WHAT MOTIVATES FAMILIES TO CHOOSE A CHARTER SCHOOL?

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Since the advent of charter schools in 1992, the population of students and number of schools has dramatically increased. Because a second generation of students have charter schools as a choice, it is important to understand what motivates children and their parents to choose these schools. Recent research has revealed that family motivations are complicated and differ by specific contexts. In this study, I interviewed 59 incoming parents and children at a small public charter school in southern Oregon with a unique population in its locale. Interviews were designed to elicit quantitative and qualitative data regarding motivations for choosing this specific school. Study results indicate that parents and their children leave traditional schools for primarily environmental and academic reasons, although the results were mixed. Families chose the school in this study for primarily environmental factors, particularly class and school size. I discuss implications for the charter school and its sponsoring district and suggest areas of further local research.

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CHAPTER I

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Charters schools have operated in the United States for more than two decades, and their longevity and proliferation indicate that they are not a passing fad (Lake, 2010; Wohlstetter, Smith, & Farrell, 2013). Charter schools have a wide breadth of missions and contexts, and individual schools rely on student enrollment in order to remain in operation. As a result, charter school administrators may make program decisions in part based on the reasons why parents enroll their students and respond to parent and student input to maintain recruitment and retention. However, not every administrator possesses the time or capacity to conduct such research. This research addresses parental motivations for leaving a traditional public school and choosing to enroll their children in charter schools. The results of this action research will assist charter school leaders in understanding the educational and programmatic needs and desires of the communities they serve.

Background

Alternative education and related placements, programs, and schools have developed for a range of reasons, including to provide greater autonomy for teachers, opportunities for greater community involvement, and services to students who seek educational models different from those employed by traditional public schools. Proponents of alternative education argue that students who are not satisfied in traditional educational placements require differentiated instruction or specialized curriculum in order to demonstrate success, as measured by behavioral outcomes, academic achievement, and completion of education programs.

One education alternative, charter schools, has its foundations in a 1970s position paper in which Budde coined the term "charter" as the agreement between small groups of teachers who would form schools and set their own policies and goals, independent of a school district (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). The charter concept was concurrently championed by American Federation of Teachers president Al Shanker (Kahlenberg, 2008). Charter schools are choice schools. Students are not assigned or placed in charters, as they would be to their designated public schools, which are most often tied to a residential zone (Oregon Department of Education [ODE], 2015). Charter schools have proliferated rapidly since the first U.S. charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992, as indicated by the rapid expansion of charter legislation and schools across the United States; in the 2013–2014 school year, 6,440 charter schools in 40 states served 2,513,634 students, representing 5.1% of the public school population (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2015).

Charter Schools in Oregon

In the 2013–2014 school year, Oregon maintained 124 charter schools that served 5% of the public school population (ODE, 2014). Table 1 shows that charter schools serve a higher percentage of White students and a much smaller percentage of Latino students. The free and/or reduced fee lunch (FRL) eligibility numbers in Oregon charter schools contrast greatly with national statistics, which show that 63% of charter school students are eligible, compared with 48% of traditional public school students (Rebarber & Zgainer, 2014). These differences warrant investigation of what attracts certain populations to charter schools in Oregon. The Oregon charter school numbers are similar

to the demographics of the proposed research site, which will be described in the next chapter.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Oregon Traditional and Charter Schools, 2013–2014

Demographic	Traditional public schools	Charter schools
Total population	538,517	28,581
White student %	63.4	78.1
Latino student %	22.6	10.1
Free/reduced lunch %	54	44

Note. All information from ODE (2014).

Decision-Making Process

Early in the existence of charter schools, one of the criticisms voiced by opponents was that parents were incapable of making informed choices for their students' educational placements. The Carnegie Foundation claimed that parents were unprepared to participate in the education market in an informed way, with the possible exception of those with higher education (Robenstine, 1992). Ascher, Fruchter, and Berne (1996) argued that few parents, regardless of social class, were willing to gather the information necessary to make an informed decision about choice schools.

Subsequent arguments portray a systemic situation that limits parents' power to choose. DeJarnatt (2008) wrote that education "has not traditionally been a private consumer item but rather a public good" (p. 14), a position that does not position parents to be rational actors in choosing the "best" school for their children. Further, the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Congress, 2002) required schools to publicly furnish

information such as test scores and incidences of violence. These data are insufficient for informed decision making and do not provide parental understanding of their students' potential experience in a school regarding curriculum and educational opportunities.

In contrast, Epstein (2008) claimed that parents are more savvy consumers of information and are demanding more and detailed information about school programs. The *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* (MetLife Foundation, 2012) revealed that more teachers (65%) believe that parents take and interest in their students' education than did teachers who took the same survey in 1987 (52%). Further, the survey shows that although parents rely heavily on teachers and students for information about schools, a large majority of parent respondents (74%) use the Internet to find information about schools and districts. As parents become more involved in making decisions about school placements for their children, it is necessary to understand the factors that inform their choices, including sources of information and live experiences.

Literature Search and Results

I searched the Educational Resources Information Center database and Google Scholar to find peer-reviewed journal articles on parents' motivations for choosing charter schools. I limited the searches to studies published from 2006 to the present to capture the most recent research conducted on the topic. One exception to this limitation is the article by Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, and Matland (2000), whose data collection instrument I adapted for my study. Although this 2000 study is outside my designated literature pool, I included it for its usefulness in building from established research for my study.

Search of the Educational Resources Information Center database for peer-reviewed journal articles published since 2006 using the combined terms *parent motivation* and *charter school* yielded 629 results. The vast majority of the research articles did not align with the topic of interest, instead focusing on student outcomes based on parental involvement at home or at school. I eliminated journal articles that focused on student motivation (226 articles) and attitudes (121 articles), those that included schools outside the United States (207 articles), those that focused on gender subgroups (51), and those that drew correlations between parental involvement and academic achievement, because these issues were beyond the scope of my study. The remaining 17 articles form the basis of my literature review, organized below by (a) research methods and (b) key themes and results.

Research Methods

Much of the research on parent motivations for choosing a charter school is gathered either qualitatively by directly interacting with parents or by surveys meant to capture attitudes at a point in time (Table 2). Kleitz et al. (2000) surveyed parents by phone using five Likert-style questions. Greene (2012) compared Indiana parent satisfaction levels with their current charter school with the satisfaction with their previous institutions and articulated the influences that affected parent choice. Donohue Stetz (2009) mixed survey responses from parents of secondary students in Minnesota with semistructured interviews to add depth to responses on the survey. Donohue Stetz's survey asked parents to identify school factors that affected their decision, such as location, school climate, and academic quality, and asked parents to rate whether specific forms of communication (e.g., print, television, radio, and word of mouth) influenced

their decisions. Interviews were designed to get more detail from the survey responses and to create a narrative for Minnesota charter school parents.

Qualitative research included focus groups and interviews with individual parents. Families in Wisconsin participated in focus groups in which the researchers sought answers to questions about how low socioeconomic status (SES) affected parental perceptions of choice and motivations for choosing a charter school (Stewart et al., 2010). Villavicencio (2013) used interviews to understand how parents gathered information on choice schools before making a decision. Bell (2009) used qualitative interviews to gather data on how geographic location impacted parental decision making.

Research subjects. Twelve of the 17 studies in the literature pool directly surveyed or interviewed parents about their motivations for choosing charter settings for their children (see Table 2). Although most of these studies included parents who had already enrolled their child(ren) in a charter school, the parents studied by Adzima (2014) were on waiting lists for charter schools; this subgroup closely matched mine, as I also surveyed parents who were in the process of transition from a traditional public school to a charter school.

Research settings. The research settings of the 12 studies vary widely (Table 3). Geographically, 12 of the studies took place in the northeastern and midwestern regions of the United States. Despite the overrepresentation of subjects in these areas, the studies represent the current trend of studying urban rather than rural charter schools. Among these studies, only Ekanem (2013) studied a rural charter population exclusively.

Table 2

Types of Research and Subjects in Literature Review

Author	Date	Design	Subjects
Bell	2009	Qualitative interview	48 middle and secondary school parents in Detroit
Donohue Stetz	2009	Survey & interview	321 parents of Minnesota charter school parents
Ekanem	2013	Survey	288 parents of K-8 children at a Delaware charter school
Finn, Caldwell, & Raub	2006	Qualitative interview	Seven charter school parents of children with disabilities
Goyette	2008	Survey	386 households with children ages 5–18 years in Philadelphia
Greene	2012	Survey	Northwest Indiana Charter School parents
Julius	2011	Survey & focus group	300 charter school parents in New Hampshire
Kleitz et al.	2000	Quantitative interview	1,100 charter school parents in Texas
May	2006	Quantitative interview	260 charter school parents in urban Ohio district
Stewart et al.	2010	Focus group	41 parents and 16 high school students in Milwaukee
VanderHoff	2008	Data analysis	42 elementary and middle charter schools in New Jersey
Villavicencio	2013	Qualitative Interview	25 charter school parents in New York City

Table 3

Settings of Research Included in Literature Review

Author	Date	Region	Urban	Town/rural
Adzima	2014	Northeast	X	X
Bell	2009	Northeast	X	
Chakrabarti & Roy	2010	NA		
Donohue Stetz	2009	Midwest	X	X
Ekanem	2013	Northeast		X
Finn, Caldwell, & Raub	2006	Midwest	*	*
Garcia	2008	Southwest	X	X
Goyette	2008	Midwest	X	
Greene	2012	Midwest	X	
Julius	2011	Northeast	X	X
Kleitz et al.	2000	Southwest	X	X
May	2006	Midwest	X	
McGinn & Ben-Porath	2014	Southeast	X	
Stewart et al.	2010	Midwest	X	
VanderHoff	2008	Northeast	X	X
Villavicencio	2013	Northeast	X	
Wohlstetter et al.	2011	NA		

Note. Cells with asterisks refer to studies for which authors did not provide contextual information. Town/rural indicates schools in large towns, small towns, and rural areas. NA = not applicable.

