

School Choice and Diversity

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the reasons why parents choose to send their children to charter schools in the Nashville/Davidson County area. Over 100 parents were given a survey at eight charter schools. The survey consisted of 10 multiple choice questions and five short-answer questions. This survey was designed to find the primary and secondary factors as to what leads parents to choose charter schools. The primary finding of this study is that parents, in Nashville/Davidson County Tennessee, choose charter schools because of high academic standards. Some secondary reasons are distance from home and the school's culture. Along with the study, this thesis also describes the history of charter schools in the United States and the history of charter schools in Tennessee.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Researchers have done many studies on why parents send their children to charter schools. However, geographically, that research has been confined to New York City, Chicago, and Louisiana, Minnesota, and Indiana.¹ This study hopes to address this geographic and scholarly gap in the extant literature by asking parents and legal guardians in Nashville: Why do parents choose to send their children to charter schools in the Nashville area?

Prior Studies on Charter Schools

The *school choice movement* is based in part on marketplace theory, meaning that parents choose where to send their child to school from a variety of options instead of being zoned into a particular school. Marketplace theory assumes that parents would select only the best, highest-achieving schools for their children and that parents would not schools that are not academically achieving, and poorly performing schools would eventually be weeded out of the marketplace (Villavicencio, 2013). Adriana Villavicencio conducted a study in two New York City charter schools to see what parents base their choice on in selecting their child's school and if parents' choices are based on marketplace theory or other factors. Villvicencio found that parents based their choice of school on a myriad of factors including safety, proximity to home, and student demographics. Villavicencio also found that parents did not necessarily pull their children out of lower-performing charter schools, as academics were not their main concern.

¹ Frankenburg et al 2017, Waitoller, Super 2017.

Parents also had different access to information sources and may have made choices that are not fully informed (Villavicencio, 2013). The study also noted that parents had different priorities concerning schooling, and if two sets of parents had the same information, they would choose a school based on what they valued the most. Therefore, the study found that, in New York City, different parents have different sets of choices in where they send their children to school and that the marketplace theory is flawed in that schooling is more value-centric than other consumer-based marketplaces. According to this study, parents chose the school that they thought would be the best ‘fit’ for their child both academically and non-academically; parents also cited an intense dissatisfaction with their child’s previous school (Villavicencio, 2013). However, the overarching reason that parents chose a particular charter school for their child is academic rigor and content (Villavicencio, 2013)

Some parents place value on the schools’ culture and student demographics, as they want their child educated in an environment with similar value systems and cultural traditions as their own (Wilson, 2016). This sentiment especially rings true for families who are ethnic or cultural minorities, because their children are ostracized at school for differences in cultural beliefs. There are charter schools that specifically serve certain communities, like the Bari Academy in Minnesota (Wilson 2016). The Bari Academy is a charter school that caters to the Somalian refugees and their families. This school has not met ‘adequate yearly progress’ as defined by Minnesota for most of the years it has been open. However, parents chose the school for their children based on the school’s cultural climate (Wilson, 2016). Parents who send their children to Bari Academy were more concerned about keeping Somali and Muslim traditions alive in their children (Wilson,

2016). Bari Academy's principal, aides, and staff speak Arabic, which helps refugee parents have a better understanding of their child's education. Parents also cited bullying as a significant reason that they sent their child to Bari, as many of the children were bullied for following Somali and Muslim traditions at their public schools (Wilson, 2016).

However, if a charter school is defined as a 'counterpublic' the school can be racially homogenous. Wilson defines a 'counterpublic' as defines as a place where different communities can have a place to themselves (Wilson, 2016). Being unique or different from the cultural norm is hard on adults, but even harder for children. Wilson's article points out that to assume all parents have the same motivations when choosing a school is simplistic. The idea that only schools with the highest test scores and best academics are chosen is faulty, because of the complicated marketplace in which schools exist.

According to Iris Rothberg's article *Charter schools and the risk of increased segregation*, charter schools across the country are segregated by race, income, and ethnicity (Rothberg, 2014). Rothberg also states that charter schools are segregated because of recruitment techniques that target specific communities (Rothberg 2014). The segregation that occurs in charter schools is not mandated by the state, and charter schools must accept all students regardless of "race, creed, color, or sex" (Archbald, Hurwitz, Hurwitz 2018). What we see occurring in charter schools is de facto segregation; however, this segregation is magnifying a problem that is already present with zoned public schools (Rothberg, 2014). Proponents of charter schools do not see the segregation as harmful because the schools are self-selected, but there are concerns that

de facto segregation could lead to institutions that are separate and unequal (Archbald, Hurwitz, Hurwitz 2018).

There are 31 charter schools in the Nashville area (as of December 2018).² The survey was conducted at schools that were chosen at random by an online random outcome generator so that every charter school in Nashville had an equal chance of being selected. When the generator would pick a school, the school was contacted school through e-mail or a phone call. Once I received permission from the school, parents/guardians were surveyed at a myriad of after-school events such as PTO meetings, University Nights, Multicultural festivals, and choir practices. In all, surveys were conducted at eight schools until over 100 surveys were completed. The results are compiled by the most common response for the multiple-choice questions and most common responses for the short answer questions. Each survey contained 15 questions to be answered by parents and legal guardians who send their children to Nashville area charter schools.³ The survey was given in person, on paper. It consisted of 10 multiple choice questions and five short answer questions. When I was in the school, I would ask parents as they were entering or leaving a school event if they would like to take my survey. If parents were interested, I would tell them their rights as a participant and answer any questions that they had.

There are a few reasons parents choose charter schools; although my data show the number one reason is that they want their children to attend schools with high academic standards. Another question I asked was if distance from home played a role in school choice, and in the case of the data from my survey, school location does seem to

² Here is a link to the comprehensive list of charter schools within the Metro Nashville School District <https://schools.mnps.org/>.

³ Hereafter parents will be used throughout this thesis to refer to both parents and legal guardians.

matter as 98 out of 107 parents live less than 20 miles away from their child's school with the majority of them living one to five miles away. Distance from home plays a significant factor in school choice along with perceived academic excellence. Another factor in why parents choose charter schools is school culture. Academic excellence and school culture often go together because many of the schools that I went to pride themselves on making sure their students are college ready – even in kindergarten. My data matches with several other studies done on school choice around the nation particularly in Indiana and Michigan (Stein et al.2010, DeGrow 2010).

Each study cited that parents reported academics as the main reason they chose their child's school (Kamenetz 2015, Powers 2017, DeGrow 2017). The studies also note that academics are not always the driving decision in school choice and other factors such as driving distance, word of mouth, and public perception can play a role in school choice (Kamenetz 2015, Powers 2017, DeGrow 2017). Although my research did not include public perception or word of mouth, my study concluded that high academic standards are the most significant factor in parental choice in charter schools, followed by distance.

