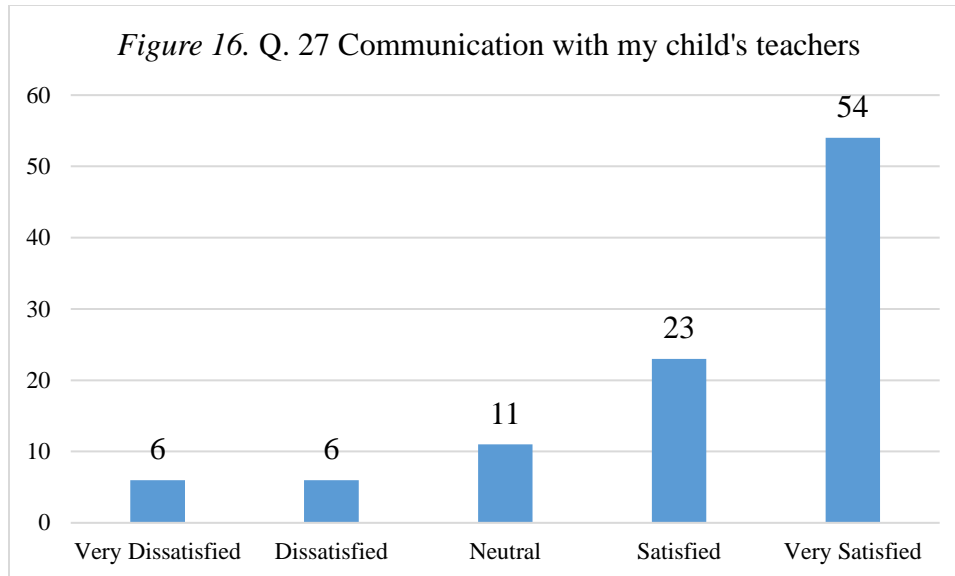


Figure 15 illustrates that 88% of the parents indicated they were satisfied/very satisfied with the opportunities that charter schools offered them to participate in the development of their children’s IEPs. Only 4% of the parent respondents reflected that they were dissatisfied, while none of the parents expressed complete dissatisfaction with their children’s IEP processes.



As seen in figure 16, 77% of the parents indicated that they were satisfied/very satisfied with the communication the charter schools maintained with them. Whereas, 12% of the parents reported they were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with this feature of their children's schools.

Summary of the Quantitative Findings. The descriptive analysis for the parent survey reveals that parents of middle school students with disabilities were satisfied with most features of their children's charter schools. The differences in the ratings of the survey items show that parents had different priorities for choosing to educate their children in a charter school and rated these features based on their degree of satisfaction. The descriptive data show that parents were mostly satisfied with the features of a charter school that related to the education of their children with disabilities. Based on the results, it is evident that individual attention (92%), social/behavioral skills (91%), special education services (91%), and child's academic progress (90%) were the top areas in which parents expressed the highest degree of satisfaction with charter schools. These four features were closely followed by parental participation in their child's IEP process (88%), and the quality of academic programs provided by charter schools (87%). Although parents still ranked communication with their child's teachers positively at 77%

and the school facilities at 64%, they expressed the least satisfaction with these features of charter schools.

Thematic Analysis

Parents were also asked to provide additional comments related to their satisfaction with various features of their children's charter schools. Across all five charter schools, 85 of the 108 parents provided short comment responses to the open-ended questions that asked parents to rate satisfaction with special education programs in their children's charter schools and whether their children had noticeable academic and social/behavioral growth since enrolling in charter schools. The short answers were coded and categorized to identify common themes. Three overarching themes were identified: Academic Progress, Social Competence, and Parental Involvement. The following subthemes emerged under three main themes: Student Participation, Greater Access to Special Education Services, and Decline in Special Education Services (Academic Progress) and Behavioral Outcomes and Social Skills (Social Competence). Table 8 shows themes and subthemes that emerged from the parental responses to the open-ended questions.

Table 8

Themes and Subthemes Research Question 2

Themes	Subthemes
Academic Progress	Student Participation
	Greater Access to Special Education Services
	A Decline in Special Education Services
Social Competence	Behavioral Outcomes
	Social Skills
Parental Involvement	

Academic Progress

Traditionally, researchers have closely linked academic progress and student achievement to assessment grades. Thus, academic progress has been historically defined as students' ability to maintain good grades in school settings (Cachia et al., 2018). Three subthemes emerged under the theme of academic progress: student participation, greater access to general education services, and decline in special education services. When asked about their experiences at the charter school, the majority of parents who answered the open-ended questions in all five schools noted they were satisfied with the academic progress their children were making at charter schools. Parents reported that their children's grades improved since enrolling in a charter school. Parents mentioned that their children "were doing well academically and received a great amount of supports from both general and special education teachers". One of the parents described a reading improvement in a child: "Her last school did not help with her reading. The special education teachers at this [charter] school help her to improve her reading." Parents also reported that the special education programs at the charter school produced improved and better academic outcomes for their children. A parent mentioned that "our experience with the special education programs have been good so far. My child is learning grade level stuffs [materials], unlike her previous school where she was learning elementary stuffs [materials]." Another parent shared a similar view: "Our child has thrived at school [School A]. In past years, he had some challenges with his work, but he is doing much better now. Hopefully, he will continue the good work in high school here." When asked whether there was any noteworthy growth in their children's academics since enrollment in a charter school, parents were overwhelmingly positive about their children's education. Many parents associated improved grades to children's academic improvement. Therefore, parents made comments like: "Grades have increased.

Everything is so much better at this school,” “His grades have been amazing! His reading and writing have improved greatly! He has become so much more involved and him playing on a team sports have kept him accountable for his grades. We are very proud of him,” and “I have noticed a big improvement in my child’s grades ever since he started attending this charter school. He seems more focused and ready for school every day.”

Although the majority of the parents in the five participating charter schools reported that their children improved academically in charter schools, however, a small number of parents noted that their children had not made any academic progress since attending the charter school. One parent commented that:

Our child is not on pace with the standard of progress. That being said he has made progress as a person trying to navigate this world. The one thing we wanted to achieve was to keep his environment consistent and positive and I think we get both at his current school.

Furthermore, some parents commented that their children did not make additional progress beyond what they had made in the school previously attended. Hence comments such as “Not much difference,” “Still the same,” and “No progress” were frequently cited in the data.

Additionally, some of the parents expressed frustrations and considered enrolling their children in another school. For instance, one parent mentioned that “Honestly, he is not progressing. I am in the process of switching schools.”

Student Participation. Student participation has been described as partnership between teachers and students in which students are actively engaged and feeling included and accepted by teachers and peers in a learning community, which is usually a classroom (Bergmark & Westman, 2018). Across all five schools, most of the parents who provided responses to the

open-ended questions noted that they observed increased self-confidence in their children that resulted in active class participation. Parents attributed this to the “help from special education teachers” who encouraged their children to “work hard.” Many parents stated that participation in class activities resulted not only in improved grades but also in self-confidence for their children. For instance, a parent noted that:

My child has gone from not understanding concepts to being able to comprehend, read and write. She’s eager to learn. Has found her voice and now is more involved in the class. The support offered to her as a unique individual has allowed her to flourish.

One of the parents noted that his son “feels more confident doing his work and getting help as needed.” With class participation, parents asserted that their children found their voice and became active participants in class activities. A parent stated that, “he seems to understand assignments a lot better and is not shy to ask questions” and another parent noted that her son “has learn [learned] how to speak out more and how to ask for help as he learns in class how to respond to others.” Furthermore, a parent attributed his son’s active involvement to the school’s efforts: “This school [School C] has taught my son about being more responsible and learning to speak up.” Parents in all the schools made comments that reflected they were pleased with the efforts their children were making in schools. Thus, comments like: “He seems to understand assignments a lot better and is not shy to ask questions,” “Since she is in the program, she is being able to solve problems making her more confident and improving her self-esteem,” “He has become so much more involved and him playing on a team sports has kept him accountable for his grades. We are very proud of him,” and “Attending this school [School B] has influenced my child. My child opens up more, speaks her mind, and have more confidence in herself” were common in the data across other schools.