The urban and rural separation is important in considering the factors that parents cite as motivations for choosing charter schools. Conditions in rural and urban areas are inherently different. Although the National Center for Education Statistics (2006) recently reclassified schools using more specific descriptors than the binary urban and rural, much of the research I reviewed used the urban and rural descriptors, which I use here for consistency.

Garcia (2008) studied whether race played a factor in school choice in Arizona, a state with an ethnically diverse population covering a wide geographic area, and found that White students entered charter schools that had a mean minority population that was 12% lower than that of the schools they left. Julius (2011) surveyed charter school parents in New Hampshire, a state more ethnically homogenous and much smaller geographically, and found differences based on parent SES. These diverse settings included both urban and rural areas, and comparison of different subsets of the population of public school students and parents revealed that parental motivations for choice hinged on more than the characteristics of an individual school.

Research measures. The 12 studies used a variety of measures to generate data. Surveys were used in 5 of the 12 studies. Goyette (2008) surveyed a representative sample of charter school parents in the Philadelphia area to find educational options considered by families. Kleitz et al. (2000) surveyed parents with Likert-style items by phone. Ekanem (2013) used a Likert-type survey designed by the Fordham Foundation to ascertain factors parents considered when choosing charter schools for their children. Ekanem reported no validity and reliability data of the survey instrument, although

Donohue Stetz (2009) clearly articulated the formulation, piloting, and revision of her survey instrument.

Interviews and focus groups were the most common measures in the literature pool (8 of 12 studies). Finn et al. (2006) used open-ended structured interviews with seven parents of students with disabilities to generate detailed narratives of parental perceptions of traditional public schools and the choice to move to a charter, as well as pros and cons of both institutions. Bell (2009) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study of 48 families in Detroit to understand how parents think about school choice over time in terms of geography. Villavicencio (2013) interviewed 25 New York City charter school parents about their attempts to gather information about charter schools and coded the results into six distinct categories, including their criteria for choosing a charter school and perceptions of their children's previous school.

Key Themes and Results

The first key theme found in previous research was the role of academic performance in parental motivation. VanderHoff (2008) found from a study of charter school waiting lists in New Jersey that schools whose test achievement increased experienced a corresponding rise in the number of students on the waiting list, and schools that specified academic excellence in their mission statements had 75% larger waiting lists than did schools that did not explicitly state academic excellence in their missions. Adzima (2014) found that school academic performance was the most important factor to parents on Pennsylvania charter school waiting lists. The results of these studies represent the logic of market competition, that is, parents will take their children to the best-performing schools when given a choice. Other studies provided

contrasting findings. In a review of the literature, Finn et al. (2006) found that academic performance was secondary to environmental factors, such as class size and programs for students with disabilities. Wohlstetter, Smith, Farrell, Estrada, and Thukral (2011) reviewed a decade of charter school research and found numerous studies in which parents eschewed the logical choice of the better school (in an academic achievement context), citing motivations such as the demographic composition of schools, safety, location, and distance from home.

The second key theme was how parents gathered information about their schools of choice, which seems to vary greatly across the studies. Villavicencio (2013) interviewed 25 parents in New York City whose efforts at gathering information about choice schools ranged from zero research to extensive Internet searching and multiple site visits. Julius (2011) reported that parents in New Hampshire relied primarily on word of mouth to gain information for decision making, although the study did not specify with whom parents consulted.

School administrators in traditional and charter schools have influence on parental motivation and understand what may have led parents to choose a charter school. For example, administrators who host open houses or program orientations have the opportunity to describe programs in a way that inspires parents to make the choice to attend. Donohue Stetz (2009) reported that word of mouth, including discussions with school personnel, was the most influential form of communication in parental school choice. Further, administrators may use their own influence to block rather than to inform. McGinn and Ben-Porath (2014) found that parents met barriers in gathering information about choice schools by lack of content (e.g., school website, publicly

available school data, and unclear mission and expectations) and administrators who stonewalled efforts to gather information for deciding their students' placements.

Research findings. I have summarized the results of the literature pool studies in Table 4. The variety of studies and designs led to a set of findings that can best be categorized in two ways: parent information gathering and motivations.

Table 4

Key Findings in Literature Pool

Author	Findings
Adzima	Positive relationship between charter school achievement and length of waiting list; negative relationship between district test scores and waiting list.
Bell	Parental schools of choice were generally more than 2 miles from home; choice sets mean (4.4) significantly different from that of geographic set (10.3).
Chakrabarti & Roy	Academic performance is the most important factor in parental school choice; school environment and geography secondary.
Donohue Stetz	Parent desires in charter: different learning environment, academic quality, curriculum offerings. Main school information source: word of mouth.
Ekanem	Small class size, school programs, opportunities for involvement influenced parent choice. Quality of teaching and technology influenced staying.
Finn et al.	Parents chose charters for their willingness to address disabilities, effective communication, small class sizes. Disadvantage of charters: high staff turnover.
Garcia	White students entered charter schools with 12% fewer minority students overall; elementary difference higher than secondary.
Goyette	Black parents more likely than White parents to look beyond neighborhood schools; Whites more likely to move to neighborhood of school of choice.

Greene	Parents choosing a specific charter school are more related by family characteristics than income status or race/ethnicity.
Julius	Parents learned about charters most by word of mouth; travel further to charter school than traditional school. Parents more affluent than average.
Kleitz el al.	Education quality and class size main parental motivations across racial and income groups.
May	Academics/curriculum the most reported motivational factor.
McGinn & Ben-Porath	Choice did not positively affect engagement; parents struggled to find objective information on choice schools.
Stewart et al.	Charter school parents have more knowledge of school processes and procedures than do traditional public school parents; teacher relationships top factor in choice.
VanderHoff	Increase in charter school performance correlates with large growth in waiting list.
Villavicencio	Parent information seeking varied from minimal to extensive; mobility, perceptions of choice, and search criteria varied across families.
Wohlstetter et al.	Academic performance is one of many reasons for parents choosing a charter school; parental choice is more complex than market logic.

Parent information gathering occurs in numerous forms, from word of mouth to extensive Internet research. Bell (2009) reported that parental choice schools were generally more than 2 miles from home, demonstrating the wide net parents cast in their school search.

Despite mobility affecting the level of information gathering, Donohue Stetz (2009) found that parents mostly learned about choice programs by word of mouth from fellow parents, friends, and school administrators in traditional programs and at choice schools, with new media (e.g., Internet and social networks) making up a significant

second tier of information gathering. McGinn and Ben-Porath (2014) cautioned that parents in their study expressed frustration at the dearth of objective, reliable information about choice schools that they investigated, which serves as a warning for choice schools to understand their role in effectively reaching parents of potential students.

The studies that measured parental motivation reported similar results despite being demographically dispersed and diverse. Donohue Stetz (2009) and Ekanem (2013) found that parents were motivated to choose a charter school by factors such as academic quality and programs, curriculum, and class sizes. Specific to special education, Finn et al. (2006) found that parents were motivated to choose a charter based on small class sizes and the school's willingness to address students' disabilities. The Texas parents in the study by Kleitz et al. (2000) named education quality and environmental factors as their main motivations. Stewart et al. (2010) reported that relationships with teachers were the top factor in parental choice in Milwaukee, WI. Adzima (2014) found a strong positive correlation between a charter school's academic achievement rate and the length of its waiting list. Garcia (2008) postulated that the results of enrollment data in Arizona in part stems from familial desire for homogenous educational settings. The research reveals that parents seem motivated to choose a placement that both meets their preferences and is a place where their child is going to be with students similar to their own in some regard, whether ethnically, behaviorally, or programmatically (i.e., after school programs aimed at specific subgroups).

Gaps in the Prior Research

Two research gaps emerged from the literature summary, one general and one local, which guided my research. First, the timing of the studies that directly involved

parents were indeterminate as to the amount of time the parents and their children had been enrolled in the charter school. In addition, the research focused on parents' charter experience or compared their charter and traditional public school experiences. My research took place at the moment of enrollment and focused directly on the lived experiences of parents in traditional public schools and their motivations at the time of enrollment in a charter school. Collecting data during the school transition process may provide clearer motivations not modified by the charter school experience.

The second gap in the prior research the difficulty in generalizing any of these studies to my local context in southern Oregon, given that motivational factors vary across geographic locations, economic conditions, human demographics, and availability of charter schools within a realistic distance. As noted above, the steady proliferation of charter schools since 1992 indicates that charter schools likely will continue to gain a share of all public school students. Parental motivation is an important factor for charter school operators to understand, so they can adapt programs to the needs of incoming students.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

I am a teacher and the testing and technology coordinator at Armadillo Technical Institute (ATI), the charter school that serves as the setting for this study. ATI collects a plethora of data on students at the time of enrollment, including a survey instrument that I developed and implemented in the 2015–2016 school year as part of my work there. The survey was used to gather parent perceptions of traditional public schools and their motivations for choosing a charter school. By analyzing these data for my dissertation, I aim to suggest adaptations and modifications of programming and services to fit the needs and preferences of the future parents and students who enroll.

My study addressed three research questions:

1. What influences families to leave traditional public schools?
2. What are families' motivations for leaving a traditional public school for a charter school?
3. How do families gather information about ATI?

I also compared the findings of the Research Questions 1 and 2 to examine how the perceptions in Research Question 1 drive motivation as gathered by Research Question 2.

Theoretical Lens

The survey instrument that I implemented this year at ATI and that forms the basis for this study builds from the prior research of Kleitz et al. (2000) and May (2006), who elicited data from parent participants about their motivations for choosing a charter school. These authors offered their survey instruments for future research, and I found useful elements in both.

Kleitz et al. (2000) grounded their study as a challenge to the market-oriented decision model common in charter school studies and synthesized the early charter school research to compose questions that examined the main motivations for parents in choosing a charter school: educational quality, class size, child safety, geographic location, and child's friends. The authors pointed out that educational quality is an abstract measure that pushes parents to respond positively to the prompt of its importance. My study used this lesson to reframe the educational quality question into more concrete terms.