Another major aspect of this study was to figure out if the racial makeup of the school affected parental choice. Eighty-three out of 107 participants answered that it is very important that their child be educated in a diverse environment. However, out of the eight schools which were surveyed, three had over 50% of the student population that is either African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, or White. Five have no race that constitutes more than 50% of the student body. The three that have a racial majority are in areas where over 50% of the population is white; however, this may be due to the parent's conscious choice to self-segregate. The survey touched on race, but there are no

definite conclusions as to whether race is a factor in school choice, and this theory would have to be extended upon with further research. Analysis on data collected is explored in depth in chapter III.

If free market principles are enacted in the public-school realm, all parents are thought to be rational consumers. In theory, parents will choose schools that are doing well academically, and if the school stops doing well, then parents can take their child out and eventually the school will shut down. Market forces will ensure that only the ‘cream of the crop’ schools are left running. In Nashville, it does appear that academics is the primary factor. However, parents have more to consider than just academics; they also consider distance from home, diversity, and school culture. For Nashville parents sometimes, the best school for their child is not the best school academically, it can be better socially or even closer to home.

Charter School Law in Tennessee

A charter school as defined by the Tennessee Department of Education as a public school that is under the operation of a non-profit governing body (Tennessee Department of Education). Tennessee charter schools are schools of choice, meaning that parents decide to send their child to a charter school. Several things set apart charter schools from zoned public schools. First, the charter schools have more autonomy and do not have to answer to a local school board. The school’s staff makes decisions about curriculum and teaching practices independent of the school district or state. Charter schools are also non-unionized meaning that teachers’ contracts with the school renew every year, and there are no tenured teachers. Charter schools have less government oversight than zoned public schools.

However, charter schools are held to the same accountability standards as zoned public schools. Since charter school funding is subsidized with federal dollars, children who attend charter schools must take state standardized tests. Charter Schools also must provide services for students who have learning disabilities, are physically disabled, and students who speak English as a second language (Tennessee Department). If these services are not provided the local school board will close the school, just like any zoned public school. Charter schools cannot deny any student entry based on academic achievement, disability, or any other metric. If there is a space in the school for the child, the charter school must accept the child into the school. When there are not enough spaces for every applicant, a lottery helps to choose new students. This way every applicant has an equal chance of being selected to attend. Any student who lives within the charter schools district may attend the school if they submit a timely application and there is a space for them.

Charter schools in Tennessee can be opened in several different ways: a sponsor can apply directly to a local board of education, a local board of education can convert an existing public school, 60% of parents or teachers can petition for a zoned school to be transformed into a charter school; or the state board of education can approve a charter school if the school was previously denied approval from the local board of education (Tennessee Department). After the school gets approved, it is up to the governing body of the charter school to monitor the upkeep and operation of the individual school.

However, charter schools still report to the State Board of Education as they must send audits, financial reports, and performance reports (Tennessee Department). If these reports are not satisfactory, the state can either not renew the charter agreement or revoke

the charter. If the charter is revoked, or not renewed, the school will finish out the following year and not reopen. Students attending Tennessee charter schools are free to leave at any time if they are not satisfied with the school. The State of Tennessee wants to make sure that all parents have a choice in where they send their child to school, beyond zoned public schools and private schools (TN DOE). Why parents choose charter schools over zoned or private schools is the focus of this study.

Conclusion

The literature and studies concerning school choice and charter schools center around what parents consider when choosing a school for their child, and what the consequences of those considerations mean for the children and the educational community at large. Studies that analyze school choice show that parents are complicated consumers because of the variety of values and beliefs they hold on education. What parents value concerning education varies from family to family, and from place to place. Differing values are why research into what motivates parents into choosing a school is important. To get a complete picture we must consider motivations beyond test scores and academics. Ultimately, in Nashville, the choice is motivated by academics, but distance from home and other factors matter as well.

CHAPTER II: HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF CHARTER SCHOOL EDUCATION

Dr. Ray Budde, an education professor from the University of Massachusetts, was the first person to propose the concept of a charter contract in the education realm. Budde's original idea for how a charter would work in the world of education is laid out in his book *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts* (1988). In this book, Dr. Budde structured a ten-year plan for changing the very fabric of education in the hypothetical Hometown School District. A charter, in this sense, is a three to a five-year agreement between a group of teachers and the school board. The charter, in this case, would be a plan of action that includes "rationale and scope [of] curriculum; description of the developmental and learning needs of their pupils; strategies for helping pupils acquire lifelong learning skills ..." (Budde, 1988 p.36). In Dr. Budde's original design, groups of teachers would apply for charters within their school to implement a program of interest to the teachers. He believed that these charters would help change the roles of teachers and superintendents alike. A charter would give teachers more authority in what they did in the classroom, and the position of superintendent would change to being more of a planner and facilitator. Teachers would also be held accountable for the results of their proposed charter. In short, a charter would inspire innovation on the part of the teachers and administrators and hold teachers accountable for the outcome of the plan.

The concept of charter schools as we know them today was first introduced by former American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president Al Shanker. He proposed an idea that was similar to Dr. Budde's idea of small groups of teachers proposing an action plan, but instead of this action plan, or charter, being implemented within a current running school these teachers could create a new school within an already functioning district. According to the Phi Delta Kappan article "What did Al Shanker actually say about charter schools?" (2014), Shanker's idea was that teachers could have more room to experiment and innovate; this way the education field could experiment similar to the scientific field. What Shanker wanted to do was implement an idea that took away some of the bureaucratic 'red tape' that zoned public schools have and let teachers and administrators decide for themselves what was best for the students. The charter schools would be allies to the zoned public schools in that there would be an exchange of ideas because the charter schools would be allowed to experiment where zoned public schools would not. Charter schools would then exchange the best ideas with the public schools. Charter schools and zoned public schools would be connected rather than direct competitors (Kahlenberg, Potter 2014).

Shanker's vision also included teachers working together in groups to evaluate and educate each other; this way teachers would always know what they were doing right and what areas to improve in (Kahlenberg, Potter 2014). As such, an expert teacher could help a struggling teacher become better at their job and if the struggling teacher did not improve termination could be recommended. All of Shanker's ideas for charter schools centered on accountability. Another key concept in Shanker's vision was that charter schools would integrate students that generally do not go to school together due to

socioeconomic or racial factors (Kahlenberg, Potter 2014). Shanker believed that all students would benefit from schools with students from different classes, races, and abilities.