Greater Availability of Special Education Services. Special education is a specially designed instruction that addresses the individual needs of qualified students to receive special education services in public schools. In all five schools, the majority of parents who answered the open-ended questions commented extensively about accessibility to the special education programs at charter schools for their children. One of the parents stated that “one of the reasons why we decided to put my son at this charter school [School E] was that the previous school removed the special education services from him.” Many parents noted the frustration they experienced in having their children’s previous schools diagnosed or assessed their children for learning disabilities and to determine whether their children would benefit from special education services. For instance, a parent wrote that “the previous school was reluctant to complete assessment for my child.” Similarly, another parent reported that:

The process to put my daughter in that special education [program] wasn’t easy and that was a long way. Started when she was in 4th grade, improving in 5th and now in 6th grade I can say that is worth it. My daughter is really taking advantage of the teachers help, and of course of IEP. Is being [been] a very good experience for me to see my daughter improving her skills.

Another parent expressed a similar view: “Special education teachers at former school did not provide good special education services like the teachers at [School D]. This school [School D] provides the special education supports my child needs to do well in classroom.” Other comments such as “The previous school had horrible special education services. This charter school [School A] is always willing to help get the special education my child needs,” “Special education teachers at previous school did not provide good special education services like the

teachers at [School B], and “The previous school was very reluctant to complete the assessment” were comments that were commonly cited by parents.

A Decline in Special Education Services. While parental comments about access to special education programs were generally positive, parents occasionally made comments that were critical of the special education services their children were receiving in a charter school. In all five schools, several parents who reported that they were dissatisfied with the services mentioned that they considered removing their children from charter schools. Parents’ dissatisfaction with their schools’ special education programs was reflected in some of their comments that included: “The special education teachers need to provide more supports for my daughter,” “The teachers need to work more closely with special needs students,” and “The teachers can do more to improve my child’s reading.” Some parents commented specifically about the decline in the quality of special education services provided for their children in charter schools: “I’m seeing some bad things in their special education programs. The teachers are not helping my son like they used to,” “At her previous school the Special Ed. was more supportive and a bit more organized. Here at the charter school, the Special Ed. hasn’t been well at communication.” Also, parents made comments such as: “Not much difference in special education services,” and “Same services, not different from other [previous] schools,” to indicate they were dissatisfied with the quality of special education programs the school offered their children. Also, few parents narrated the challenges they had in accessing special education programs for their children in charter schools. As noted by a parent:

My child has never attended another charter school so I’m unable to compare. Special education services were not in existence when we first attended the school [School E]. My child’s 2nd grade teacher tried to hold him back for his reading problems. When I

asked to have him tested for learning disabilities, I was told he did not need it. So, I paid to have him tested, and he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Some parents expressed frustrations with their charter schools' special education programs and considered switching their students to traditional public schools. One of the parents stated that the student "is not progressing. I am at the process of switching schools."

Social Competence

Weiner and Craighead (2010) defined social competencies as "the ability to handle social interactions effectively" (p. 1623). Two subthemes emerged under social competence: behavioral outcomes and social skills. Across all five charter schools, the majority of the parents who responded to the open-ended questions reported positive behavioral outcomes and improved social skills in their children since enrollment in charter schools.

Behavioral Outcomes. Parents also reported positive behavioral changes in their children after enrollment in a charter school. In all five charter schools, most of the parents who answered the open-ended questions mentioned that their children showed improved behaviors because of support from the charter school personnel, particularly the teachers. One of the parents commented that the school used "good behavioral strategies" to address son's behavioral issues, while another parent reported that, "he behaves well at home now and I think his behavior in school has also improved because we get less phone from his special education teacher." Similarly, another parent noted that her daughter "behaves better now and I get few phone calls for bad behavior." Many of these parents praised their charter schools for the positive behavioral changes observed in their children. Thus comments such as "I have noticed positive changes in her behavior since she transferred to the school [School E]," "A lot of improvement in her

behavior now,” and “He is doing much better now with his behavior and does not get in trouble like he used to in APS schools” were frequently expressed by parents.

Social Skills. Romanczyk, White, and Gillis (2005) defined social skills as the ability to maintain appropriate and effective interactions with other people in society. Most parents across the five charter schools commented that their children’s social skills improved since enrolling in a charter school, that their children were able to interact and get along with their peers and teachers. One parent commented that their daughter “now gets along with other students and teachers,” while another parent noted that her child “now has friends and behaves much better to peers and staff than in elementary school.” Parents acknowledged that the improvement in their children’s social skills has “reduced bullying and drama” that their children typically engaged in prior to enrollment or transfer to a charter school.

One of the parents stated that “when my daughter started, she was socially underdeveloped. She has become more outgoing and I believe this impacts her educational goals. The goals set for her educationally were such that she reached them but strived for more.” Some parents of students with autism acknowledged that charter schools applied some strategies to improve their children’s social skills. Other parents commented that charter schools applied certain strategies to help their children improve their social skills. One of these parents commented about the improved social skills observed in her son:

learned different ways to solve problems. [He] Uses the IB curriculum to show how to respond to daily live in outside world. Working to improve and recognize social skills and body placement. [He] Comes up with different tolls to recognize behaviors. Fighting everyday has stopped.

Additionally, parents stated that social skills resulted in positive educational outcomes for their children with autism. Another parent of a student with autism made the following comments about her child:

He has not had any more negative behavioral issues. He writes!!!He gives more efforts now. He has confidence and he feel [feels] safe and comfortable enough to speak to his teachers and counselors about any issues he may face. Before I think he just felt unheard, so he had no hope. He has made strides socially, he can actually function, learn, and feel comfortable in his school setting now. He works harder now, and he sees his own improvements. His confidence has soared. He cares about his education and sees that he can improve and that if he works hard that he can accomplish any task that he is faced with.

Although there were no measures of interventions used in this study, the majority of parents reported positively academic, social, and behavioral changes in their children. While comments regarding behavioral outcomes and social skills were generally positive across all schools, it is important to note that two parents from School A commented that their children were not learning grade-level curriculum.

Parental Involvement

Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) described parental role as an integral part of a child's education. They noted that parental involvement includes parents' use of resources in the education and schooling of their children. Across all five participating charter schools, several parents who answered the open-ended questions commented positively about involvement in special education programs of their children. These parents stated that they felt there were more opportunities for parent involvement at a charter school than in traditional public schools. One of

the parents wrote that “His previous school would not tell us about the kind of special education services he is getting. This school [School B] gets us involved in spec. ed. things” and another parent talked about being “involved in IEP process.” A few parents indicated they were frustrated with the lack of opportunity to participate in their children’s special education process at a previous school. For instance, a parent noted that:

Previously, I hated going to IEPs. They made me feel anxious, sad, and hopeless and I did not feel understood in anyway. At our first IEP at the school [School E], I felt heard, understood and my son’s team made me feel confident and gave me hope that my son’s disability would not conquer him. His team spoke to him and listened to him prior to his IEP. His team has helped him improve so much that he no longer hates school. He has made magnificent improvements since the beginning of the school year.

Although many parents admitted that they felt more included in their children’s special education programs in the charter schools, some parents reported experiencing equal involvement in special education processes at both of their children’s previous school and current charter school, “Both previous school and current school [School C] were great at finding her specific needs and strengths. Both schools listened to my concern and were willing to work with me.”

Summary of the Qualitative Findings. The short answer comments revealed that the majority of the parents reported that they were satisfied with the services charter schools offered their children. Parents also reported having positive experiences after enrolling their children in a charter school. The most revealing were parents’ comments identifying both academic, behavioral, and social skill improvements in their children. Parents reported that these improvements resulted in motivation for school, greater participation in school-related work, and

better relationships with the teachers and peers for their children. Parents also associated the positive behavioral and social changes to their children's abilities to access general education curricular. The short answer comments also reveal a high level of satisfaction with respect to the quality of teachers and access to the grade-level curricula at the charter schools and the availability of special education programs in charter schools.

Although only a small number of parents reported that they had negative experiences with their children's charter schools, these parents mentioned the challenges they encountered in accessing special education services for their children. The challenges they noted included the charter schools' unwillingness to conduct diagnostic assessments to determine eligibility for special education services. Moreover, they commented about the decline in the quality of special education programs at their children's charter schools. Also, some parents mentioned that special education programs provided at the charter schools were similar to the services offered at the traditional public schools their children previously attended.