May's (2006) study of 260 parents who withdrew from traditional schools in an urban Ohio district differentiated between educational quality (which she defined as better education and quality of instruction) and environmental factors, such as class size, support staff, and one-on-one instruction. May argued that parents tended to equate the two aspects, resulting in muddled research results. The ambiguities of the terminology lead to what May terms a *perception gap* (p. 27), in which parents are influenced by environmental factors rather than academic factors when choosing a charter school. May's line of questioning to parents mitigated that perception gap with specific questions about academic quality and environmental factors, from which I drew my own questions for this study.

By combining the frames of reference and adapting the questions from these two studies, I was able to further the line of inquiry into parental motivations for choosing a charter school by asking specific questions that separate educational quality and academics from environmental factors and gather parents' input on these concepts as motivational factors at the point of enrollment.

Research Design

The case study method of research investigates a bounded system through in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2007) and is appropriate here, as I studied a single charter school. This mixed methods study used data from a survey instrument of closed- and open-ended questions administered to parents and students at the time of enrollment at ATI. The survey gathered perceptions of the traditional public schools that participants left and motivations for choosing ATI.

I conducted a cross-sectional analysis, defined by Babbie (2012) as "observations representing a single point in time" (p. 105), specifically within the charter school enrollment process. Gathering data from parents and their children in the moment of transition provided information about their decision-making processes not captured in prior charter school research. I am a teacher and technology coordinator at the school, making it a convenience sample as well as action research (Babbie, 2012). Although convenience samples are less desirable than other types of samples when conducting quantitative research for capturing and generalizing data to a larger population, my position in the school provided me access to the study participants. Further, in qualitative research, the purposeful selection of a sample can best help answer the research question (Creswell, 2014). Also, as action research, a convenience sample at my school enables me to make and implement suggested changes as a result of study findings.

Setting and School

ATI is a public charter school in Phoenix, Oregon, sponsored by the Phoenix-Talent Schools. As per National Center for Education Statistics (2006) categorization, ATI is in a town/rural setting. Phoenix borders Medford to the southeast along the

Interstate 5 corridor. ATI is an open enrollment school and is therefore an education option for Jackson County students in Grades 6–12. ATI averages about 95 students per year but has a highly mobile population that comes and goes; for the 2013–2014 school year, 149 students were enrolled at ATI at some point in time. About 60% of ATI students are economically disadvantaged, defined by the state of Oregon as students who qualify for FRL based on reported family income. Special education students, that is, students with individualized education plans (IEPs) make up 30% of ATI's student population. ATI provides transportation for students through a contract with the Rogue Valley Transportation District, the local public transit company. A student's school ID doubles as a bus pass, which allows students to ride for free during the school year. ATI earned a Level 1 designation from ODE for the 2013–2014 school year, placing it in the bottom 5% of schools in Oregon in terms of 4- and 5-year cohort graduation and student achievement on state assessments of reading (60% of tested students) and mathematics (16%).

For context, Table 5 includes 2010 U.S. census data for general population figures for all of Jackson County and the cities of Medford, Phoenix, and Talent. In 2013–2014, 126 of the 149 students (84.6%) enrolled at ATI lived in those two school districts. ATI's small population is not representative of the demographics of the study locales, which limits this study to action research on the unique population of the school. Further, the census data for the Medford and Phoenix-Talent communities do not match school district demographics (Table 6), which limits generalizability of the data gathered in this study.

Table 5

Demographics of Study Locales

City	Total population	White population %	Latino population %	Poverty %	High school graduation % (age 25+)
Medford	74,907	79.8	13.8	20.6	79.1
Phoenix	5,047	80.1	16.1	NA	
Talent	6,066	78.7	15.6	19.1	87.9
Jackson County	203,206	82.5	11.7	18.1	81.0

Note. All data retrieved from the 2010 U.S. census. NA = not available.

Table 6 contains school district data for Medford and Phoenix-Talent districts and ATI. According to the 2013–2014 Oregon State Report Card (Saxton, 2014), for the entire population of Oregon traditional public schools 63.4% of students were White and 22.6% of students were Latino. In public charter schools, White students made up 78.1% of the population, whereas Latino students made up 10.1% of the charter population. The other ethnicities identified were not significantly different across traditional and charter populations, in part because of their small representation. Further, 50.7% of Oregon public school students were in poverty, and 13.3% of all students were receiving special education services. White students made up the vast majority of ATI's population, contrasted with the demographics of the White and Latino populations in the Medford and Phoenix-Talent districts. The poverty percentage was mostly in line with that of the districts. ATI's percentage of students receiving special education services was significantly higher than that in its surrounding districts, setting it apart from other schools. Because of the difference in demographics, generalizing the research is limited

to the population of ATI, which is different from the general population of the school districts.

Table 6

Demographics of Districts and Schools, Grades 6–12, for the 2013–2014 School Year

District/ School	Population	White Population %	Latino Population %	Poverty %	Special Education %
Medford	6,864	71.7	20.3	54.9	10.7
Phoenix -Talent	1,403	59.6	31.0	62.7	14.2
ATI	126	80.9	10.3	55.0	28.0

Notes. ATI population represents enrolled students from Phoenix-Talent or Medford districts.

ATI's students are all full-time students, meaning they are enrolled for at least four of the six class periods per day. The enrollment cap is 120, with a subcap of 18 middle school students. Students may openly enroll at ATI at any time during the school year by their own choosing. Some students are referred by their traditional public schools, although ATI does not keep data on percentages of students referred versus openly enrolling. There are two main programs at ATI: the regular diploma program and the Assistance Program, which is designed for special education students who require services for social and emotional learning. Students in the Assistance Program are integrated into the regular diploma program based on their observed behaviors and capabilities; the mission of the program is to include all students in regular education classes.

ATI's intake process has multiple steps. Every applying family goes through this process in the same prescribed fashion, pursuant to state charter school statute.

1. Prospective student and parent/guardian attend school orientation, which details program mission, education model, school policies, and services provided.
2. Parent/guardian completes registration form and schedules intake interview.
3. At intake interview, school staff collect data on students such as previous placements, academic and extracurricular interests, risk factors, and services needed, such as special education, counseling, and economic services.
4. Intake staff make placement decision based on status of waiting list and/or whether appropriate services are available for applicant student.
5. Accepted students begin 3-week intake coursework.

The five-step process may take as little as 3 days and up to 3 weeks, depending on when parents and their children attend orientation and complete their interviews and the intake start dates. By integrating the research instrument into the intake process, I gathered data from parents and their children as a matter of course, when they were already present at the school for intake purposes.

Sampling

In all, there were 29 parent participants and 30 student participants; the final student interviewed was present without a parent. In two interviews, more than one parent was present, and I recorded responses from both parents as one participant because the input from both parents was regarded as a single placement decision for their child. Twelve of the students interviewed were enrolled in Grades 6–8, and the remaining 18 were Grades 9–12. All 30 student participants previously attended a traditional public school prior to enrolling at ATI. Because the interview instrument was part of the

standard intake protocol, the study population presented a cross-sectional sample of the larger population of parents who enrolled at ATI.

Although I interviewed the entire population of families leaving traditional public schools to enroll at ATI, it was reasonable to expect that not every parent and child would participate fully and openly. Parents may not have been able to comprehend the questions as written or verbalized or may not have provided honest answers to the prompts, which results in self-report bias (McDonald, 2008). I had the interview questions translated into Spanish (and planned for translation of answers into English) by ATI's Spanish teacher for administering to parents who are more comfortable reading and speaking in that language. No participants selected that option, and every parent and student who participated provided responses to all of the questions.

Data Collection and Instrument

Interviews took place at ATI on Saturdays between September 12, 2015 and February 6, 2016. I interviewed parents first while students completed another part of the intake process in a separate room with a second ATI staff person. After parents completed the interview with me, students and parents traded locations. During the interviews, I read the questions aloud and wrote down participants' responses, reading them back to determine accuracy.

I administered the interviews verbally as opposed to providing a written or computerized survey. An oral interview allowed participants to quickly and accurately provide the appropriate response; some participants may not have experience working with computers and have different levels of reading comprehension and written expression. Although Creswell (2014) noted that not all participants are equally

articulate, qualitative questions are the most effective way to gather parent perceptions, which can then be coded and analyzed for emergent themes. As a result, verbal delivery seemed to be the most equitable and bias-free form of data collection.

The data collection instrument for this study comprises two elements. The first is a set of closed-ended questions. The second element is a set of open-ended questions that prompted participants to describe their experiences with traditional public schools and to give reasons why they chose ATI, such as "What was the most important reason why you chose to withdraw [your child] from his or her public school?" Appendix A provides the forms used for interviewing parents and children.

Closed-Ended Questions

When parents enroll their children, the school collects demographic information as part of the intake process, which I used for descriptive purposes in the study. The demographic questions were binary and included special education status, FRL status, and whether a public school administrator recommended ATI to the family.

The other closed-ended question was the final item in the interview, in which participants chose from a list of factors to identify and rank up to the three most important factors for choosing ATI. The ranking item follows up on an open-ended question in which participants named their motivations (in no particular order) for choosing the charter school. The ranking item allowed participants to organize and rate their motivations for the choice.

Open-Ended Questions

The five open-ended survey questions were drawn from May (2006) and Donohue Stetz (2009), who interviewed parents of charter school and alternative program students

about their perceptions, lived experiences, and motivations for their choice of school. I adapted and designed questions to match Creswell's (2014) advice for mixed methods protocols by asking four or five open-ended questions that have probes for following up by asking participants to explain their responses and ideas in more detail or to elaborate on a statement. For example, one question asked parents and children whether a bad experience at their previous school was a primary motivator for choosing to leave, with the follow-up prompt to describe the experience. The open-ended questions augmented the closed-ended questions by providing detailed data that revealed accurately the experiences and sentiments of participants.