Shanker never implemented this idea for a charter school. However, his plan was picked up by the Citizens League Study Committee, chaired by John Rollwagen. The committee took Budde and Shanker's design a little further by "envisioning a framework of state policy and the possibility of schools being authorized by the state as well as by a local board" (Kolderie, 2005). After Al Shanker spoke at the Itasca seminar in Minnesota, the charter school idea inspired Senator Reichgott, of Minnesota. Senator Reichgott helped pass the 'charter bill' into legislation in 1991. Throughout the early 1990s, the charter school idea took hold in six more states, with different forms and outcomes. In 1991, charter school legislation made its way into Washington D.C. with Senators Dave Durenberger and Joseph Lieberman introducing a federal funding program for charter schools. This program was adopted in 1994 with strong support from the Clinton Administration (Kolderie, 2005). Figure 1 shows which states have charter school legislation, and what year each state's charter school laws went into effect.

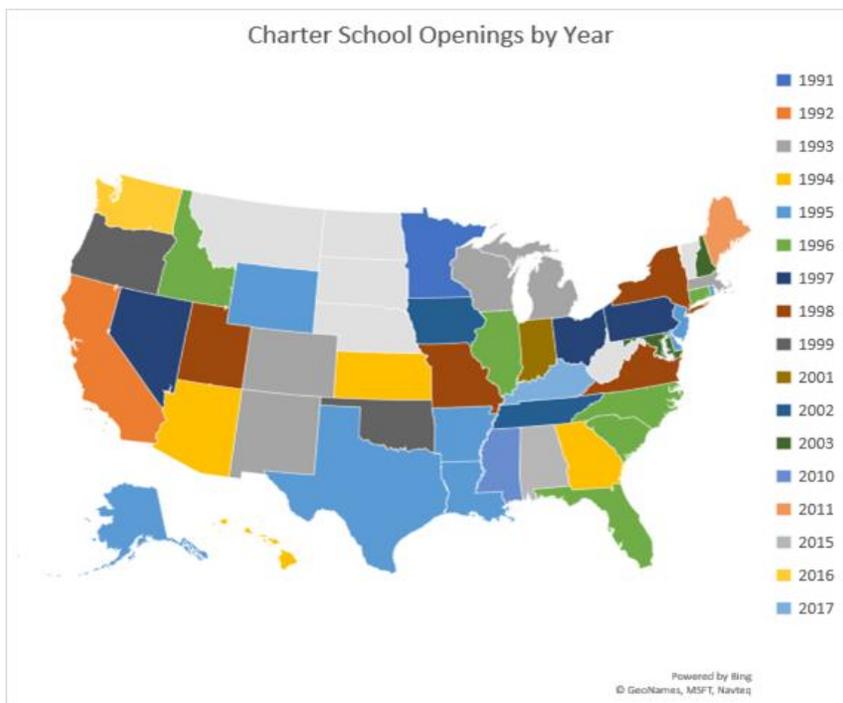


Figure 1 – Map of Charter School Openings by year (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools)

The charter school legislation in Minnesota is similar to charter school legislation in Tennessee (discussed below): the schools are tuition-free, they have to accept any and all students that apply (if there are spots available), and the schools must be run by non-profit organizations (A Primer). City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota opened in 1992, right after Sen. Reichgott passed charter school legislation. City Academy was the first charter school in the United States. Milo Cutter, Barron Chapman, and Terry Kraabel opened the school. Their goal in opening this school was to help disadvantaged kids in the St. Paul area who are from “homes racked by poverty or substance abuse, those who have made their homes behind fences and bars or those who have no home at all” (Jacobs 2015). City Academy is a second chance for high school students to get their lives together and prepare for the workforce or college. The school recruited its first class of students by going on the streets and by taking referrals from St. Paul’s school district.

The second state to adopt charter school education was the state of California. Currently, California has the highest number of charter schools and the highest number of students enrolled in charter schools in the nation (Growth and 2017)¹ The vision for California charter schools was that the schools would be free of some of the regulations public schools in the state were required to follow. Charter schools in California are free to make their curricula with direct teacher input instead of supporting the local school board (Green 2011). The idea was that the students, teachers, and parents would have more decision-making power behind how the school was structured and what the students were learning. This way the school would work for the students and yield better educational outcomes (EdSource 2004). In return for the reduced regulation, charter schools in California would be held to higher accountability standards than their public-school counterparts (EdSource 2004). The very first charter schools in California had to start with a petition that was signed by school board members or a percentage of teachers in a particular school district. In recent years, however, petitions are one of many ways to form a charter a school in California (Charter Schools in California 2004).

Tennessee Charter School History

In 1998 the Tennessee Charter Schools Association (TSCA) was formed and pushed for a charter school legislation to be passed in Tennessee. When the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002 was passed, it initially allowed for charter schools to serve students that came from failing schools, received free or reduced lunch, or did not score proficient on state standardized tests. The law made local education boards the

¹ California passed a charter school law in 1992. The first charter school in California was San Carlos Elementary School in San Mateo, CA. Now called the San Carlos Learning Center, the school boasts an innovative edge in teaching and student learning outcomes (SCCLC).

“sole chartering authorities” (Morgan, 2006). In 2005, the eligible student population that could attend charter schools was expanded to fit students that failed their math and reading exams (Morgan, 2006).

The Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002 had many of the same legal parameters as public-school law in Tennessee, since some funding for charter schools comes from state taxes . However, Tennessee charter schools do not have to follow all of the same rules as non-charter public schools, charter schools have more autonomy, and the governing body has more decision-making power than a local school board. The reasoning here is to help charter schools meet the proposed goal of their charter contract without certain ‘red tape’ policies getting in the way. Tennessee charter schools must be run by a non-profit organization, and the non-profit organization may not run the charter school in conjunction with a for-profit organization (Charter Schools FAQ). In the state of Tennessee charter schools, must be secular and cannot be run or sponsored by a religious organization.

The Haslam Administration made significant changes to the Tennessee Charter School Act of 2002. As of 2011, any student regardless of where they last attended school, or their previous test scores can attend a charter school. Any student that lives within the district of the charter school can attend the school if the child’s parents applied and there is availability at the school – this policy is known as open enrollment (SCORE, 2012). In the past, a cap existed on the number of charter schools that the state could open, but this cap was also lifted in 2011 (SCORE 2012). These changes in the charter school law in Tennessee are significant. They mean that Tennessee parents have more options concerning where their children are sent to school, and the choice is not

determined by income or academic ability. When the school does not have enough room to accept all students the school may conduct a lottery, meaning that students will be chosen randomly for the remaining open spots in the school (Charter Schools FAQ). Today, charter schools in Tennessee must accept any student that applies, if there is room within the school.