The next section presents the triangulation of findings when examining the short answers parents provided to the open-ended questions compared to their responses to the Likert-scale questions.

Synthesis of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

I sought to find the degree of parents' satisfaction with the aspects of their children's charter school and to describe their experiences with their children's charter school programs in research question 2. Findings from both the open-ended questions and Likert scale responses revealed an overall high degree of parental satisfaction and perspectives with the charter school programs. In addition to the Likert-scale ratings, parents provided short answer comments that expanded upon reasons for their degree of satisfaction and their experiences after enrolling their

children in charter schools. The next section highlights how the short answers support the Likert-scale ratings.

Individual Attention, Academic Progress, and Quality Academic Studies

The majority of the parents provided short answer comments related to the academic improvement of their children since enrollment in charter schools. The theme of academic improvement was reinforced by high Likert-scale ratings that the parents assigned to individual attention, child's academic progress, and quality academic programs. Parents rated these three survey items very high. The high ratings of these three survey items and parental comments indicate that parents were pleased with their children's academic growth in charter schools.

Opportunity for Social/or Behavioral Skills

This survey item was also rated high. The majority of the parents provided comments pertaining to social competence. Parental comments revealed increased class participation, positive behavioral outcomes, and social skills for their children. These three themes support the Likert-scale rating of social/behavioral skills suggesting that parents were highly satisfied with the academic, behavioral, and social outcomes observed in their children since enrollment in charter school programs.

Quality of Special Education Services

The majority of the parents provided comments regarding the greater availability of special education services and satisfaction with the special education programs at their children's charter schools. These parents reported their children were able to access general education curriculum because of the academic and behavioral supports that are in place in the general education classrooms. The high rating on the survey of this item and related short answers indicate a high degree of parental satisfaction and positive experience with their children's

charter school programs. Although comments about special education programs at charter schools were generally positive, a few parents reported a lack of accessibility to special education programs and poor special education services at their children's charter schools and suggested the need for improvement in the special education programs in their children's charter schools.

Participation in the IEP Process

Although most parents rated this item as high, a few parents provided short answers related to participation and involvement in their children's IEP processes. The Likert-scale ratings of this survey item suggest that parents were satisfied with their participation and involvement in the IEP process of their children.

Communication with Child's Teachers

A small number of parents commented that teachers initiated communication through emails or phone calls regarding issues concerning their children's special education programs such as the progress their children were making toward the IEP goals. In addition to the lower rating of this survey item, only a few parents commented about the communication aspect of their students' charter schools. The low Likert-scale rating and the few numbers of parental responses indicate that parents were less satisfied with this feature of their children's schools but may not have reflected the way teachers handled information related to their children's education.

Conclusion of the Findings. The quantitative and qualitative findings for research question 2 indicated that the majority of the parents of middle school students with disabilities were satisfied with most of the services their children received at the charter schools. The ratings of the eight survey items measuring the parental level of satisfaction with the charter school

ranged from 64%-92%. The Likert-scale data and short answer responses supported the fact that parents were adequately satisfied with the individual attention, improved behavioral/social skills, special education services, and academic progress of their children in charter schools. These four features in which parents expressed the highest degree of satisfaction were closely followed with parental satisfaction with the opportunity the charter schools provided for them to participate in their children's IEP processes and the quality of academic programs offered to their children at the charter schools.

The Likert-scale data and short answer responses reinforced the fact that while the majority of the parents felt the charter school programs were beneficial for their children, a handful of parents shared some sentiments about the need for improvement in their children's charter schools. The Likert-scale and short answer responses revealed that a few parents were dissatisfied with the decline in the quality of their children's special education programs and the difficulties they experienced in obtaining diagnostic assessments necessary to determine their children's eligibility for special education services. Although only a few parents provided comments related to communication with their children's schools, the Likert-scale ratings of this survey item suggest that parents were nonetheless satisfied with the communication aspect of their children's schools. Furthermore, some parents rated school facilities the lowest of all the survey-items and did not provide qualitative comments related to school facilities. Nevertheless, the rating shows that majority of parents expressed some degree of satisfaction with the facilities in their children's schools.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the reasons parents considered when enrolling their middle school children with disabilities in a charter school and how these parents reported their experiences and degree of satisfaction with charter schools after enrollment. To date, there have been few studies that have asked parents about their reasons for choosing to educate their children in a charter school and their experiences afterwards. In fact, this is the first study that focuses primarily on the motives of parents for enrolling their middle school children with disabilities in New Mexico charter schools. This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the theoretical frameworks that guided this study and includes a discussion of the findings. Following the discussion of the findings, recommendations are made for the school personnel and parents of students with disabilities, implications for future research are examined, limitations are discussed, and conclusions are drawn. The research questions addressed in this study were: (a) What do parents of students with disabilities report as reasons that they enrolled their children in charter schools? and (b) What do parents of students with disabilities report about their experiences after enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools? I addressed these questions by drawing on the survey of parents of middle school students with disabilities from five public charter schools.

I used two theoretical frameworks to guide the study: 1) parental self-efficacy and 2) parental role construction. Parental self-efficacy refers to how parents view their abilities to perform actions at a certain level (Bandura, 1977). In this study, parents became involved in their children's education because they believed they had the ability to take actions and to participate in educational decisions that would potentially bring about positive educational outcomes for their children. The parental role construction describes how parents make decisions to become

involved in their children's education. Parental role construction for involvement can best be explained as parental beliefs about what one is supposed to do as a parent in relation to their child's education and the actions taken in the process of implementing these beliefs (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2004). Parental role construction focuses on what parents believe to be their responsibilities in the education of their children. In this study, parents of middle school students with disabilities demonstrated their responsibilities through seeking a charter school that addressed the educational and social needs of their children. Thus, this study's findings should be viewed in light of the parental actions in relation to the education of their children with disabilities and can be interpreted through these two theoretical lenses.

Discussion of the Findings

For parents of students with disabilities, certain reasons influenced their decisions to enroll their children in charter schools. When individuals are asked about the decisions that they have made, there is a tendency for them to justify that choice, a concept known as "choice rationalization". When completing the survey, parents in this study were likely to rationalize their choice of charter schools for their children with disabilities.

They justified this choice by rating certain features of charter schools that they considered important and attractive to the unique needs of their children. Many parents considered small class size in charter schools important because they related it with improving academic and social outcomes for their children. While the majority of the parents in this study reported that small class sizes and inclusive education, and other reasons that attracted them to a charter school, it must be noted that parents also appreciated the individualized attention that charter schools provided for their children. Interestingly, many of the parents viewed the small class size as an opportunity for the provision of individualized attention and personal engagement for their children. They seemed to have a consensus that attention for their

children's academic and social needs had been evidently lacking in previous schools. Additionally, parents noted that the small class size allowed teachers to address their children's concerns and problems faster than previous schools. Parents also believed that the small class size provided the opportunity and time for teachers to provide possible interventions for students' learning and behavioral needs. Parents noted that charter schoolteachers listened and seemed to be "knowledgeable" about their children's learning needs and/or behavioral problems. This is important because many of the parents indicated that their children had special needs and needed additional time to complete their assignments. Parents related small class sizes in charter schools to safe learning environments. Parents in this study had different perceptions of what connoted safety. For instance, a good number of parents of students with emotional disturbance and other health impairment associated "less bullying" and "application of behavioral interventions" with charter schools' efforts to maintain safe and conducive learning environments for students. This finding is not surprising given that current research shows that students with emotional and behavioral disorders exhibit challenging behaviors in school settings (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018).

Parents believed that the discipline at the charter schools was better than what was provided in the traditional public schools in which their children previously attended. The fact that class sizes in charter schools were smaller than class sizes in schools in which their children had previously enrolled correlated with better discipline at the charter schools. Teachers were better able to manage their charter school classrooms given that the number of students in the class was typically lower than the number of students accommodated in most traditional public school classes. These descriptions of classroom management in charter schools contrast with many parents' impressions of the traditional public schools their children had previously

attended. This is not to say that parents in this study were entirely critical of traditional public schools. A few parents attributed shortcomings in traditional public schools to teachers being “overwhelmed” by the expectations placed on them despite the challenges associated with large class sizes, lack of resources, and complex class dynamics. Some parents noted positive experiences that they had with traditional public school teachers and administrators who had worked to help their children. However, even with good intentions, parents described teachers as overburdened in dealing with many students in a classroom and complexity in managing classroom discipline. Thus, the immediacy of responses that some educators in charter schools responded to students’ needs as reported by parents, raises questions about the extent to which educators in traditional public schools can respond to the unique needs of students with disabilities.