Sampson (2004) recommended conducting a pilot test of research instruments in order to refine and narrow their focus to ensure they suitably address the research questions. I piloted the interview questions with five parents whose children currently attended ATI. Although the piloting process resulted in no changes to the nature and syntax of the questions, one parent whose child has attended ATI for 4 years said, "I wish I had been asked these questions when we enrolled." The parents further indicated that asking these questions of parents is important to establish that their previous experiences and needs matter when choosing ATI, creating an air of welcoming, collaboration, and trust.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected included demographic data from parents, such as income status, special education status, the level of their child or children in school (middle or secondary), and where parents received information about ATI (e.g., school website/publication, word of mouth, or advertisement). The final quantitative question

asked parents and children to rank the factors influencing their choice of ATI. I used Microsoft Excel to generate percentages for demographic data and means for the ranking prompt. I then used an SPSS program to obtain chi-square values and descriptive statistics.

The interview also contained open-ended questions to procure more nuanced data than those gathered by the quantitative questions. I qualitatively coded the open-ended survey responses for emergent themes in terms of how participants perceived their previous public school experiences, including the major influences on their choice to leave and enroll in a charter school. Categories included administrative influence (e.g., conversations with principals and teachers), environmental factors such as school size and location, and instructional factors, such as access to support or special education services.

To code the qualitative data, I followed Tesch's (1990) eight steps in the coding process, paraphrased below.

1. Get a sense of the whole.
2. Pick one document and go through it, asking "What is this about?"
3. Repeat step 2 for all participants. Make a list of topics and group them by similarity.
4. Abbreviate topics as codes and return to data to label appropriate text with codes.
5. Turn topics into categories. Show interrelationships between categories.
6. Finalize abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data belonging in each category and perform preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode existing data.

By following this process, I completed a preliminary coding pass that allowed me to read more deeply into the open-ended data to find the major, minor, and unique topics and themes from across the data pool. I first categorized responses to the open-ended questions regarding reasons for leaving the previous school and reasons for choosing ATI. For example, the question "What was the most important reason why you withdrew from/did not enroll at your previous school?" elicited a wide variety of responses. From those responses, I engaged in initial coding, which established codes for later clustering and categorization. For example, parent responses such as "the pace of class, especially in math, was emotionally affecting him," "he's not learning at his level," "struggles keeping up in reading," and "unschooled most of her life and used to her own pace" were placed in the category of pace too fast.

Due to the relatively small sample size and brief responses of participants, coding was conducted via Microsoft Excel rather than using a qualitative data analysis software program to assist in coding.

Reliability and Validity

Common external validity concerns for survey data include ecological fallacy and the practice of reductionism (Babbie, 2012). Ecological fallacy occurs when a researcher attributes something learned about a sample unit (e.g., low-income parents) to individuals within that unit. For example, correlating an aggregate statistic, such as average income of parents in a school, and applying the statistical implications to an individual parent at the school (whose income is unknown) results in ecological fallacy. Although an aggregate mean describes a group of subjects, it does not immediately apply to individuals in that group.

Reductionism is the practice of limiting one's explanation of phenomena using lower order logic or exclusively using variables from a specific discipline, such as sociology, economics, or psychology to attempt to articulate the influences on outcomes. As the literature review demonstrated, parental motivation for choosing a charter school is a complex phenomenon. A reductionist viewpoint on the topic may ascribe choice based on what is believed to be the simplest indicator, such as race or household income.

Avoiding the above practices is key to obtaining valid findings and interpretations. My analysis centered on group outcomes rather than individual responses to put aside the ecological fallacy. Further, the research in the literature review demonstrated that parental decisions about children's education placements involves multiple factors that complement or conflict with one another, such as economics (income level), geography (relative locations of homes and schools), psychology (parental mindset), and sociology (parental beliefs and values). The survey instrument measured each of these factors and produced a detailed view of how such factors interact in perceptions of traditional public schools.

There are precautions to take involving validity at every level of qualitative research. On a general level, I spent dozens of hours in the field, surveying and interviewing parents, which provided the opportunity to richly describe the settings of the study and interactions with parents, important factors in lending validity to my findings (Maxwell, 2013). To completely present my findings, I included discrepant information that may counter my established themes. Finally, I employed more than one peer debriefer to review my study, which provided opportunities to clarify vague language and

specify important elements of the study, such as key findings, limitations, and areas of future research.

Another challenge of conducting qualitative research is lack of openness of respondents (Creswell, 2007). The standard intake interview has consequences attached, because a placement decision is based in part on the information collected in the interview. Because of the consequences of the intake interview, parents may have approached the questions asked in a more guarded manner than would parents who had already enrolled their child(ren) in a school. For example, if the standard intake portion of the interview did not go well, the parent may have either refused to participate or have been more careful in selecting their answers for fear of rebuke or reprisal. Although no parents refused to participate, it is difficult to evaluate whether any participants obscured their true motivations or engaged in response bias, defined as overreporting socially desirable behaviors and underreporting of perceived socially undesirable behaviors (Bradburn, Sudman, Blair, & Stocking, 1978). These limitations were balanced by the convenience sampling of the research design, which catches parents while they are on school grounds, making a higher response rate more likely than a survey mailed home to parents.

A Note About Bias

Creswell (2014) argued that acknowledgement of bias is key to effective, valid qualitative research. I have special access to this school because I am employed there as a teacher. My political and personal views on school choice are quite strong in favor of charter schools. By consequence, I am not a neutral observer. However, the research process disengaged me from participants by asking open-ended, detail-oriented questions

as part of the standard intake process at the school in this study. By phrasing the questions toward participants' lived experiences and perceptions, I objectively analyzed the descriptive data and coded the qualitative data in a manner that is consistent with the tenets of valid, open research. I am reporting the data in a manner that allows readers to make their own judgments, which is critical when sharing this information with the governing body of my school, its sponsoring district, and the greater community.

Reporting Findings

I present the survey data here in an aggregated format to display percentages for binary questions and means for scale items, as suggested by the American Psychological Association (2010). I report qualitative findings by describing the themes that emerged from open-ended questions and going into specific detail about each of the themes regarding consistency of responses and divergent thinking among participants. I present the themes from the open-ended questions across a series of cases to report how the cases fit the themes and how they did not. By inserting quotations directly from the participants, I created a narrative that encompasses the overall experience.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Descriptive information collected included student grade level, FRL status, and special education status. Of the 30 families, 22 (73%) qualified for FRL, and 13 students (43%) were identified for special education services, either for an IEP or Section 504 services. Compared with the demographic information in Table 6, these rates are higher than ATI's average, which is 60% FRL and 28% of students with special education plans. Fourteen of the 18 high school students (77.8%) and 8 of the 12 students in Grades 6–8 (75%) qualified for FRL. Seven of the students receiving special education services were in Grades 6–8, and the remaining six were in Grades 9–12. The secondary-to-middle ratio was lower than normal; ATI averages about 77 high school students and caps the middle school cohort at 18. At the time of the study, there was no waiting list for high school students and an established waiting list for middle school students. Because the data collected for this study were anonymous, it is impossible to count how many middle school student participants were admitted as other students left the program and how many were placed on the school's waiting list.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked "What influences families to leave traditional public schools?" Responses from parents are presented first, followed by student responses.

Parent Responses

Figure 1 shows the categorization of responses to the question of withdrawing from one's previous school for parents. Note that participants may have named more than one factor, and percentages do not add to 100.

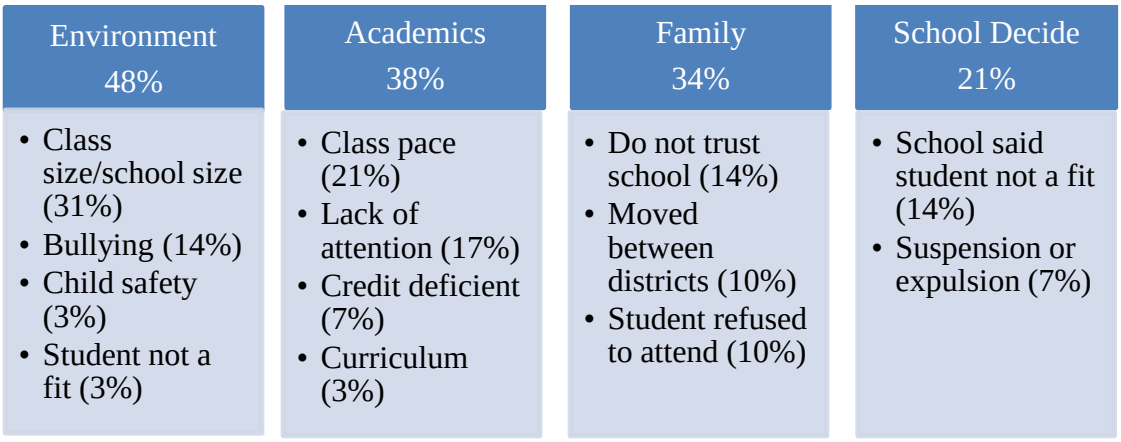

Figure 1. Coding and categorization of parent responses to Research Question 1.

By asking parents about the most important reason for withdrawing from their child's previous school, I was able to ascertain the conditions that necessitated a change for parents and their children. Although the question asks for a singular important reason, most parents provided numerous factors that contributed to the decision, resulting in more nuanced data. I coded parent responses into four domains: environment, academics, family, and school decide. These four domains emerged as the dominant domains for decision making with varying degrees of influence.

Environment. Parents cited environmental factors (48%) more than any other as a catalyst for leaving their child's previous school. The responses within the environment domain varied (Figure 1). The most common response was class or school size (31%). Another four parents (14%) stated that their child was a victim of bullying at their previous school. Seven of the parents who named class or school size and bullying as factors in leaving the previous school noted that these environmental factors contributed to school-related anxiety in their children.