The first charter school in Tennessee was the Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering (MASE) located in Memphis, Tennessee (Authors, 2003). MASE was opened to serve students in 7th-12th grades in Memphis who were performing inadequately in their previous school, but the school takes anyone regardless of test scores or grades and aims to make them a high achiever in the STEM fields. MASE currently boasts a population of over 300 students. Nashville got its first charter school in 2003. As of December 2018, there are 77 charter schools in operation in Memphis, Tennessee. In Nashville there are 31 charter schools currently in operation. There are 7,000 charter schools in operation nationwide (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools)

Charter Schools in Nashville-Davidson County

In the fall of 2003, Smithson Craighead Academy opened in Madison, Tennessee. Smithson Craighead was founded by Sister Sandra Smithson, a Catholic nun from Philadelphia, and her biological sister Mary Craighead, an educator from middle Tennessee. Sister Smithson taught for years in disadvantaged communities around the world, and her philosophy of education is that no child is unable to learn. Sister Smithson and Mary Craighead teamed up with a non-profit organization called Project Reflect who also helped open Smithson Craighead Academy. Project Reflect “was founded in 1992 to

serve children living in poverty and to transform urban America through education and education reform” (Project Reflect). The organization still strives to help Nashville’s struggling low-income students become lifelong learners.

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Academy Nashville was the second charter school in Nashville. It opened its doors in 2005, as a middle school that serves grades 5-8 (Lawson, 2006). KIPP has hundreds of schools across the United States, and when they opened their first Nashville location - there are now five - they saw that most students who live in the north and east Nashville were not college-ready according to their ACT scores (Why KIPP). All 200+ KIPP schools across the United States have the same mission based on college readiness, even at the elementary school level. KIPP schools tend to be located in areas where students are failing to do well on state standardized tests and college readiness exams.

Before the 2011 revisions to the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002, the Davidson County area was home to six charter schools. The 2011 change in law helped dozens of new charter schools open in a relatively short amount of time, each with different philosophies and educational practices. After the 2011 revision to the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002 was passed, 23 new charter schools opened their doors from the years 2011 – 2017. Two more charter schools will be open in the fall of 2018.² Although the law expanded what types of students could attend charter schools seven years ago, Nashville charter schools are generally located in lower-income parts of the Nashville area. Most of the schools opened with similar intentions of helping ‘at risk’ youth, with many of the schools having extended school days, extended school years, and smaller classroom sizes. Today these schools are open to all students. However, the

² A list of charter schools and their opening years can be found in Appendix C.

majority of children attending charter schools in the Nashville area are minority students. There are 31 charter schools within the Metro Nashville Public Schools system. 25 of these charter schools have a student body where more than 50% of the students are the same race (Metro Nashville, 2017). Nineteen out of the 31 charter schools are majority black, two are majority white, and 3 are majority Hispanic/Latino. Demographics of the school may play a role in why parents choose a school for their child. What also may play a role are extracurricular activities, proximity to the home, and educational philosophies that the school upholds.

Charter schools in Nashville have differing philosophies of education, and multiple curriculums. The next paragraphs will provide a short examination of the different curriculums/educational philosophies of Nashville charter schools.³LEAD is the largest charter organization in Nashville with seven schools. LEAD schools believe in a student-centered approach to learning, which entails high accountability. College readiness is also a significant focus in LEAD's curriculum; the goal for all LEAD schools is to have a "safe, orderly, and positive school culture" (LEAD). In Nashville there are six KIPP charter schools, the KIPP educational philosophy focuses on college readiness, structure, character development, and high expectations for students (KIPP). KIPP believes that a highly-structured environment with high expectations will foster high student achievement. The RePublic charter organization has four schools in Nashville. RePublic's mission is to teach disadvantaged students coding and computer programming; they believe that if students learn these skills, they will be ready for the jobs of tomorrow (RePublic).

³ A comprehensive list of Nashville charter schools and their educational philosophies can be found at this website <https://schools.mnps.org/>.

Rocketship Public Schools have two charter schools in the Nashville area.

Rocketship schools aim to help close the achievement gap between low- and high-income communities through student-centered learning, individual talent development, and high parent involvement (Rocketship). East End Prep, Intrepid Prep, Knowledge Academies, New Vision Academy, Purpose Prep, and Strive Collegiate focus on rigorous academics, citizenship, and college readiness. Smithson Craighead and Valor collegiate focus on higher order thinking skills, and rigorous academics. Explore! Community school's mission is based on project-based learning and hands-on creative projects (Explore!). Nashville Classical uses classic literature to build the foundation of their curriculum, and also holds students to high expectations (Nashville Classical). STEM Prep Middle and High School uses science, technology, math, and engineering to build their curriculum. STEM Prep Academies are the only STEM-oriented charter school in Middle Tennessee (STEM Prep).

I sampled eight charter schools in the Davidson County/Nashville area. Below will be a brief overview of each school that was included in my sample.⁴

Table 1 – Sampled Charter Schools Major Focuses

⁴ All information for charter schools was found on the National Alliance for Charter Schools and the Tennessee Department of Education websites.

Sampled Schools	Year Opened	Major Focus
East End Preparatory School	2012	Preparing scholars for success in college and the world by challenging, supporting, loving, and leading them through a top-quality, well-rounded education promoting academic excellence and strength of character.
Nashville Classical	2013	To educate every child for academic success and personal excellence in high school, college, and life.
Smithson Craighead	2003	We seek to educate and empower children at all levels from at risk to high achieving. With a strong foundation in basic skills, higher order thinking and positive behavior skills
LEAD Prep Southeast	2013	To provide families in the fast-growing Antioch region of the city a high-quality, college-preparatory middle school and high school option for children.
KIPP Kirkpatrick Elementary	2015	We encourage students to take risks to learn the character, academic, and social skills needed to choose their futures in high school, college, and the world beyond.
Strive Collegiate Academy	2015	At STRIVE Collegiate Academy, our mission is to prepare middle school students for success in high school, college, and career. We will achieve this by empowering each student with a literacy-based curriculum aligned across all content areas, in a culture that encourages leadership, virtue, and excellence as the foundation for success in all of their endeavors.
Rocketship United Academy	2015	Rocketship United Academy is built on the idea of taking full advantage of the wonderful diversity of our community. We celebrate our similarities and differences as we learn from one another about the world around us each and every day. The rich mix of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures in our school, make United a vibrant learning community that welcomes all students.
Knowledge Academies	2015	To prepare students to make the best academic and social choices, leading to a successful life, connected to college, community, creativity, and culture.