Given the challenges students with disabilities experienced in traditional public schools, parents who reported transferring their children from a traditional public school to a charter school indicated that they moved their children to a charter school in hopes of attaining better educational opportunities for their children. Thus, previous educational experiences played a role in these parents’ decisions to educate their children in a charter school. Certainly, parental choice of public schools has become a notable part of the educational reform efforts and support for a variety of school choice options that continue to expand across the nation. May (2006) noted that parents who choose their children’s schools were happier with the experience due to the opportunity to freely choose. Earlier studies (Schneider & Buckley, 2006; Chubb & Moe, 1990) reported that choice brought competition and compelled charter schools to treat parents as individuals who require quality services for their children. This assertion is particularly true

given the quality of educational services that most parents in this study reported were provided for their children in charter schools.

Parents appreciated the inclusive education model operated by all participating charter schools in this study. Throughout the study, it was evident that parents across all the schools were happy that their children received instruction alongside their peers without disabilities in general education settings. The experiences of these parents suggest that the educational services their children received and the placements they were assigned had more to do with the charter school's beliefs and practices than with the diagnostic test scores. The overriding concern for most parents in this study was the lack of opportunity in traditional public school settings for their children to be educated with their peers without disabilities. Based on the qualitative data parents provided, charter schools appeared to address this concern. This finding is consistent with previous research that charter schools that supported an inclusion model seemed to attract both parents of students with and without disabilities (Lange & Lehr, 2000; Tuchman et al., 2018; Waitoller & Super, 2017). It is interesting that the popularity of inclusive education in almost all charter schools across the nation seems to have generated interest in research that investigates whether attending a charter school reduces the need for placement in special education programs. Marcus and Carpenter (2017) found that attending a Denver charter school that promoted a strong inclusive philosophy significantly decreased the likelihood that a student classified as having a specific learning disability was restricted from participating in general education classes. Apparently, parents in this study were appreciative of challenging curricula taught in charter schools and rigorous academic expectations for all students in general education settings. This finding parallels the findings of previous research that found a relationship between inclusion and higher academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Carter &

Hughes, 2006) and that found high school students with severe disabilities benefitted academically when provided with peer supports in general education settings (Copeland et al., 2004). Thus, parents in this study chose a charter school which they perceived as offering a more academically challenging learning environment than the child's previous school.

Although parents in this study overwhelmingly appreciated the inclusive education model of their charter school, it is important to note that charter schools are simply complying with the IDEA 2004 provisions that general education settings should be the initial placements for all students with disabilities (Wright & Wright 2012).

While the majority of parents felt that their children demonstrated more academic and social growth in charter school environments, academic gaps for students with disabilities persisted in all five charter schools. A small number of parents were unhappy about the lack of academic gains that their children made in inclusive settings. These gaps suggest that charter schools need to provide continued and ongoing supports around academic supports to address the unique needs of individual students. Additionally, parents' complaints about supports and accommodations for their children reveal that not all charter school parents found that their children received high-quality academic programs in charter schools. As noted by Tuchman et al. (2018), parental grievances about services in charter schools may indicate that these schools lacked sufficient resources to adequately serve students with disabilities. Additionally, Finn et al. (2006) cautioned that parental enthusiasm for challenging curricula used in charter schools may not necessarily translate into improved student performance for all students.

IDEA (2004) requires schools to collaborate and communicate with parents about their children with disabilities in the design and implementation of special education services. Given that IDEA requires schools to keep parents involved in their children's education and to provide

information related to special education services, the ongoing communication between parents and charter school personnel in this study is commendable. Research has shown that parent-teacher communication increases parental involvement in school activities (Parveen et al., 2016.). Parents in this study indicated that charter schools involved them in their children's education in a manner not typical of the traditional public schools. All the five participating charter schools in this study attracted parents who wanted to be part of a school community which encouraged their participation in the educational programming of their children. Given the frequent communication and high level of parental involvement in these schools, all five participating charter schools in this study seemed to comply with these two fundamental mandates of IDEA. Additionally, parents in this study appeared to value services that were directly related to increased educational and social outcomes for their children. However, parents showed less interest in extra-curricular activities. This finding parallels Julius (2011) who also found that parents of students with disabilities in New Hampshire charter schools were not particularly concerned with access to extra-curricular activities.

Whether parents were satisfied with the services at the charter schools was one of the two questions this study sought to answer. Research examining the reasons parents enrolled children with disabilities in charter schools is limited. However, researchers who investigated this topic found that parents' dissatisfaction with previous traditional public schools was often the main reason they sought charter school programs for their children (Hawkins-Pammer, 2000; USDOE, 2017). This current study is not an exception, as parents expressed disapproval of their children's previous schools. For instance, participant parents indicated that they transferred their children from a traditional public school to a charter school because the academic, social, and behavioral

needs of their children were not met in those settings. Many parents reported concerns with the previous school's inability to provide needed attention for the unique needs of their children.

Since most charter schools have a smaller student population, the one-on-one attention provided for students often resulted in higher academic expectations, as evidenced in the parental comments in this study. Studies such as the study conducted by Wohlstetter et al. (2008) found a correlation between higher academic expectations and parental satisfaction. Like other parents, parents of students with disabilities are seeking schools that encouraged their children to strive to reach their maximal potentials. Although parents from only two of the five charter schools noted that their charter schools focused on college preparation, many parents in this study believed that despite the disabilities, their children have the potential to pursue post-secondary education. This assertion has been supported by studies such as Almond (2013) in which parents associated enrollment of their children in charter schools with the potential of attaining a post-secondary education. In addition to higher academic expectations, parents in this study appeared to be excited about positive behavioral and social changes they saw in their children since their enrollment in a charter school. Parents noted that their children showed improved motivation to learn, greater confidence in their abilities, greater participation in class and school-wide activities, and greater satisfaction with their teachers and overall school environment. This observation was noted by parents of students with autism as well. Despite the limited number of parents of students with autism who participated in this study, the five parents shared similar views related to the positive effects that charter school programs had on their children.

Overall, in terms of academic performance, all but a few parents in this study reported gains in academic achievement since enrolling in a charter school. Although gaps still existed among students with disabilities compared to the gains made by students without disabilities,

nonetheless, these students were learning new concepts and accessing general education curricula. The majority of the parents attributed their students' academic and social gains to the supportive environment in the charter school. Previous research (Julius, 2011) found that the culture of a school impacts academic and social outcomes for all students. Additionally, parents reported satisfaction with services. They also believed that charter schools provided greater availability of special education services than the schools their children had previously attended. Parents in this study praised special education teachers for working closely with their children and for providing supports that enabled the children to participate actively with their peers. Although parents reported higher accessibility of special education services in charter schools, a few parents were not pleased with the decline in the quality of special education programs in their children's schools. These parents raised concerns about the lack of services provided to their children in the general education classrooms. Consequently, these parents seriously considered moving their children to another school because of the lack of services. Although only a small number of parents complained about special education services, these complaints reveal that charter schools may not have the resources to serve all students with disabilities. IDEA mandates charter schools to provide free, appropriate public education to all eligible students (COPAA, 2012). Earlier studies (Rhim et al., 2015; Swanson, 2005) have pointed out the challenges that charter schools face in serving students with disabilities.

However, despite the dissatisfaction that a small number of parents expressed about special education services, the majority of parents in this study were pleased with their children's academic progress and greater participation in class, which resulted in their children's improved academic performances. Parents attributed their children's academic progress to quality of teachers, grade-level curricula, and high expectations that teachers in charter schools placed on

all students' academic progress. The relationship between quality academic programs and parental satisfaction in charter schools has also been highlighted in previous studies (Almond, 2013; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Julius, 2011; USDOE, 2017).