Academics. Eleven of the 29 parents (38%) cited academic reasons for withdrawing from their child's previous traditional public school. The most common response indicated that the academic pace was too fast for their child. Parents reported that the academic pace led to frustration, anxiety, and "getting lost" in school. Five parents reported that their child felt "lost" in their previous school due to circumstances such as lack of individual attention, or as one parent said, "he's not getting his learning needs met."

Family. The family domain contains parent attitudes and living conditions outside the bounds of school. Ten parents (34%) cited a family consideration for leaving their child's previous school, such as lack of trust in the traditional school system (n = 4), and the child's refusal to attend (n = 3). Out of general statements of distrust, one parent said, "They're indoctrinating them how to behave, as opposed to how to learn." Three families moved into new school districts and chose to explore alternatives to a traditional school as part of their move.

Traditional public school decision. The final domain to emerge had the fewest responses but is an important subgroup in education: students removed or counseled out of their traditional public school. Fowler (2011) discussed the unintended consequences of suspension, expulsion, and referral to other programs and the impact of student dropout rates. Six parents (21%) mentioned measures taken by the previous school as an important reason for leaving. One parent reported that their child had been expelled for bullying, and another parent reported multiple suspensions for their child that necessitated a change of schools. Four more parents stated that the child's previous school decided that the child "did not fit," in the words of one parent, and recommended

alternative settings. Another parent felt that after their child successfully completed a day treatment program from drug abuse, “the school didn’t want him back.”

Student Responses

As with the parent motivations reported above, student responses coalesced around the same four domains: Environment, Academics, Family, and School Decide. However, the categories of each domain reported by students varied some from those reported by parents, as shown in Figure 2. Note that participants may have named more than one factor, and percentages will not add to 100. Although the categories and specific numbers reporting each category differed between parents and children, the environmental factors domain was the most common response for both groups, followed by academics.

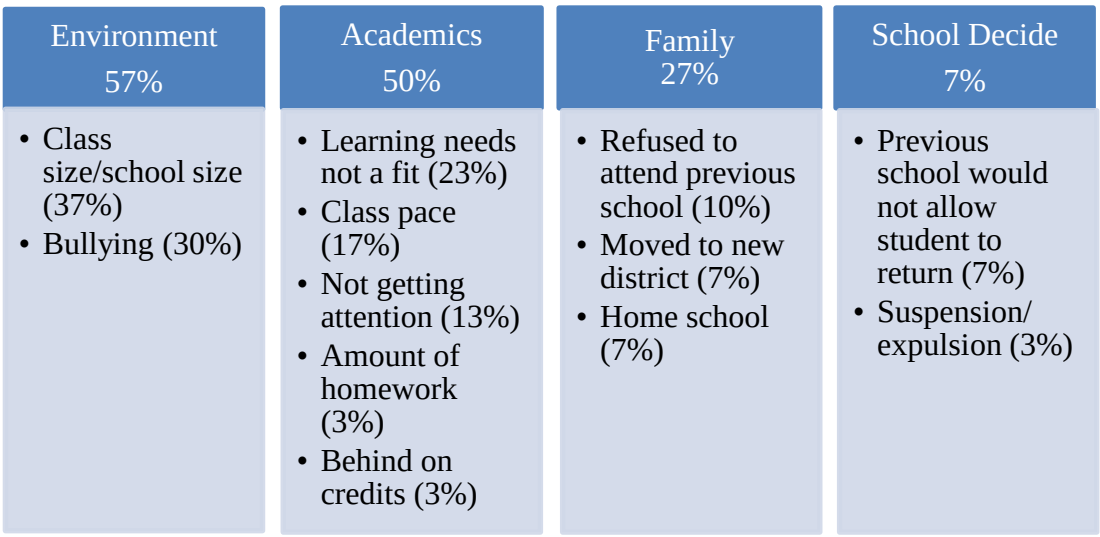

Figure 2. Coding and categorization of student responses to Research Question 1.

Environment. Students reported factors similar to those reported by parents in the environment domain: class size and bullying. Class and school size was the most common response (11; 37% of students), followed by bullying (9; 30% of students). Generally, students stated that school size contributed to distractions and anxiety. One student said, "There are too many students. I panic in the class and in the halls," and another cited environment by saying, "There really aren't any good crowds there."

Academics. Half of student respondents (15) pointed to academic factors for leaving their previous schools. One student said, "I'm not learning what I need to," and another stated, "I'm not getting the help I need." Four students (13%) reported that they were not getting adequate academic help. In total, seven students described learning needs as a factor, and five students named academic pace as a motivation, compared with six parents.

Family. Family decisions factored into eight (27%) of student motivations for leaving previous public placement. Three students cited their outright refusal to attend. Only one parent response confirmed refusal to attend. Two students stated that they left to try home school, but according to one student, "my mom couldn't handle it" after 2 months. Two students cited moving between districts and exploring nontraditional options, similar to parent responses.

Traditional public school decision. Two students claimed that their previous school refused to allow them to return, with one of those students citing an expulsion as a reason for leaving. Overall, students did not report dialogue with school administration as often as parents did, which may be explained by who was privy to the conversation.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was "What are families' motivations for leaving a traditional public school for a charter school?" By asking parents and children why they chose ATI and their perceptions of what makes ATI different from traditional public schools, I was able to elicit a variety of responses that revealed four domains of motivation.

As I began to code the responses to address Research Question 2, regarding motivations for choosing ATI, it became apparent that the two questions designed to elicit responses overlapped greatly. Responses from many parents to the questions "Why did you choose ATI for your child?" and "What is your perception of what makes ATI different from traditional schools?" were similar. For the second question, one respondent said, "Everything that makes it different is why I chose ATI." As a result, I coded and categorized responses to both questions in one document to better understand responses to Research Question 2, regarding parent and child motivations for choosing ATI in particular.

Parent Responses

Figure 3 organizes the common domains for parent responses to the motivation questions. Once again, participants may have named more than one factor, and percentages do not add to 100.

Environment. Every parent participant (100%) stated an environmental factor as part of their motivation for choosing ATI. Parents named seven specific environmental factors. The most common responses regarded size: 23 parents (79%) made some statement about program size. Fifteen parents cited class sizes as a source of motivation, and 13 parents made mention of the school's overall smaller size (5 parents named both elements). Ten parents (34%) said that teachers' relationships with students were a

deciding factor. Regarding the importance of relationships in ATI's environment, one parent stated that ATI will "embrace what's different about you [rather] than wanting

Environment 100%	Academics 83%	Referral 45%	Public School Experience 41%
• Class/school size (79%) • Student/teacher relationships (34%) • Nonjudgmental (10%) • Student/teacher ratio (7%) • Previous charter experience (3%) • Parent liked alternative education as a student (3%)	• Individual attention (72%) • Individualized pace (24%) • Curriculum (24%) • Learning opportunities (14%) • Work with challenging students (10%) • Flexible structure (3%) • Technology (3%) • Cater to disabilities (3%)	• Referred by friend (17%) • Child has friends at ATI (14%) • Sibling attended ATI (10%) • Previous school suggested (3%)	• Not traditional school, not home school (24%) • Unsuccessful at previous school (17%)

Figure 3. Coding and categorizations of parent responses to Research Question 2

[children] to conform," and another said, "Teachers know students better and are more personal with them."

Academics. The second most popular response to why parents chose ATI pertained to academics, particularly ATI's approach to academics (83%). Of the 24 academics responses, 21 parents stated that individual attention (one-on-one instruction, personalized learning, and academic assistance labs) was a motivating factor. Seven respondents (24%) specifically named academic pace for individuals. Only two of the six parents who reported academic pace as a reason to leave their previous school named

ATI's academic pace as a factor in choosing the charter school. A further seven respondents (24%) named ATI's curriculum and instruction. One parent stated that the school had "diversity in learning and instruction" compared with their previous school.

Referral. Thirteen parents (45%) used a referral from a trusted source as a deciding factor. Five parents were referred by family friends, four parents had children whose friends attended ATI, and three parents had children who previously attended ATI and were satisfied with the results. The results here coincide with parent information gathering habits.

Previous school experience. Not surprisingly, some element of experience at one's previous school motivated parents to choose another setting. Thirteen parents (45%) reported that previous experience in some capacity influenced the choice of ATI. Seven parents stated that ATI was a sort of middle ground between a traditional school and home schooling, whether for lack of alternatives as one parent indicated or as another said, "We're willing to try whatever."

Ranking. After collecting numerous details on the parents' motivations for choosing ATI, I asked them to rank in order of importance up to three of the most important factors for choosing ATI, with 1 the most important factor, 2 the second most important, and 3 the third most important. Table 8 displays the results of the ranking task. With 29 participants and three ranking slots for each, there were 87 possible responses. Two parents chose only two factors, resulting in 85 total responses to the ranking prompt.

The two most common responses, class size (23; 79% of parents) and programs/services (18; 62% of parents), have rankings dispersed among the three

options, whereas four less common responses (bad experience at previous school, ATI's mission, child's safety, recommendation from other parents) had more 1 rankings than

Table 7

Parent Responses to Ranking Question

Item	*n*	1	2	3
Class size at ATI	23	6	10	7
Programs/services offered by ATI	18	5	8	5
Bad experience at previous school	11	6	3	2
ATI's curriculum	8	2	2	4
ATI's stated mission	5	3	2	0
Lack of alternative choices	5	1	1	3
My child's safety	4	3	1	0
Recommendation from other parents	4	3	1	0
My child's friends attend ATI	4	0	0	4
My child's sibling attends ATI	2	0	1	1
Recommendation from previous school	1	0	0	1
Geographic location of ATI	0	0	0	0
Other (please describe)	0	0	0	0

others. Class size was ranked 1 in 4 of the 23 responses, and ATI programs and services was ranked 1 in 3 of 18 responses, indicating that they are common motivating factors but secondary to other considerations.