Conclusion

Charter school education in the United States and Tennessee has evolved tremendously since Ray Budde first propositioned for charter schools in 1988, and Al Shanker offered his ideas in the early 1990s. The first idea of a charter contract within a school system evolved into entire schools based on a charter. This idea evolved to entire

school systems across the country based on a charter agreement. Instead of charter schools being laboratories for innovation that would be shared with zoned public schools, charter schools became competition for zoned public schools spurring many conversations about education reform involving the charter school idea. Tennessee charter schools and charter school law have evolved dramatically as well.

Tennessee allows charter schools in already functioning school districts and allows them to have flexibility in curriculum outside of the Tennessee Academic Standards to achieve the goal of the charter contract (Morgan, 2006). The state of Tennessee's intent in creating charter school education was to give parents more involvement in their child's education, help education become a more innovative field, and give the state department options to improve their failing schools. The charter school movement gives all parents a choice in where they send their children to school, and why they make that choice is the focus of this study.

Nashville is home to many different types of charter schools with different types of educational philosophies. Demographically Nashville charter schools have a large minority population. According to the Tennessee Charter Schools Center's 2018 impact report, 50% of the charter school student population in Nashville is black, 30% is Hispanic, and 18% is White (TCSC, 2018). The majority of Nashville charter schools have one race that comprises of more than 50% of the student body. Only four out of the 31 charter schools in Nashville have no race that makes up more than 50% of the student population. The next chapter will delve into data into why parents in Nashville chose certain charter schools for their children. Chapter III will show what parents consider the most critical aspect of their child's education

CHAPTER III: DATA AND ANALYSIS

During Spring 2018 and Fall 2018, I conducted a 15-question survey (see Appendix D) of parents who send their children to charter schools in the Davidson County area. I surveyed parents at eight charter schools for a total of 107 surveys. The first ten questions of the survey are multiple choice, and the last five are short answer. Surveys were completed at school functions, such as PTO meetings, choir practice, and family events. I was always physically present when surveying parents; no online surveys were given or made. Participant consent was obtained, and any questions parents had about the survey were answered promptly in accordance with IRB protocol. It was made clear that parent answers were anonymous, and that names would never be revealed in my study. Parents knew that their results were completely confidential.

Methods

The charter schools that were considered had to meet only two requirements. The first requirement was that the charter school had to be a school of choice, meaning that no students are zoned through their neighborhood to attend the school. There are two charter schools in which this is the case: LEAD Brick Church and LEAD Cameron. These schools were not considered in my surveying because parents/guardians did not choose to send their child to this school; the students attend these schools because of the neighborhood they live in. The second requirement was that the school be located in the Metro Nashville/Davidson County area. If the school fit both of these requirements, it was put on the list of schools that would be randomly selected for surveying. To keep my

selection as impartial as possible, I put the names of all of the schools that met my requirements in an online random outcome generator and had it choose the order in which I would contact the schools.

Once the online outcome generator picked a name, I contacted the specific school to ask permission to survey parents. I would send e-mails to the principal, family coordinator, or any other administrator. If I did not hear back, I made a personal phone call to the school. Once I got permission from the administration to survey on school grounds, I went and physically give my survey on the school's campus. Parents would be approached as they came in or left the extra-curricular event and asked if they would like to take my survey. Each survey was given a number, so when participants would answer the short-answer questions they would be referenced by number. From here on when participants are directly quoted, they will be referred to by the number on their survey.

The survey was given in English and Spanish, but most surveys were filled out in English. The majority of the questions were centered on the different reasons that parents would choose charter schools such as school culture, student demographics, or distance from home. Other questions dealt with the parent demographics and income. Every question on my survey was designed to answer one essential question: Why do parents choose to send their children to charter schools in the Nashville area?

Limitations in Research

This study has limitations. The first limitation is that the survey was only ever given to parents physically in hard copy. There was no online version of the survey, which limits the results to parents who can participate in after-school activities. Another limitation is that online charter schools were completely exempt from my sample size, as

the scope of my study was somewhat constricted by geographic location. These limitations made the sample size of my participants relatively small and left out certain groups of parents. If I were to do this study again, an online version of my survey would be preferable, if able to obtain access to parents via email or other means, so as more parents have the opportunity to give their opinions. Another set of limitations are that four out of the eight schools I surveyed are elementary schools, which skewed some of my results, especially the age range of the participant’s children. Younger parents have less experience in zoned public schools, so they have nothing to compare with their child’s current school. Also, about a fourth of my surveys came from Nashville Classical charter school, so these results may be slanted toward what Nashville Classical parents think and overshadow other results.

Data and Analysis

Table 2 – Overview of Sampled Schools

Schools that were surveyed:¹	Grades Taught	Number of Surveys Collected
East End Preparatory	5-8	5
Smithson Craighead	K-4	11
KIPP Kirkpatrick	K-4	15

1 All information for grades taught can be found on the respective schools’ websites.

Table 2 continued – Overview of Sampled Schools

Schools that Were Surveyed	Grades Taught	Number of Surveys Collected
LEAD Prep Southeast	5-9	16
KIPP Kirkpatrick	K-4	15
Strive Collegiate	5-8	8
Rocketship United Academy	K-4	11
Knowledge Academies	5-12	28
Nashville Classical	K-8	28