Parents also indicated that they were satisfied with the degree in which charter schools involved them in their children's special education programs, particularly in the process of developing their children's IEP. Parental involvement in special education services reflects that the participating charter schools comply with this important provision of IDEA. The fact that these parents were involved in their children's educational programs reflected that they were exercising parental rights provided by federal laws that protect the education of students with disabilities. These laws were not only designed to protect parental rights, but also to ensure quality service delivery for students with disabilities.

Although parents were generally pleased with their charter schools, some parents indicated dissatisfaction with the limited extent and quality of school facilities. The absence of specific parental comments about school facilities is likely an indication that this feature of a charter school was not perceived as important as other features related to charter school programs for children with disabilities. Julius (2011) noted that parents of children with disabilities enrolled in New Hampshire charter schools were less interested in the quality of school facilities. The poor quality of facilities in charter schools may indicate that these schools lack sufficient funds to address this problem.

Across the nation, student enrollment in charter schools has consistently increased almost three-fold in the past 10 years (NAPCS, 2017). Enrollment of students with disabilities in charter schools has experienced an equivalent increase even though there is a disparity in the disability categories represented in charter schools. In this study, students with specific learning disabilities

(SLD) and emotional disturbance (ED) had greater representation than students in other disability categories. These data reflect the enrollment pattern for students with disabilities in New Mexico as students with SLD and those with ED have the highest enrollments compared with students with low incident disabilities. This data supports studies (Tuchman et al., 2018) that examined enrollment patterns of students with disabilities in charter schools in Washington state. Tuchman et al. (2018) noted that Washington state charter schools enrolled students with SLD and ED at higher rates than traditional public schools. Although the data in this study reflected higher representations of students with specific learning disabilities and emotional disturbance in the five participating charter schools, these data are in contrast with the data obtained from NMPED Public Records, which showed that New Mexico traditional public schools enrolled students in all disability categories than charter schools (B. Friedman, NMPED, personal communications, October 14, 2020). Moreover, recent studies (Garcy, 2011; Winters & Carpenter, 2017) found that traditional public schools enrolled students, regardless of disabilities, at higher percentages than charter schools. Half of the parent participants in this study were Hispanic and over half were mothers. This representation is reflective of the demographics of New Mexico residents that comprise 49% Hispanic and 51% female (United States Census Bureau, 2019, July 1). Also, this data parallels previous research that has identified mothers as the most involved parent in children's educational activities than fathers and other guardians (Tazouti & Jarlegan, 2019).

Based on this study's findings, in most cases, parents choose charter schools because of dissatisfaction with previous schools. This dissatisfaction was likely a motivation for parents to choose new schools that they believed were willing to address the academic, behavioral, and social needs of their children. Parents in this study did not indicate that charter schools met all

their expectations. Indeed, a few parents expressed frustrations with some aspects of the charter schools that their children attended, including special education services, accommodations, and even academic supports within the general education classrooms. However, these parents appeared to be appreciative of the efforts charter schools were making related to improved academic and social outcomes for their children. Furthermore, they believed that charter schools provided better educational opportunities as well as better curricula than those provided in traditional public schools. In this study, when parents believed that better curricula were offered in their child's charter schools, they felt that their children were more likely to succeed academically in charter schools than in traditional public schools. This study revealed that one of the major attractions to charter schools was its reputation for a small teacher-student ratio. The small teacher-student ratio suggested the promise of more individualized attention and instruction as well as the inclusion of their children with disabilities in general education classrooms. Charter schools also were perceived as offering safe learning environments where academic, behavioral, and social interests of their children could be met.

Given my experience as a special education teacher in a charter school in which I served students in inclusive settings for six years, I consider two findings in this study unexpected. First, it was surprising that a few parents in this study reported poor special education services and insufficient academic supports for students with disabilities in charter schools. Second, my belief was that the small class settings in charter schools would allow special and general education teachers to provide quality special education services and necessary supports for all students, especially for students with disabilities. Lastly, since charter schools offer smaller classroom settings compared to overcrowded classrooms in most traditional public schools, my expectation was that parents of students with low-incident disabilities would be attracted to such schools.

However, the demographic data in this study indicated that only three of the 108 parents in this study enrolled their children in the five charter schools.

Previous Research Findings and Current Study's Findings

This study provides evidence that parents of students with disabilities chose charter schools for similar reasons that had been established by previous charter school research. However, this study adds some unique perspectives to the existing charter school studies. Earlier studies (Finn et al., 2006; Kleitz et al., 2000; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Lewis & Danzig, 2010; May, 2006) found that small class sizes in charter schools compared to larger class settings in traditional public schools lead parents to favor charter schools for their children. However, unlike this study, earlier studies did not include parents with different ethnicities. The Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian, and Native American parents in this study appeared to consider that small class sizes offered their children potentially better academic and social benefits. Moreover, this study looked specifically at charter schools in New Mexico.

Earlier studies (Almond; 2013; Julius, 2011; Kleitz et al., 2000; May 2006; Waitoller & Super, 2017) reported that student safety and school disciplinary policies influenced parents to enroll their children in a charter school. These earlier studies primarily discussed the importance of safety, while this current study highlighted charter schools' disciplinary policies and included a discussion related to specific intervention strategies used in charter schools.

Interestingly, 9 out of the 14 earlier studies reviewed in this paper found that the quality of academic programs and challenging curricula were important reasons for parents when deciding whether to enroll their children in charter schools. Parents in this study expressed similar perspectives about academic programs and opportunities their children had in accessing challenging curricula in charter schools. However, unlike previous studies, this study highlighted

both the positive and negative perspectives parents had about academic supports for their children with disabilities in general education settings. While most of the parents were satisfied with their children's academic gains, a few parents expressed dissatisfaction with inadequate accommodations and lack of academic supports for their children in general education settings in charter schools.

In addition, previous studies (Finn et al., 2006; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Waitoller & Super, 2017) also found that quality special education services motivated parents to enroll children with disabilities in a charter school. However, this study highlighted inclusion and service delivery within general education settings as integral features of special education programs that parents valued in the charter schools. Moreover, this study included both negative and positive perspectives parents provided about special education programs in charter schools.

Also, previous studies (Adzima, 2014; Saatoglu et al., 2011; Whitting & Feinaur, 2011) found that parents had better opportunity for involvement in their children's education and school activities in charter schools than in traditional public schools. This current study also found that parental involvement was higher in charter schools and was one of the reasons that influenced parents in this study to enroll their children in a charter school. Finn et al. (2006) reported that charter schools maintained parent-school communication that fostered positive relationships between charter school personnel and parents. Similarly, parents in this study reported positive experience about communication with both special education and general education teachers. Like an earlier study (Julius, 2011), this study also found that parents were less concerned with extra-curricular activities.

Lastly, while this study's findings confirmed most of the previous research findings, it is noteworthy that other findings contributed additional insights into charter school research. For

instance, this study reinforced the value that parents attributed to academic and behavioral supports which helped their children to become active participants in the general education classrooms. Unlike previous charter school studies, this study demonstrated that parents were pleased with their children's increased participation in general education settings in charter schools than in traditional public schools. This finding is significant to the educational services provided to students with disabilities, given that that these students are not often active participants in academic activities in general education settings. Although Lange and Lehr (2000) noted that students with disabilities made social gains in charter schools, information regarding the influence of behavioral intervention supports on students' social gains is lacking their study.

Reflected in their comments on the quality of services provided by charter schools to both parents and students, it appeared that parents of students with disabilities in this study viewed services received in charter schools to be superior to those in traditional public schools. The appeal of charter schools among parents from diverse cultural backgrounds was reflected in the results of this current study. This study revealed a motivated and diverse parent population who reported that various reasons account for their decision to choose a charter school for their child with a disability. Parents cited the reasons for enrolling their child with a disability according to the order of importance: fewer discipline problems, small class sizes, better educational services, special education services, updated about child's academic progress, child safety, opportunity to participate in a child's IEP process, and extra-curricular activities. In their qualitative comments, parents revealed that they found an inclusive education model, individualized supports, academic value, and parent-school communication important for their children's academic and social progress.