Student Responses

The responses of students to questions of why they chose ATI and their perceptions of what makes ATI different from traditional public schools elicited a variety of responses that revealed four domains of student motivation. Unlike parents, students did not refer to their previous school experience but did include geographical factors in their responses. Figure 4 summarizes the domains and categories of statements. Once again, participants may have named more than one factor, and percentages do not add to 100.

Environment 83%	Academics 63%	Referral 33%	Geography 23%
• Class/school size (63%) • Teacher/student relationship (27%) • Better environment for me (20%) • Focus on students (3%) • New start (3%) • Nonjudgmental (3%) • Different setting (3%)	• Individual attention (53%) • Class pace (10%) • Catch up on credits (7%) • Academic choices (7%) • Curriculum (3%) • Learning opportunities (3%) • Work with students who have IEPs (3%) • Quality of instruction (3%)	• Referred by friend/sibling (30%) • Has friends at ATI (3%)	• Lack of alternative choices in area of residence (13%) • ATI's location (10%) • Moved to new school district (3%)

Figure 4. Coding and categorization of student responses to Research Question 2.

Environment. Twenty-five students (83%) offered environmental considerations for choosing ATI. The predominant environmental feature students mentioned was program size (19; 63% of students) and their preference for smaller class sizes and student body population. Eight students (27%) cited teacher-student relationships as

motivation for choosing ATI. One student said, "ATI is more into helping students," and another said, 'I heard that if there are problems, staff gets involved."

Academics. Students provided 19 (63%) responses regarding academics as a factor in choosing ATI. However, only one category within the academic domain, individual attention (16; 53% of students), was brought up by more than three students. Many students used variations on the term "one-on-one" in terms of academic support and attention from teachers. This contrasts with results from Research Question 1 in which 11 students cited their own learning needs or not getting the help they needed as reasons for leaving their previous public school.

Referral. Ten students (33%) reported a referral factoring into their choice of ATI. Congruently, as parents consulted with other parents and adult friends, students took recommendations from their friends who currently attended ATI (n =7) and siblings who currently or previously attended ATI (n =3). The results parallel those for parents, who referred to their child's siblings and friends.

Geography. Overall, seven students cited geographical factors in their choice of ATI, which is exclusive to the student group. Four students stated that ATI was a result of a lack of alternative choices, which has to do with where they live; there are few alternative options for middle school and secondary students in Jackson County school districts. Three students (10%) included ATI's location in their decision. All three students stated that it was closer to home than other schools and easy to access.

Ranking. After collecting numerous details on the students' motivations for choosing ATI, I asked them to rank in order of importance up to three of the most important factors for choosing ATI, where 1 was the most important factor, 2 was the

second most important, and 3 was the third most important. Table 9 displays the results of the ranking task. With 30 participants and three ranking slots for each, there were 90 possible responses. Five students chose only two factors, resulting in 85 total responses to the ranking prompt.

Table 8

Student Responses to Ranking Question

Item	*n*	1	2	3
Class size at ATI	22	11	9	2
Bad experience at my previous school	15	4	7	4
Programs/services offered by ATI	12	7	2	3
ATI's curriculum	9	5	2	2
My friends attend ATI	6	2	1	3
Recommendation from other students	6	0	2	4
Lack of alternative choices	5	0	3	2
My sibling attends ATI	5	1	1	3
ATI's stated mission	2	0	2	0
Recommendation from previous school	2	0	1	1
Geographic location of ATI	1	0	0	1
My safety	0	0	0	0
Other (please describe)	0	0	0	0

Like parent responses, class size at ATI earned the most rankings (22; 73%). Unlike parents, the second most frequent student ranking was the bad experience at previous school (15; 50%), followed by programs and services (12; 40%). The class size

distribution indicated that class size was generally the most important factor in choosing ATI for students. The programs and services average earned scores of 1 for more than half of the responses, and 4 of 11 of the students who identified bad experience at previous school ranked the item as 2 or 3, indicating that a previous bad school experience was secondary to class size in terms of choosing ATI.

Research Question 3

Parents

The question "How do families gather information about ATI?" revealed that word of mouth is the most common source of information for parents seeking education alternatives. Twenty-three parents (79%) cited word of mouth for information gathering, including 11 parents who consulted with adult friends and 6 parents who currently had or in the past had children who attended ATI. Eleven parents (38%) utilized the ATI website, and 8 parents (28%) reported speaking with some kind of agency to find information on ATI: 5 parents spoke with a counseling agency, and 3 parents spoke with school administration. Only one parent did not gather information before attending orientation.

Sixteen parents (55%) consulted more than one source, 12 utilized only one source, and 1 parent had conducted no research before attending orientation. Of the 12 parents who used one source of information, word of mouth remains the dominant root. Seven parents (58%) relied solely on word of mouth. One parent relied on a counseling agency, two sought school administrators, and two browsed ATI's website.

Students

Research Question 3 responses revealed that students relied mostly on word of mouth (24; 80% of students). Eighteen students (60%) identified friends and siblings at ATI as their informants when gathering program information, although five students admitted to actually talking to their parents. Only 17% of students referred to an agency or school administrator, and 10% used ATI's website to access information.

Statistics

I used chi squares in SPSS to determine whether the variables of special education status and free-and-reduced lunch status were independent of specific parent motivations for leaving their previous schools, including the most common parental responses.

Special Education Status by Academic Problems

I measured the relationship between special education status and reporting of academic problems with a chi-squared analysis (Tables 9 and 10). The chi-squared value was 2.208, which was not significant; $p = .137$. This revealed no significant relationship between special education status and reported academic problems at the student's previous school.

Table 9

Special Education Status by Academic Problems Cross-Tabulation

IEP	Academic problems		Total
	No	Yes	
No	8	8	16
Yes	10	3	13
Total	18	11	29

Table 10

Complete Analysis of Special Education Status and Academic Problems

Test	Value	*df*	*p*		
			Asymptotic (2-sided)	Exact (2-sided)	Exact (1-sided)
Pearson χ^2	2.208[a]	1	.137		
Continuity correction[b]	1.213	1	.271		
Likelihood ratio	2.270	1	.132		
Fisher's exact test				.249	.135
Linear-by-linear association	2.132	1	.144		
Number of valid cases	29				

[a]One cell (25.0%) had expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.93.
[b]Computed only for a 2 × 2 table.

FRL Status by Academic Problems

I also measured the relationship between FRL status and academic problems (Tables 11 and 12). The chi-squared value for FRL status and academic problems was 2.833, which was not significant; $p = .092$. My results showed that two cells contained less than the expected count, which precluded a valid association.

Table 11

FRL Status by Academic Problems Cross-Tabulation

FRL	Academic problems		Total
	No	Yes	
No	3	5	8
Yes	15	6	21
Total	18	11	29

Table 12

Complete Analysis of FRL Status and Academic Problems

Test	Value	*df*	*p*		
			Asymptotic (2-sided)	Exact (2-sided)	Exact (1-sided)
Pearson χ^2	2.833[a]	1	.092		
Continuity correction[b]	1.575	1	.210		
Likelihood ratio	2.784	1	.095		
Fisher's exact test				.197	.106
Linear-by-linear association	2.735	1	.098		

Number of valid cases	29				

[a]Two cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.03. [b]Computed only for a 2 × 2 table.

Special Education Status by Environmental Motivation

I conducted a chi-squared analysis to test the independence of special education status and environmental motivation for choosing ATI. Although class and school size was the motivator most often reported by parents, I wanted to determine whether class or school size had dependent variables for parents choosing to leave their previous schools (Tables 13 and 14). The chi-squared value was 0.042, which was not significant; p = .837. This result indicates that the variables are independent. Environmental motivation (i.e., class size) had a relatively even distribution among families regardless of their student's special education status.

Table 13

Special Education Status by Environmental Motivation Cross-Tabulation

IEP	Environmental factor		Total
	No	Yes	
No	8	8	16
Yes	7	6	13
Total	15	14	29

Table 14

Complete Analysis of Special Education Status and Environmental Motivation

Test	Value	*df*	*p*		
			Asymptotic (2-sided)	Exact (2-sided)	Exact (1-sided)
Pearson χ^2	.042[a]	1	.837		
Continuity correction[b]	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood ratio	.043	1	.837		
Fisher's exact test				1.000	.566
Linear-by-linear association	.041	1	.839		
Number of valid cases	29				

[a]Zero cells have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.38.
[b]Computed only for a 2 × 2 table.

FRL Status by Environmental Motivation

I also investigated the relationship between FRL status and class and school size as an environmental motivator (Tables 15 and 16). The chi-squared statistic was 0.514, which was not significant; $p = .474$. Once again, the variables were independent. The

environmental variable of class size was not dependent on FRL status, and there was no significant association between FRL status and environmental motivation.

Table 15

FRL Status by Environmental Motivation Cross-Tabulation

FRL	Environmental factor		Total
	No	Yes	
No	5	3	8
Yes	10	11	21
Total	15	14	29

Table 16

Complete Analysis of FRL Status and Environmental Motivation

Test	Value	*df*	*p*		
			Asymptotic (2-sided)	Exact (2-sided)	Exact (1-sided)
Pearson χ^2	.514[a]	1	.474		
Continuity correction[b]	.091	1	.763		
Likelihood ratio	.518	1	.471		
Fisher's exact test				.682	.383

Linear-by-linear association	.496	1	.481		
Number of valid cases	29				

[a]Two cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.86. [b]Computed only for a 2 × 2 table.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

As discussed in the literature review, the main themes that emerged from prior research regarding families' motivation to attend a charter school were academic quality, school environment, and geography (Finn et al. 2006; May, 2006; Wohlstetter et al., 2011). The dominant themes from the literature review for parent information sources were word of mouth and school administrators. In general, the results of this study reflect the findings in the literature review, with specific exceptions. An important distinction to make is not the type of school that attracts families to ATI but rather academic and environmental factors. A small number of parent respondents indicated that they did not trust traditional public schools, but there was no indication that the fact that ATI was a charter school, as opposed to a traditional public school, played into families' decision making.