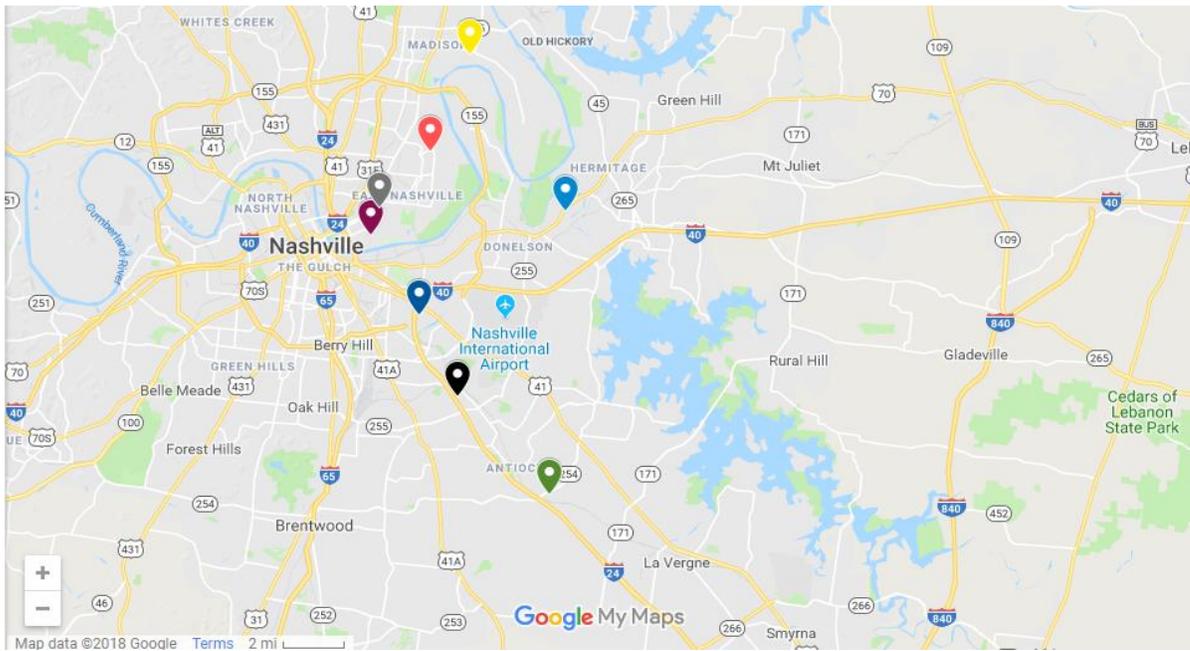


Figure 2: Map of Surveyed Charter Schools

The first question of the survey asked what grade the participant's eldest child was in first grade. Out of the 107 participants, only 61 parents answered the question. The most common answer was first grade. This is about what was expected since out of the eight charter schools that were surveyed, five taught at the elementary level. There are a few factors that may have caused the low answer count. The first factor was that a few of my participants spoke languages other than English and Spanish and may not have understood the nature of the question. Another contributing factor was the way the question was formatted. This question could be easily mistaken for directions about how to fill out the survey. It also took away a level of anonymity, and parents may not have felt comfortable divulging information about their children.

The second question concerned how far parents lived away from their child's school. The most common distance that parents lived from their schools was from one to five miles away (40/107). The next most common distance was five-10 miles away (30/107). The third most common distance was 10-20 miles away (28/107). Seven people lived 20-30 miles away, and only one person lived more than 30 miles away from their child's school. When dividing the results up by school the most common distance for each school was less than 10 miles; these results are consistent with the overall results of my survey. Since most of the participants are parents of young children, it is possible they would want to be closer to their child in case of any emergency. The one person that

lived more than 30 miles away from the school was one of the three people that answered distance from home as a very unimportant factor in choosing their child's school.

Depending on the school, parents' distances from home can vary. The following is a breakdown of the distances that parents live from the schools which were surveyed. Four out of eight schools had parents who lived more than 20 miles away. Only one school, Smithson Craighead, had a parent who lived more than 30 miles away. The most common answer overall was 1-5 miles away. When the answers are broken down school by school every school except for one (Strive Collegiate) had most parents living 5-10 miles away. In fact, Smithson Craighead, LEAD Prep Southeast, and KIPP Kirkpatrick had more parents that lived 10-20 miles away from their child's school than those who lived 1-5 miles away. At every school, the majority of participants lived less than 20 miles away from their child's school, indicating that distance from home is an essential factor in a parent's decision in choosing their child's school.

Distance from home has always been an important factor for parents concerning their child's education. Nashville has a particularly tumultuous past in school desegregation. In *Kelley v. Board of Education* (1955), Alfred Z. Kelley filed a lawsuit to desegregate Nashville public schools because his son could not attend the school that was directly across the street from their home (Wynn). In accordance with the more recent No Child Left Behind legislation, parents were free to choose schools that were within their district if their child's school needed improvement (U.S., DOE). Parents want academically sound schools and within a reasonable distance from their home. A reasonable distance, according to my survey results, is less than 20 miles away from home.

The third question concerned the factors that parents/guardians considered when choosing their child's current school. For this question parents had the option to circle all answers that they felt applied to them, so the answer count will total out to more than 107. Out of the 291 responses 66 said that school culture is the most important factor, followed closely by subjects taught (57/291) and student demographics (47/291). School culture can be defined in several different ways. The most common definition of school culture is "the way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share" (ASCD). Most of the charter schools that I went to pride themselves on having a school culture that is driven toward success, especially concerning college education. All of the schools that I surveyed call their students "scholars," and there is an expectation that all of the students will go to college. The importance of a college education is made clear to students from kindergarten to high school. For one school, in particular, the goal is to close the achievement gap for children who are otherwise disadvantaged (RePublic).

As a follow up to the third question, I asked parents how important it is that their child is educated in a diverse environment. Eighty-three out of 107 participants answered that this is very important; hence student demographics are a significant factor in choosing where they send their child to school. No participant responded that diversity is very unimportant to them. Out of the schools I surveyed, three have a majority Black/African American student population, while five have no race that is more than 50% of the student body. Participant 5 (in response to the disadvantages of non-charter education) pointed out that "neighborhood schools tend to lack racial and economic diversity." This parent chose to send their child to a charter school due to the school's

high academic achievement and racial and economic diversity. Parents consider different types of diversity other than racial diversity. Economic and cultural differences also make a diverse student body. For parents, diversity does not begin and end with race. The importance of diversity also ties into the fourth question as parents chose it as one of the most important aspects of their child’s education.

Table 3 – Student Demographics (Nashville School Finder)

Name of School	African American or Black	Hispanic or Latino	Asian/Pacific Islander	White
East End Preparatory School	78%	13.5%	.50%	7.9%
Smithson Craighead	82.10%	16.3%	.80%	.80%
LEAD Prep Southeast	35.6%	26.6%	3.4%	34.4%
KIPP Kirkpatrick	83.9%	12.10%	1.9%	4%
Strive Collegiate	42%	14%	3%	42%

Table 3 Continued - – Student Demographics (Nashville School Finder

Name of School	African American or Black	Hispanic or Latino	Asian/Pacific Islander	White
Rocketship United	46%	37%	1%	16%
Knowledge Academies	43%	32%	.30%	24%
Nashville Classical	73.5%	4.4%	0%	22.1%

For the fourth question, participants had the option to circle more than one answer choice. This will make the answer count total to more than 107. 95 out of 247 responses showed that the most important aspect of their child’s education is high academic standards. Out of 247 responses 44 showed that the diversity of the student body is most important. The least common answer was student demographics (15/247), which reinforces the idea that cultural diversity is more important to Nashville parents than racial diversity. The charter schools that were surveyed pride themselves on their rigorous curriculums. Charter schools are not beholden to the curriculum that is imposed by their districts’ school board. The charter schools that were surveyed go beyond the Tennessee state standards and sometimes focus on preparing students for certain fields, such as STEM or classic literature.