Findings to the Research Questions in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks

The purpose of this research was to seek answers to the reasons parents enrolled their children with disabilities in charter schools and their experiences after the enrollment. Both parental self-efficacy and parental role construction theories underline parents' abilities to make decisions pertaining to the education of their children and their roles and expectations in ensuring their children receive quality education. Given that parents are key decision-makers who play important roles in the education of their children, parents of students with disabilities in this study believed they needed to make educational decisions that would require them to seek charter schools that would address their children's educational needs. Hence, the findings of this study revealed that parents in this study felt they were hopeful to achieving improved academic outcomes for their children with disabilities by enrolling them in charter schools. Therefore, parents in this study considered some features of charter schools important when making the decisions to enroll their children in charter schools.

Like other features, majority of the parents noted that provision of quality educational services was critical in their selection of a charter school. Parents of students with disabilities in this study sought charter schools for educational programs that they felt met their children's special needs. These parents considered special education services, child's inclusion in general education classrooms, participation in IEP, small class sizes, and disciplinary policies as important reasons for enrolling their children in charter schools. Additionally, parents conceptualized and articulated their reasons for charter schools by appreciating the opportunity for their children to access general education curricula, received individualized attention and received accommodations, academic and behavioral supports in inclusive settings rather being served in segregated settings as typical of former traditional public schools their children

previously attended. These findings clearly showed that these parents were actively involved in the search for better schools for their children with disabilities. Clearly, parental perceptions of their efficacy and role to influence educational outcomes for their students motivated them to search for charter schools that had enticing features that could address the unique academic and social needs of their students as evidenced in this study.

One of the purposes of this study was to understand the experiences of parents after enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools. Findings in this study reflect that parents saw their experiences with charter schools as generally positive. The findings that parents were pleased with the availability of special education services and opportunities for involvement in their children's special education programs are reflective of self-efficacy and parental role construction theories, which highlight that parents tend to be actively involved if they have the ability to make changes in their children's education. As the theory of parental self-efficacy suggests, parents see themselves as possessing the knowledge and skills about what special education service should entail for children attending public schools. Parents in this study described their experiences with special education programs for their children attending charter schools as satisfying but dissatisfying in traditional public schools. Based on the qualitative comments, it was evident that majority of the parents in this study advocated and sought for special education services that fit into their children's academic and social needs.

Parental role-construction emphasizes the role of parents in achieving educational outcomes for their children. The fact that majority of parents who participated in this study described having good experiences with the academic and social gains their children made at charter schools suggest that parents played important role in the education of these children.

Recommendations for School Personnel and Parents of Students with Disabilities

Given the increased enrollment of students with disabilities in New Mexico charter schools (B. Friedman, NMPED, personal communication, October 14, 2020), it is important to understand the features that make charter schools attractive to parents of these students. Parents who participated in this study based their choice of a charter school on the special needs of their children.

Recommendations for School Personnel

Based on this study's findings, the following recommendations were made for public school personnel, particularly for the school administrators.

Provide Continuous Professional Development. Teacher preparedness is the degree to which teachers, especially general education teachers, feel adequately prepared to work with students with disabilities in inclusive settings. To consistently promote inclusive education in public schools, school administrators need to provide ongoing professional development for teachers and staff related to special education service delivery for students. Lindstrom and Speck (2004) reported that continuous professional development is crucial for schools in their efforts to provide quality educational services for all students. This can be accomplished through promoting collaboration, sharing of professional knowledge, using evidence-based practices, and keeping teachers informed of the various educational changes. The majority of the parents who participated in this study underscored the connection between special education services and general education settings. They appreciated that special education services were provided within the general education settings with supports provided by both general education and special education teachers for their children. Since special educators and general educators are jointly responsible for the academic growth of all students in general education classrooms (Gordillo & Miller, 2017), public school administrators must recognize that the professional practices of

teachers are likely to influence educational outcomes for students. This will in turn likely affect school choice decisions of parents, especially parents of students with disabilities.

Provide Equal Access to Charter Schools and Accommodations. Charter schools are public schools that receive state and federal funds. As a result, all students are entitled to have equal access to charter schools. Various criticisms related to the ability of charter schools to provide free appropriate public education to children with disabilities have been reported in research focusing on educational services for students with disabilities attending charter schools. These criticisms center on some charter schools intentionally serving fewer students with disabilities, especially students with low incident disabilities, which typically make up about 20% of all students with disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). These criticisms are reflected in the complaints offered by a few parents in this study regarding the lack of accommodations and supports for their children in general education settings. Parents' complaints suggest that despite positive perspectives offered by parents in this study, charter schools will still need to improve educational services for students with disabilities. Despite federal laws guiding the education of students with disabilities, substantial gaps in achievement continue to exist between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities in most public schools (McKittrick et al., 2019). The fact that parents of students with low incidence disabilities have low representation in this study is concerning because it confirms what research has emphasized regarding significantly lower enrollment of students with low incidence disabilities in charter schools. Low incident disabilities include intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, autism spectrum disorders, and deaf-blindness. Based on the federal mandates, charter schools are legally obligated to provide access to academic programs offered at charter schools to all students, irrespective of the type or severity of the disabilities. Therefore,

to comply with the federal laws, charter school administrators must not “counsel” these students out of charter school programs but rather provide needed accommodations and supports these students require to perform in charter schools.

Encourage Parental Participation. It is important that administrators and educators recognize that parents are increasingly aware of the legal and fundamental role in the education of their children with disabilities. Thus, it is relevant to examine whether traditional public school personnel intentionally exclude parents from participating in their children’s special education programs, especially in the IEP process. Most parents who participated in this study spoke about the lack of receiving frequent and updated information about their children’s IEP meetings from the previous schools that their children had attended. Both teachers and administrators need to make a concerted effort to include parents in both the IEP process and special education programs. Research has consistently shown that special education teachers pride themselves on their ability to provide specialized knowledge about special education and their skills to deliver educational services to students. It is possible that teachers’ notion of being the “experts” may have led some educators to consider parental input in special education programs secondary to their own expert educator input, as evidenced by the reports of many parents in this study. Additionally, school personnel need to pay close attention to the IDEA mandates that require parental participation in the education of students with disabilities (Wrights & Wrights, 2012).

Maintain a Small Class Size. Although charter school administrators may not be able to control the population size of their schools, they may be able to work toward small class sizes or to place students with disabilities in small class settings so that their needs can be effectively met. Small class sizes traditionally exist in most charter schools; therefore, all public school

administrators should recognize that these classes hold promise for improved student achievement and could attract the interest of parents of students with disabilities. Since small class size has become one of the notable characteristics of charter schools, it may be important that charter school administrators continue to retain enrollment of their students while maintaining this aspect of their school for the purpose of ensuring positive educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Encourage Parent-School Communication. School administrators and teachers need to understand the importance of maintaining communication with parents. This will foster a partnership that may result in positive academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities. School personnel should not lose sight of the fact that parents and students are consumers of educational services and their perspectives matter.

Improve Extra-Curricular Activities and School Facilities. Parents in this study reported that charter schools lack extra-curricular activities such as sports and have poor facilities. Charter school administrators need to address these areas of concern. While research has noted that adequate funds remain one of the key challenges charter schools face (Swanson, 2005), charter school administrators should seek ways to raise funds needed to provide quality facilities and provide extra-curricular activities.

Recommendations for Parents of Students with Disabilities

Just as was found in earlier studies (Finn et al., 2006; Hawkins-Pammer, 2000; Fiore et al., 2001; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Waitoller & Super, 2017), this study also found that parents select charter schools to have the educational needs of their children met. Based on this study's findings, the following recommendations were made for parents:

Examine Aspects of a Charter School. Parents should carefully investigate aspects of a charter school that they hope will meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of their children. Parents will want to ensure that the charter school that they select for their child encourages parents to be more proactive in their decisions regarding the education of their children. The majority of the parents in this study valued involvement in the special education services and the overall educational programs available for their children. Parents may do well by seeking a school for their child that encourages parental involvement in school-related activities.

Reflect on Experiences Regarding Prior School(s). Parents are recommended to examine and reflect on aspects of previous schools they were dissatisfied with to ensure that prospective charter schools that they may be considering can address these aspects effectively.