Academic Performance and Academic Fit

Adzima's (2014) study of Pennsylvania charter school waiting list data and VanderHoff's (2008) study of New Jersey charter schools found that increased academic performance of charter schools was correlated with growth of their waiting lists. Academic performance in those studies was defined by scores on standardized tests of reading and math. In their review of the literature, Chakrabarti and Roy (2010) found numerous studies concluding that academic performance was the single most important factor influencing parental choice in alternatives to traditional public schools and expanded the definition of academic performance to include quality of instruction.

Academic performance and reputation are motivators in the literature, but they do not appear in my study. Although academic performance is stressed in the literature, parent and child participants in my study named numerous elements of academics without mentioning the school's academic performance as reasons for leaving their previous public school and for choosing ATI. For example, parents named individual attention and pace and differentiated learning opportunities as academic motivators, as opposed to ATI's reported test scores and graduation rates. Given ATI's performance on standardized assessments, which places the school in the lowest 5% of schools in the state, the result is not surprising. One parent reported that she had heard "good and bad" about the school, and after being asked to clarify, she said that she knew about the state report card information published in the local newspaper. However, this knowledge did not stop the family from deciding that ATI was the best option for their child, showing that academics was not the primary factor.

Aside from one student who named "better teachers" as motivation for choosing ATI, participants cited academic factors other than performance and instructional quality, which I term *academic fit.* As opposed to what the extant literature indicates, parents and children entering ATI are more concerned about finding an academic approach that works for them and meets their needs. Responses from participants indicated that they are looking for academic quality but not the type that involves test scores and college placement. Parents and students choosing ATI clearly valued finding an academic fit as motivation (83% of parents and 63% of students), in particularly for one-on-one attention in class and study time opportunities (72% of parents and 53% of students), which is a cornerstone value of ATI. Perhaps the closest result comparable to academic performance

was curriculum, which 24% of parents brought up. ATI's curriculum is experience based; students conduct individualized inquiry that utilizes kinesthetic learning as a basis for instruction. About one fourth of parents believed that ATI's curriculum was an academic fit.

In the ranking portion of the study, 62% of parents marked the ATI programs and services item, indicating that the perceived academic fit was a motivator, although perhaps this item was mostly a secondary consideration, given its mean ranking of 2.00. Twelve students (40%) also marked this item in their rankings, with a mean of 1.67. That result is the closest mean to 1, second to class size. The academic priorities of parents and students entering ATI seem to be based more on fit than performance.

Environment

As May (2006) concluded in her study of 260 Ohio parents who removed their children from traditional schools and placed them in charter schools, parents choosing ATI perceived a better educational experience in charter schools, although the lines between academic quality and environmental qualities were blurred. May wrote that "parents appear to find variables such as individual attention, small class sizes ... as factors leading them to perceive their children are receiving a better educational and academic experience" (p. 39). This quote guided my own coding of responses to separate academics and environment but also reveals the importance of environmental factors in shaping parent perceptions of ATI and what influenced their choice to seek a charter school.

In response to the items asking for reasons for choosing ATI, all 29 parents named one or more environmental factor that influenced their choice, as did 83% of

students. The most common responses by far referred to school size and class size. Returning to the May's (2006) quote above, the two variables she listed are congruent with the results of this study. Parents named individual attention in terms of academic fit and class size most consistently in their responses for motivations for choosing ATI. ATI had median class sizes of 14 and 18 for middle school and high school core classes, compared with medians in Phoenix-Talent of 23 and 29.5, respectively (ODE, 2015). Further, 20 of 59 participants (34%) stated that their previous school was too large for their academic and environmental comfort. Although the percentage who named large school or class size is much lower than those who named ATI's small size as a motivating factor, the concept of small class size is popular with incoming families.

Finn et al.'s (2006) study of parents of students with disabilities found environmental factors to be more motivating than academic quality for students with IEPs or Section 504 plans in their interviews with parents. Nearly half of the families included in my study (43%) had a child receiving special education services, and 10 of those 13 parents cited environmental factors as motivation for leaving their previous schools and for choosing ATI. Interestingly, the mean ranking for the importance of ATI class size was 2.4 for the 10 parents whose children had IEPs or Section 504 plans and 1.76 for the 13 parents of children who did not receive specialized services. This result indicates that the specific environmental factor of class size was slightly more important for the latter subgroup but clearly was a motivating factor for both subgroups.

A third finding of interest regards student-teacher relationships. Stewart et al.'s (2010) study of parents of charter school students in Milwaukee, WI found that student relationships with teachers was a top factor in parental choice of charter schools. Echoing

Stewart et al., about one third of ATI parent participants (34%) cited the same variable as motivation for choosing the charter school. The locations of Milwaukee, WI and Phoenix, OR differ greatly, which limits any generalization between the studies, but the elements do coincide. Student-teacher relationships are closely associated with individual attention, because good relationships are the underpinnings of one-on-one interactions in a learning environment and of improvement in educational experiences (Keddie & Churchill, 2005).

The chi-square analyses revealed that no dependency existed between environmental motivations and students' economic or special education status. Regardless of status, environmental factors are important to families entering ATI.

Geography

Contrary to the results found in the literature review, geography was not a motivating factor for most of the parents and children in this study. Two parents (7%) and three students (10%) named ATI's location as a reason for choosing the school. One student who identified geography as a motivator pointed to a window and said, "You can see my house from here." Such a quote would support Wohlstetter et al.'s (2011) review of charter school literature, in which they found that geographic considerations superseded academics as deciding factors for leaving a traditional school and choosing a charter. Contrary to the student sentiment quoted above, Goyette (2008) and Bell (2009) found that parents in urban areas in the northeastern United States looked beyond neighborhood schools to find choice schools regardless of distance from home. The settings and demographics of those studies differ significantly from those of this study, which precludes establishing a connection but does point back to Wohlstetter et al.'s

conclusion that parental decision making is more complicated than academic considerations.

Although geographic location did not generally drive parent and child choice, it was not and inhibitor for participants who came from outside ATI's sponsoring district. Julius's (2011) study of 295 New Hampshire parents of charter school students found that parents were willing to travel further to get their students to a choice school than to a traditional school. However, the parents in that study were generally above the average income status. That demographic contrasts with the population of my study, in which 73% of participating families qualified for FRL, the current indicator of income status in education. In their review of the literature in terms of the economics of parental choice, Chakrabarti and Roy (2010) cited numerous studies that found location to be less of a consideration, although in some circumstances disadvantaged subgroups (e.g., low SES and racial or ethnic minority groups) valued location more highly than did other subgroups. I did not ask parents whether ATI's location was further from home than that of previous schools; however, 19 participant families came to ATI from outside the Phoenix-Talent district. Given the geographic layout of schools and their attendance boundaries, I do not presume that all 19 families are closer to their previous traditional schools than to ATI. Yet, the large number of families from outside the district indicates that parents seeking education alternatives are willing to look beyond the bounds of their resident district to find a fit for their children.

Information Sources

Echoing the reports of Donohue Stetz (2009) and Greene (2012), the main source of parent and child information gathering before attending ATI was word of mouth. The

majority of parents (79%) relied on word of mouth from various sources, such as adult friends, their children, their child's friends at ATI, and counseling agencies, when researching ATI. Likewise, students relied on word of mouth; 80% of student participants reported word of mouth as their primary source of information about ATI, and half of those students relied on friends already attending ATI to gather information. Utilizing testimonials from those who have lived the experience seems to be the most immediate and trustworthy source for parents and their children.

As Villavicencio (2013) found when interviewing 25 parents of school children in New York City, parent information gathering efforts ranged from nonexistent to extensive. One parent in my study and one parent in Villavicencio's study did not attempt to gather information before enrolling in a charter school. In another similarity between these studies, fewer than half of parents and only 10% of student participants used the Internet when conducting research. This may be due to a variety of reasons, including limited access and unfamiliarity with technology or the general preference of the population.

Statistics

The chi-squared analyses of relationships between specific demographics and environmental factors did not reveal any significant findings. Although none of the studies I reviewed specifically measured motivational factors by socioeconomic standards or special education status, Finn et al. (2006) found that parents of special education students valued school size and individual attention as deciding factors in choosing a charter school. The null result of my analyses indicates that motivational factors are not specific to socioeconomic status or special education status.

Limitations

There are key limitations that impacted this study and should be considered for future research. First, by making the forms and results anonymous, I limited the usability of the data. Not all students who interviewed with me completed the entire intake process and stayed at ATI. By attaching names to the forms, I could have examined demographics of students and families who chose to leave ATI before completing the intake process and then compared these families to families who stayed at ATI. I also could have followed up on the initial interview data to gauge family satisfaction after being at ATI for a specific period of time, such as 6 months or 1 year. These retention statistics might reveal demographic patterns regarding satisfaction. One aspect of motivation I did not examine was the family dynamic itself. I did not collect data on the family decision-making process to understand who in the family most influenced the school choice: parent, child, or case worker.

Implications and Areas for Future Research

School choice continues to be a divisive issue in the education and political arenas; therefore, research that sheds light on these issues and arguments is necessary to continue the discussion. The study I conducted is important to me personally, because I plan to have a leadership role in Oregon charter schools going forward. In addition to the personal goals of action research, the study also has implications for practice and future research on charter schools and parental choice and for ATI, its sponsoring district, and the community context.

Implications for ATI

Collecting information on parent and child attitudes about their experiences in traditional public schools and their motivations for choosing a charter school provides an

opportunity for ATI to justify its presence in the Phoenix-Talent community as a viable alternative for families who desire a smaller program and a different approach to academics. Although word of mouth is a community-based information source, it is important to note that 24% of incoming parents spoke with a community organization, such as a counseling agency, when seeking information. By establishing what parents and their children desire and charting change over time, ATI can be responsive to shifts in community demographics, attitudes, and needs, and that information can be communicated to community organizations that serve families. Charter schools are not permanent institutions and must engage the communities in which they exist to create symbiotic support systems. The majority of ATI's population is from traditionally disenfranchised subgroups, and as organizations recommend students to ATI, the school can reciprocate by involving its students in public works projects and events that integrate students into the greater community to foster a sense of belonging and ownership.