Parents stated that emphasis on certain education standards was an advantage that charter schools have over zoned-public schools. One parent felt that a disadvantage to zoned-public schools is that “non-charters aren’t able to narrow the education emphasis... to the highest degree” (Participant 5). For charter schools, the curriculum is not limited to just the state standards; this is a huge bonus for parents. Several parents felt that the school's flexibility in curriculum and standards is an advantage to charter school education (Participants 2,4,9). Academics were important to the parents that took my survey, and parents felt that flexibility in the curriculum is an important component for higher academic standards.

The sixth question asked - how important is it that your child’s school be close to home? - Most participants answered that their child’s school being close to home was somewhat important. This answer conflicts with the results of the second question, because 40 out of 107 parents lived between 1-5 miles away from their child’s school. It seems that distance is more of a factor in school choice than parents realize. The school's distance from home may not be the most significant factor in school choice, but it is one of the deciding factors in a parent’s decision on where they send their children to school.

The seventh question asks about parent satisfaction with their child’s school. Eighty-four out of 107 participants answered that they were very satisfied with their child’s school. Only 16 parents said that they were somewhat satisfied with their child’s school – this was the second most common answer. No participants answered that they were very dissatisfied, which directly conflicts with some parent’s verbal statements. A few parents expressed that they were less than happy with their child’s school, but the survey answers did not reflect this sentiment. One parent felt that he/she was sold on false

promises of higher test scores and felt that his/her child's school did not deliver. Other parents were not happy with the lack of basic programs such as a library or sports teams (Participants 21, 4). Part of this may be due to the fear that these answers will get back to the school's administration or other parents may see them. All parents were assured at the time of filling out the survey that their answers would remain confidential, however, when they were asked to put their names on the informed consent, some expressed that they had doubts about the confidentiality of the surveys. If this survey were given in a more anonymous online format, parents would have felt more secure in answering this truthfully.

Since most parents were satisfied with their child's school, the eighth question - Why does your child not attend a public, parochial, or private school?- was almost a point of contention, since some parents felt that I had misworded the question.² The primary reasons that the surveyed parents did not send their child to a traditional public, private, or parochial school are because of academic standards (47/107), and school culture (40/107). A common complaint among parents is that zoned public schools do not have high standards for their students and the curriculum is not rigorous enough. Participant 28 felt "that regular public schools do not teach as well." Another participant felt the same way, writing that zoned public schools have a "limited academic setting" (Participant 53). For the most part, parents answered that academics were the reason that their child attended a charter school above anything else. When parents got to this question, many of them corrected me on my wording. Parents were quick to point out that charter schools are public schools, and that what we think of as traditional public schools are "zoned public schools." This distinction seemed to be a point of contention with parents, as many

² This occurred only at one charter school: Nashville Classical.

of them either told me this in person or they wrote a note for me to the side of the question. The parents emphasized that charter schools in Tennessee are public schools and are publicly funded.

For the ninth question, parents were asked what they thought other parents consider when choosing their child's school. For the most part, parents chose answers that were consistent with what they themselves considered. However, distance from home was a more significant factor in what they thought another parent's decision would be than it was for themselves. Most parents thought that other parents considered academic programs when choosing their child's school (69/107), followed closely by distance from home (48/107). Although parents answered that school culture was important to their decision, they did not choose it for consideration in other parents' decisions. This is odd because school culture can be tied into curriculum, because charter schools can make their own curriculum. However, academic programs were cited as the largest factor for both the participants themselves and what the participant believes other parents would consider.

These results are similar to other studies, in that parents cite that they consider academics the most when choosing a school for their child. In Indiana and Michigan parents said in separate studies that academics are their number one priority (Stein et al 2010, Cravens 2012 & Degrow 2017). What differs in our studies are the ideas secondary reasoning, like lack of information on other options, or reputation of different schools (Stein et al. Degrow). These findings are not unique to Nashville, however secondary factors (besides academic quality) are unique to different locales and different studies.

Questions 10 and 11 concerned the student's race and the participant's family income. The most common ethnicity was African American/Black (47%) followed by White (25%), Hispanic/Latino (19%), Other (6%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (2%). Nobody answered that their child was Native American or Native Indian. These answers somewhat reflect the racial makeup of Nashville according to the census except for one key finding: 63% of people in Nashville are White, and 27% are Black/African American (Data Access 2017). For Question 11 the most common income was from \$50,000 – 74,999 which matches Nashville's median income which is \$52,858 (Data Access 2017). Nobody answered that they did not know their income, and nobody said they made over \$200,000 a year. The income portion of my survey had extremely varied answers, the lowest income that was made was under \$15,000 a year and the highest income made is \$150,000 - \$199,999 a year. Only 8 participants said they would prefer not to answer the question.

Depending on income parents ranked their priorities differently. If the participant had a household income of below \$50,000, they were more likely to factor in subjects taught when choosing their child's school versus school culture for household incomes above \$50,000 (question three). They were also more likely to live farther away from their child's school. Out of the 49 participants whose household income was less than \$50,000 per year 33 lived farther than five miles away from their child's school. However, 23 out of the 49 also answered that it was very important their child's school be close to home. If the participant household income was more than \$50,000 per year, then proximity to home was only somewhat important. The importance of school culture also varies by income. If the participant has a household income less than \$50,000 the

reason that their child does not attend a public, parochial, or private school was because of academic standards. If the household income is above \$50,000, then school culture is a more common answer than academic standards.

Certain answers were more common per racial group. If the participant was Hispanic/Latino, then subjects taught was the factor most considered when choosing their child's school (question three). If the participant was White or African American/Black, school culture was the most important factor. The school's distance from home was also very important for participants who were Hispanic/Latino, while it was only somewhat important if the participant was White or African American/Black. Participants who were African American/Black were more likely to live farther away from their child's school. Out of the 50 participants in the study who were African American/Black 21 lived farther than 10 miles away from their child's school. The only participant who lived more than 30 miles away was African American/Black and had a household income of less than \$15,000 a year.

Some survey answers were consistent across all racial groups and income levels. All racial and income levels answered that high academic standards were the most important aspect of their child's education (question four). Having a diverse educational environment was also very important. Another consistency is that parents are generally very satisfied with their child's current school (question seven). From these results, we can see that most parents, regardless of income and race, want the best education for their child.