Recommendations for Future Research

It would be informative that future research studies include different demographic groups such as parents in rural communities and parents from urban school districts that serve large populations of students and parents from different cultural backgrounds. This would potentially allow a more comprehensive understanding of parental choice from a broader spectrum of parents. Prior to this study, Finn et al. (2006) and McKittrick et al. (2019) were the only studies that specifically included perspectives of parents with students with disabilities enrolled in rural charter schools. Most of the charter school research has focused mainly on parents of students with disabilities enrolled in urban charter schools (Smith et al., 2011). Research that includes parents in rural and urban settings will provide broader insights that can be generalized to better understand why parents of students with disabilities have more frequently been choosing charter schools for their children.

It would be interesting to examine how parents of different ethnicities compare to one another regarding their reasons for choosing a charter school for a child with a disability. These comparisons would provide information related to the influence of cultural backgrounds on parental choice of charter schools for students with disabilities.

Additionally, examining how various parent sub-groups compare to one another in relation to their reasons for choosing a charter school for a child with a disability would be insightful. These comparisons may include: (a) parents of elementary school students with disabilities versus parents of secondary school students with disabilities; (b) parents of students with high incidence disabilities versus parents of students with low incidence disabilities; and (c) mothers of students with disabilities versus fathers of students with disabilities in charter schools. These comparisons would provide public school stakeholders and practitioners information and knowledge needed to effectively address the needs of a wider range of parents and students with disabilities.

Studies designed to collect data related to parents' perceptions about small class size, individualized instruction, quality of academic programs and compared to their children's academic and social gains at charter schools would be useful in exploring the relationship between any of these factors.

Inclusive education seems to be one of the most valuable aspects of charter school programs. However, several parents in this study expressed some frustrations with the lack of supports for their children in inclusive settings. More research needs to be conducted on the nature of inclusion in charter schools. Such research may provide information on the need for charter schools to reinforce their inclusive education practices.

Future research should also consider using interviews to gain a better understanding of the reasons parents of students with disabilities select charter schools and the subsequent experiences they have had with charter schools. The use of interviews will provide parents the opportunity to discuss their experiences in more depth. Furthermore, researchers will have the opportunity to follow-up with the parent participants and conduct a member check that may provide participants the opportunity to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are accurately represented.

Lastly, there is a need for future research to investigate whether parents of students with low-incident disabilities have the opportunity to place their children in charter schools. Data obtained from NMPED showed that this group of students were seldomly enrolled in New Mexico charter schools.

Limitations

Although this current study presents some interesting findings, there are a number of limitations. Only middle school parents were included in this study. The perspectives regarding charter school programs reflect the experiences of this parent population and not those of the parents in other grade-levels.

This study included only English-speaking parents. The perspectives and experiences of non-English parents regarding educational services offered by charter schools were not represented in the study. The perspectives provided by non-English parents would potentially provide a better understanding of how to serve the increasingly diverse population in American public schools. Moreover, this current study did not include parents of students without disabilities, making it difficult to conclude that they share similar sentiments about charter

schools or are accessing charter schools for the same reasons as parents of students with disabilities are accessing charter schools.

This study employed a survey design in which parents' perspectives about charter schools were only obtained through Likert-scale ratings and short answers to open-ended questions. Parent interviews could provide insight into parents' perspectives about charter school programs. Therefore, the lack of interviews prevented parents from clarifying their thoughts and perspectives regarding charter schools.

Only three of the 108 parents (3%) who participated in this study were parents of students with low-incident disabilities (deaf-blindness, hearing impairment, and visual impairment) participated in the study. Hence, the views and experiences of this group of parents regarding charter schools are not adequately reflected or represented in this study. This is an important area for future research to explore.

Furthermore, the population of this study included only parents who had chosen charter schools. The perspectives and experiences of school parents who had not chosen charter schools for their children was missing from this study.

Another notable limitation was the study's sample size. Only 108 parents from five charter schools participated in this study despite numerous efforts to include a significant number of parents. Given the small sample size, it is not possible to generalize this study's findings to all charter school parents of students with disabilities.

Lastly, information on the length of time that students had been previously enrolled in none charter schools was missing. A question that would have provided data on this information was missing.

Despite these limitations, this study provides information for key stakeholders in charter school. Charter school educators, administrators, and related professionals may better understand what parents look for when enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools.

Conclusion

Research on why parents choose charter schools for their children is limited. Even more limited or non-existent is the research examining the reasons motivating parents in New Mexico to enroll their middle school students with disabilities in charter schools. Like other parents, for a parent choosing a school that effectively addresses the needs of a child with a disability can be a complex task. According to B. Friedman of NMPED Public Records (personal communication, October 14, 2020), New Mexico has witnessed an increase in the enrollment of students with disabilities in charter schools. As noted by Friedman, currently 27,189 students from which 16% were students with disabilities attend charter schools in New Mexico. Therefore, research focusing on information related to academic and behavioral outcomes of all students, including those with disabilities is important to charter schools in order to provide effective services for all charter school students. Parents of middle school students with disabilities at the five participating charter schools selected charter schools for several salient reasons that they believed were important for their children's education. These parents appreciated the academic and social gains their children made in charter schools. Throughout the study, the majority of parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the traditional public schools that their children had previously attended and saw charter schools as a viable option to traditional public schools. These parents noted that small class settings and inclusive education available in charter schools led to improved academic and social outcomes for their children. Even though most parents were pleased with academic programs of their charter schools, a few parents indicated areas of

concern related to the lack of academic supports and accommodations that could potentially address their children's learning needs. Indeed, more concerning for some parents was the decline in the quality of special education services in charter schools. While it was noted that New Mexico parents who participated in this study were generally pleased with charter schools, nonetheless, they still expressed some concerns with service delivery related to charter schools.

Perhaps more worrisome is whether these charter schools are meeting the IDEA mandates. The IDEA lays out broad mandates for services for all children with disabilities, and charter schools are not exempted from fulfilling those mandates (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). This current study shows that only a small number of students with low incidence disabilities attended the five participating charter schools, while the numbers of students with high incidence disabilities, such as SLD and ED, were high. The small numbers of students with low incidence disabilities, such as autism and ID in this study were noticeable. Research that examined enrollment of students with disabilities noted that charter schools had a low enrollment of students with low incidence disabilities due in part to the high cost and the challenges of educating these students in charter schools (NAPCS, 2015; Winters, 2015). The disproportionate representation of disability categories in this study is reflective of a similar enrollment pattern in many charter schools throughout New Mexico. In comparison to traditional public schools in New Mexico, charter schools in large urban districts are likely to enroll disproportionately greater numbers of students with high incidence disabilities and lower numbers of students with low incidence. Given this potentially discriminatory enrollment, charter schools are more likely to serve students with mild to moderate disabilities who are typically included in the general education classrooms.

All five participating charter schools in this study provided the inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. This is in fulfillment of one of the IDEA mandates that require students with disabilities to be educated with their peers without disabilities in general education settings (Gordillo & Miller, 2017). While the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings is commendable and was clearly valued by parents in this study, nonetheless, the lack of supports in inclusive settings noted by some parents should be worrisome for charter school administrators and parents. Placing students in general education classrooms is not enough in fulfilling the IDEA mandate. By providing critical academic supports such as accommodations, differentiation, modification, and multi-level instruction, it is possible that student success can potentially be achieved in an inclusive setting (Gordillo & Miller, 2017).

In general, most of the parents who participated in this study were pleased with how education had been delivered to their children in the charter school that they attended. However, parental comments reflected an imbalance in the service delivery for students with disabilities in traditional public schools that their children had attended in New Mexico. These parents' criticisms of traditional public schools that their children previously attended were evident throughout the study. Most of these parents were unhappy that their children with challenging behavior were suspended multiple times from traditional public schools because the schools failed to implement the behavior interventions outlined in their children's IEPs. In contrast, these parents noted that charter schools addressed their children's behavioral issues by using appropriate interventions. This supports existing research that indicates parents of students with ED tend to seek charter school programs for their children because they believe these schools address disciplinary issues better than traditional public schools (Lange & Lehr, 2000).