Understanding parental motivations for enrolling their children at ATI allows administrators and teachers to communicate effectively with parents and develop a shared vision for the achievement and completion of children's compulsory schooling. Further, understanding the perceived shortcomings of other organizations and strengths of one's own institution, as well as the opposite, provides an outsider's perspective that is valuable in shaping effective educational entities. ATI should utilize all the resources it can in order to reach and educate students. Parents are capable of participating in the public education process, and understanding what drives their choice is an important first step.

ATI is a small school that serves students with a wide variety of struggles with academic, social, and emotional skills. By surveying incoming parents and their children, ATI may adapt to changes in the community to better serve the student body and associated families. For example, 40% of students who registered for ATI between September 12, 2015 and February 6, 2016 were in Grades 6–8, and ATI caps its middle school cohort at 18. If demand for ATI among middle school students continues, the school may consider adding a second middle school cohort.

The environmental and academic factors most identified by parents and students indicate that there is a need in Jackson County for smaller programs that emphasize individualized learning and opportunities for one-on-one academic assistance. As this study shows, 79% of incoming parents and 63% of their children named small program or class size as a motivating factor for choosing ATI, and 72% of parents valued individual attention for their children. Continuing to manage class size is critical. ATI averages about 15 students per class, but to maximize individual instruction time, ATI might consider budgeting for classroom aides, reaching out to the public for parent and community volunteers in classrooms, and partnering with the local College of Education at Southern Oregon University to bring in more practicum volunteers and student teachers to reduce the adult-student ratio. By bringing in more adults who are willing to assist students academically, ATI will better meet the perceived needs of parents and the children and can accordingly plan for appropriate academic interventions. By extension, ATI can also pursue and recruit teachers who have specializations in working with small classes, differentiating instruction, and students who require individual attention to effectively learn.

The results of this study indicated that word of mouth is the primary source of information for parents and students. ATI's enrollment has remained steady in recent years, and rates word-of-mouth transmission of information indicate that there is a certain level of parental satisfaction with ATI. Yet, word of mouth is dependent upon individuals and is beyond the purview of the school. ATI advertises minimally but should also connect with middle and secondary schools in Jackson County in order to disseminate information about ATI's programs and services and to communicate with administration and guidance counselors when schools consider referring a student to an alternative education setting. Parents and their children may not be aware of their options, and the results indicate that fewer than half turned to the Internet to gather information. Delivering program information through local schools may enhance families' access to programs that they may not otherwise find.

Researching during the intake process and acting on the emergent data gathered from parents and children addressed many of the primary factors. For example, by providing counseling services for students who struggle with anxiety or who are victims of bullying, ATI can create an environment that allows students to focus on academics, thereby creating opportunities for increased academic performance. Data-based decision making has been the focus of education reform and practice for much of the 2000s (Skalski & Romero, 2011). The data-based decision-making process demonstrates quality of leadership and instruction, as programs and adaptations are a direct result of the needs articulated by incoming students and their parents. At ATI, the program can respond to the parent- and student-reported needs and concerns by creating individualized plans for instruction and assistance and by establishing programs that respond to the prevailing

needs of the population, such as maintaining small class sizes and planning for one-on-one instruction, which is valued by incoming students and parents.

The stated mission of ATI, "Inspiring thoughtful individual choices in learning and growth," will be supported by adapting to the stated needs of incoming students, and ATI can provide instruction and services that addresses the needs of individuals and small groups, based on intake assessments and parent and child input.

Implications for the Sponsoring District

This study has two distinct implications for the sponsoring school district. First, when the results on parental and student motivations for choosing ATI are published, district and traditional school administrators will have access to valuable information for understanding the needs within their community that are perceived to be unmet. District leaders may address these needs by making adjustments to programs and/or offering services that may aid in student retention, success, and parent-child satisfaction. Although school leaders may not be able to control the population of their schools, they may be able to work toward smaller class sizes or to appropriately place students in smaller classes. Conversely, district leaders may offer ATI supports specific to the population ATI serves, such as access to teacher trainings and joint partnerships with area mental health and counseling agencies. By sharing resources and communicating about needs and wants, the sponsoring district can identify students who may have success at ATI and refer accordingly. Collaboration between the Phoenix-Talent district and ATI can lead to a relationship that might streamline the application and enrollment process for students and foster sharing of best practices and norms for students who have special needs (Schnaiberg & Lake, 2015).

The second implication is for charter renewal. Charter renewal is an important aspect of the relationship between a charter school and its sponsoring school district. The agreements made and expectations articulated in the charter become the basis for renewal or nonrenewal. The *Oregon Public Charter School Handbook* (ODE, 2013) lists the primary factors on which sponsors assess charter schools for renewal: academic performance, fiscal performance, governance effectiveness, leadership and instructional quality, compliance with the terms of the charter, compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and mission fulfillment.

Among the goals specified in ATI's charter is the sponsoring district's option to set a new measure of school success in the event of a change in the ODE's rating system, which came to fruition with Oregon's waiver from the No Child Left Behind legislation and its subsequent replacement by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. With the information supplied by this study, the district has direct input from ATI and its primary stakeholders regarding their values and needs, which may contribute to the district's new evaluation system.

Continuing the practice of researching parent motivations for choosing ATI provides evidence for consideration during the renewal process and provides the sponsoring district and wider community with information on how parents and their children feel about traditional school options.

Areas for Future Research

My study adds to the research on families' motivations for choosing charter schools. This study fills a gap in the research by comparing experiences in traditional public schools with family motivations for choosing a charter school. Further, the study fills a gap by investigating the sources of influence on family decision making by the

timing of the research, which is during the ATI enrollment process. I interviewed families at the moment of intake, when motivations may be most readily accessible, rather than interviewing families after their child has been enrolled in the charter school for a period of time. Adding to the research by gauging perceptions of the traditional school experience and motivations for choosing a charter school may reveal how congruent the two concepts are and promote further research into this phenomenon to better understand what drives families to choose alternative education models.

Although the results of studies of individual schools and parents are difficult to generalize, future research at local levels can contribute to marking change in perceived needs over time and provide buildings, districts, counties, and states with vital information regarding what parents and their children desire for their public education. Merriam (2009) argued that qualitative research has value in its transferability, given sufficient descriptive data. A longitudinal study of perceptions and attitudes toward academic and environmental factors of choice can reflect greater socioeconomic trends and guide decision making in program structures and academic foci for both traditional schools and alternative settings, such as charter schools.

At ATI, collection of data at the time of enrollment should continue in order to ascertain individual and group needs and perceptions. Future research can expand to include data on parental and child satisfaction within the domains named when entering the school, such as class size, individual attention, teacher-student relationships, and curriculum. Comparisons with attendance rates and academic achievement prior to attending ATI should be conducted for individuals and subgroups to determine whether the environmental and academic factors have an impact on student performance in terms

of test performance, credit accrual, graduation and completion rates, dropout rates, and disciplinary incidents. Understanding, acting on, and studying the factors identified by parents and their children will make for rich data collection and environments in which all students have opportunities to succeed.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW MODELS

Parent Intake Interview Model

Survey Number:

Date:

The purpose of this intake interview is to collect information on motivations for choosing ATI. All responses will remain anonymous, and will be aggregated for reports and may be included in published studies. Your responses will NOT affect your child's enrollment status at ATI.

Your enrolling child's current grade: 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Did your child previously attend a traditional public school? Y / N

Does your household qualify for free/reduced lunch: Y / N

Is your child on an IEP? Y / N

What was the most important reason why you chose to withdraw from/did not enroll your child at his or her previous school?

_____

_____

Did a counselor or administrator at your previous school recommend another school to you? Y / N If yes, did they recommend ATI? Y / N

Why did you choose ATI for your child?

_____

_____

What is your perception of what makes ATI different from traditional schools?

_____

_____

How did you gather information about ATI before attending orientation?

_____

What matters to you most in choosing ATI?

Using this list for reference, rank in order of importance up to three most important reasons for choosing ATI. 1 is most important, 2 is second most important, and so on.

Rank only those that apply.

____ Bad experience at my previous school (please describe)

____ ATI's stated mission

____ Programs/services offered by ATI

____ ATI’s curriculum

____ Class size at ATI

____ My child's safety

____ Geographic location of ATI

____ My child's sibling attends ATI

____ My child's friends attend ATI

____ Recommendation from previous school

____ Recommendation from other parents

____ Lack of alternative choices

____ Other (please describe)

Student Intake Interview Form

Survey Number:

Date:

The purpose of this survey is to collect information on your motivations for attending ATI. All responses will remain anonymous, but will be aggregated for reports and may be included in published studies. Your responses will NOT affect your enrollment status at ATI.

Your current grade: 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Your household qualifies for free/reduced lunch: Y / N

What was the most important reason why you withdrew from/did not enroll at your previous school?

_____

_____

Did a counselor or administrator at your previous school recommend another school to you? Y / N If yes, did they recommend ATI? Y / N

Why are you attending ATI?

_____

_____

What is your perception of what makes ATI different from traditional schools?

_____

_____

How did you gather information about ATI before attending orientation?

_____

What matters to you most in choosing ATI?

Using this list for reference, rank in order of importance up to three most important reasons for choosing ATI. 1 is most important, 2 is second most important, and so on.

Rank only those that apply.

____ Bad experience at my previous school (please describe)

____ ATI's stated mission

____ Programs/services offered by ATI

____ ATI’s curriculum

____ Class size at ATI

____ My safety

____ Geographic location of ATI

____ My sibling attends ATI

____ My friends attend ATI

____ Recommendation from previous school

____ Recommendation from other students

____ Lack of alternative choices

____ Other (please describe)

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