Although earlier research has noted charter schools face challenges in providing quality special education services for students identified with disabilities, this seems not to be the case in this study, as most of the parents were happy with the special education programs in their children's schools. Only a few parents noted the need for charter schools to work on improving the quality of their special education services. Interestingly, most parents commented about the greater availability of special education services in charter schools than in traditional public schools. This is interesting given the limited resources that charter schools face in delivering special education services for students. Perhaps, parents who have enrolled their children in New Mexico charter schools equate individualized attention offered to their children in charter schools to the availability of special education services.

Finally, it is important to note that this study gives parents an opportunity to voice their experiences with charter schools and services related to their children's education. As the charter school system continues to increase, it is informative to understand why parents of students with disabilities are choosing charter schools together with what they think about their child's actual experiences in charter schools. Given their commitment to providing quality education, New Mexico charter schools must be able to provide the kinds of services that meet the needs and interests of parents and their students with disabilities.

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Appendix A:

Charter School Parent Survey

Part One: Demographic Questions

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Please know that you are only allowed to take this survey once.

Please provide responses to the following questions:

1. Gender of your child with disability

Mark only one oval

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer
- Other-----

2. Relationship to your child

Mark only one oval

- Mother
- Father
- Guardian
- Foster parent
- Foster grandparent
- Stepmother
- Stepfather
- Grandmother
- Grandfather

3. What is your child's school enrollment history?

Check all that apply

- Completed elementary school at a traditional public school
- Completed elementary school at a charter school
- Started middle school at a traditional public school

- Started middle school at a charter school
- Transferred from a traditional public middle school to a charter middle school
- Transferred from a charter middle school to a charter middle school

4. What school does your child attend?

Mark only one oval

- El Camino Real Academy
- Mission Achievement and Charter School
- Native American Community Academy
- South Valley Preparatory School
- The International School at Mesa del Sol

5. What is your child's grade level?

Mark only one oval

- 6th
- 7th
- 8th

6. What is your child's disability?

27. Check all that apply

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Specific learning disability

- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment

7. What is your ethnicity?

Check one or all that apply

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

Part Two: Reasons for Charter School Choice

Please provide detailed written responses to the questions below.

8. Please list the reasons that influenced your decision to enroll your child at this charter school.

9. Does this charter school provide additional supports that were not offered by other schools that your child attended prior to attending this charter school? If so, list those supports.

Please indicate how important each factor was in your decision to choose this charter school for your child. Click on a response below that most closely shows the importance of each factor in your decision.

(1) Very Unimportant; (2) Unimportant; (3) Neutral; (4) Important; (5) Very Important

Reasons	1	2	3	4	5
10. This school provides better education services than my child’s previous school(s)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Special education teachers inform me of child’s academic progress better than my child’s previous school(s).		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Special education services are provided for my child in general education classrooms at this school better than my child’s previous school(s)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. The school seeks my input in the development of my child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) more than my child’s previous school(s).	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. The school has more extra-curricular activities such as sports, clubs, etc. than my child’s previous school(s).		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. My child is safer at this school than at previous school(s).		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. This school has a smaller class size than my child’s previous school(s).		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. There are fewer discipline problems in this school than my child’s previous school(s)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part Three: Parental Experiences with Charter Schools

Please provide detailed responses to the following open-ended questions:

- 18. Please describe your experience with special education services for your child at previous school(s) and this charter school.

19. Please describe any academic, social, and/or behavioral improvements your child has demonstrated since he/she started attending this charter school.

For each of the following items, please click the response that most closely reflects your level of satisfaction with your child’s current charter school.

(1) Very Dissatisfied; (2) Dissatisfied; (3) Neutral; (4) Satisfied; (5) Very Satisfied

Reasons	1	2	3	4	5
20. Individual attention for my child in general education classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Quality of academic studies/programs (e.g., instructional strategies, grading, assignments/projects, curriculum, and subjects offered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Academic progress of my child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Opportunity for my child to practice social/or behavioral skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Quality of the school’s facilities (e.g., bathroom, cafeteria, library, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Quality of special education services delivered to my child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Participation in my child’s IEP process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Communication with my child’s teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Oluwole Ilesanmi at oilesanm@unm.edu or at (307) 399-3430. You can also contact Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (505) 277-2644.

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Appendix B:

Letter of Invitation

Invitation letter to Parents

Dear Charter School Parents:

The focus of my dissertation research is to understand why parents choose to educate their children with disabilities in New Mexico charter schools.

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Oluwole Ilesanmi, a doctoral student in Special Education Department at the University of New Mexico (UNM). This study examines factors parents consider when choosing a charter school for their child with a disability. Your child's charter school administration has given permission to ask for your participation in the study. You will be asked to take an online survey that includes 25 questions. The survey takes approximately 25 minutes to complete.

Issues of confidentiality regarding information related to you and your child are of utmost concern. Analysis of the survey responses will help to determine the factors parents consider prior to enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools. Results of this study may be published for the University of New Mexico. This information will be stored in a locked cabinet at my office and will be destroyed following the completion of the study.

Your decision to allow your responses to be collected and analyzed in this research study is entirely free and voluntary. Refusal to participate in the study will not in any way affect your child at school.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (505) 277-2644. The IRB consists of a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human subjects. For more information, you may access the IRB at irb.unm.edu. If you wish to discuss this project, please feel free to contact me via email or phone. My contact information is as follows:

Sincerely,

Oluwole Ilesanmi,
PhD Student
oilesanm@unm.edu
(307) 399 3430

Appendix C: Consent Form



Parental Choice of Charter Schools for Middle Students with Disabilities Parents' Consent to Participate in Research

Purpose of the study: You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Oluwole Ilesanmi, a doctoral student from the Department of Special Education at the University of New Mexico. The purpose of this study is to collect data on the factors that parents/guardians consider when choosing a charter school for their child with a disability. You are being asked to take part in this study because it is important to determine the factors that may influence parents to enroll their children with disabilities in New Mexico charter schools. This form will explain what you can expect when participating in the research, as well as the possible risks and benefits of participation. If you have any questions, please ask the investigator.

What you will do in the study:

Setting: You will be asked to complete an online survey or a paper survey.

Duration: This will be a one-time survey that will take 25 minutes to complete.

Survey. You will be asked to complete an online survey, or a paper survey composed of closed and open-ended questions. The survey will assess the reasons you enrolled your child in a charter school and your experience with your child's charter school. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and you can stop the survey at any time. It is important to include parents/guardian's voice in a research study that focuses on factors that may influence them in choosing a school for their child with a disability.

Risks: Participation in this study requires minimal or no risk, as no identifying information will be collected.

Benefits: There may be some benefits, including sharing your perspectives and experiences about charter school program and educational services your child receives at the charter school. It is hoped that information gained from this study will help improve educational services for your child and may be a long-term benefit to students, parents, charter school educators, and administrators.

Confidentiality of your information: Any information about you and your child will be kept secure by the researcher. Your child will not be required to participate in the study.

Use of your information for future research: All identifiable information (e.g., your name, date of birth) will be removed from the information or samples collected in this project. After we remove all identifiers, the information or samples may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

Payment: You will not be paid to take part in this study.

Right to withdraw from the study: Participation is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions at any time, please call or email Oluwole Ilesanmi at (307) 399-3430, oilesanm@unm.edu.

If you would like to talk to someone affiliated with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), you can call the Office of the IRB at (505) 277-2644 or email at IRBMainCampus@unm.edu

Appendix D:

Flyer (Advertisement)

**Parental Choice of Charter Schools for Middle School Students with Disabilities**

I am looking for parents/guardians of middle school students with disabilities to participate in this study.

This project wants to look at why parents/guardians of middle school students with disabilities choose to enroll their children in charter schools.

Parents/guardians of students who are receiving special education services under the following categories: autism; deaf-blindness; deafness; emotional disturbance; hearing impairment; intellectual disability; multiple disabilities; orthopedic impairment; other health impairment; specific learning disability; speech or language impairment; traumatic brain injury; or visual impairment (including blindness) will participate in the project

If you decide to participate in the project, you will be asked to:

- Give a consent for participation in the project
- To complete an online survey or a paper survey that will take approximately 25 minutes to complete.

This project is being conducted by Oluwole Ilesanmi, a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education at the University of New Mexico (UNM).

Contact Information: Please call (307) 399 3430 or email oilesanm@unm.edu to get more information or to schedule an appointment.