Questions 12-15 are the written portion of my survey, and most of these outlines what participants think are the advantages or disadvantages of charter school education

and non-charter school education. For the written portion of my survey, 92 out of 107 participants answered the questions. Some of the respondents did not answer the question posed. For example, one participant, in particular, answered “I don’t know” for every question. Some of these answers were confusing because some of the participants that were surveyed did not speak English or Spanish, and there was not a survey in any other language. Another reason is that some of the questions were worded a little too similarly and some parents got confused about what the question was asking.

For question 12, which asked about the disadvantages of charter schools; the consensus for disadvantages to non-charter schools were the academic standards, student to teacher ratio in the classroom, and lack of communication from the teachers to parents. Participant 65 noted that “there is a smaller more intimate learning that takes place at a charter school versus non charter that houses more students.” The student to teacher ratio at charter schools is very low because they can choose to accept a limited number of students, and the teachers seemed to make sure that they communicated everything to the parents. Some parents, such as participant 57 felt that charter schools have “much structure both socially and academically.” Every school that I went to requires students to wear specific uniforms and had posters constantly reminding students of behavior norms. Some parents felt that the discipline was a disadvantage in charter school education stating that the schools focused on “petty issues” such as color of socks and shoelaces instead of focusing on education.

Parents felt that the disadvantages of charter school education varied depending on the school itself. One school, in particular, Strive Collegiate, is on the third floor of an office building in Donelson. Most of the participants felt that the disadvantage was that

the school had no cafeteria or library and lacked many extra-curricular activities. Seven participants said that the lack of transportation was a disadvantage and that they wished the school could be closer to their home. This number nearly corresponds to the number of parents that live more than 20 miles away from their child's school. Some felt that since the school is outside of their neighborhood, their children would not be able to go to school within their community and with their neighborhood friends. Parents also felt that there was a political stigma regarding charter schools especially since a strong advocate for charter schools, Betsy DeVos, became the U.S. Secretary of Education. DeVos is a controversial figure because of her support for charter schools, vouchers, and other policies. However, many of the responses said that there was no disadvantage to charter school education. Most parents who filled out the survey were very satisfied with their child's school.

Most parents wrote that the advantages of non-charter education are that the schools are located within the neighborhood and close to home. They also felt that funding is more adequately distributed, and zoned public schools do not have to fight so much for their funding as charter schools. Another advantage of non-charter school education for participants is that there are more extra-curricular activities and sports programs. A few have only ever sent their children to charter schools, so they had no comparison. Some participants felt that there were no advantages to zoned public school education.

Transit and proximity to home are issues facing the school choice movement. Lack of transportation can be a barrier to low-income parents in choosing the school that is best for their child. A study that was conducted in Washington D.C. found that low-

income parents “would choose a (hypothetical) better school farther from their home if transportation were provided.” (Teske, Fitzpatrick & O’Brien 2017 p. 4). Another study, also done in Washington D.C, found that parents were “willing to choose an elementary school with proficiency rates up to 11 percentage points lower if the school was one mile closer to them” (Glazerman, Dotter 2016). These findings are consistent with my research. While parents do prioritize academic excellence, they also consider distance from home – especially if their child is in elementary school.

Participants were very enthusiastic about the advantages of charter school education. Some advantages were that there are smaller class sizes and a more rigorous curriculum. Parents also felt that smaller class sizes and stricter discipline were advantages. Many parents felt that there is more community involvement and teachers overall are more involved. One participant noted that with smaller student-teacher ratios teachers could be more actively involved with individual students, and even give them tutoring after school if needed. Participants also felt that it was easier to talk to school administration and make changes. Most parents felt that the significant advantages were that the academics for charter schools are much more rigorous and challenging and the school is not limited in what they teach. Every parent who completed the short-answer questions had positive things to say about their child’s school. In general, parents were happy with their child’s school barring a few minor issues.

Overall the short answer questions help put the multiple-choice portion of the survey into perspective, especially participants ideas of diversity and academic standards. Participant 4 notes that his/her school can “hone [sic] in on racial & economic diversity combined with high expectations & standards, which is a value for our family.” Several

participants noted that diversity and academic excellence go hand in hand, and help their children learn to be a part of a community. While parents overall were satisfied with their child's school, there were several complaints of lack of transportation and convenience. These complaints came from parents who lived farther away from their child's school, highlighting the importance, to participants, of the school's proximity to home. Parents are willing to overlook a lot of negative aspects of a school, such as lack of gym, library, and extracurricular activities for high academic standards. These short answer questions tell us what parents are willing to sacrifice to provide their child with a quality education.

These results answered my major question: why do parents in Nashville send their children to charter schools? The answer is that parents choose their child's school based on academic programs and high academic standards. A secondary reason that is also a major factor is distance from home, being that 98 out of 107 participants live less than 20 miles from their child's school. According to these results, distance from home comes closely behind high academic standards in school choice. School culture is also an important factor in school choice as it comes third behind academic standards and distance from home. Most of the parents that took the survey are parents of young children, so other factors like dissatisfaction with child's previous school, may not apply to them because they have only sent their children to charters and have nothing with which to compare their school. Due to these and other limitations, some of the data will need to be expanded upon further to better understand school choice in Nashville.

If education is going to be treated like any other consumer good, we need to see what the market forces (parents/guardians) consider when choosing a school. The marketplace for any commodity is complicated, and while consumers do consider the

quality of a product, they also consider other factors that have nothing to do with quality and sometimes the best product is not the one that is necessarily the highest quality. The same goes with education: parents have more to consider for themselves and their children than just quality. This is why the 'free market' approach to education will not always yield the best results. However, charter school education does leave room for experimentation where zoned-public schools do not, and this experimentation can help better all schools.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Overcoming Biases

When starting this project, I had certain misconceptions about charter schools. I was entirely against them and thought that they did more harm than good. Some misconceptions that I had were that there was no oversight, they could be selective in who they accepted, and they funneled money out of already struggling public schools. None of this is true for the state of Tennessee. Most of my misconceptions were proven wrong when looking at the laws about charter schools for Tennessee. Many of my misunderstandings came from reading opinion pieces and articles that agreed with my biases instead of looking at the facts and forming my own opinion. Another aspect of my project that helped me overcome my biases was going to the schools and meeting the administrators and parents. When I met these people and talked to them, I saw the passion that they had for the children and their learning, and that helped me realize that charter schools are not some evil institution. My biggest takeaway is that I need to approach things that I do not fully understand with more objectivity and look at the facts instead of inflammatory opinions.

Future Research Questions

While my research did answer many questions and help debunk some of my biases it also raised many questions for me to pursue in future research. One pressing question is how do charter school teachers get paid? Charter school teachers are not

employees of the state; they are employed by the independent operating bodies which run them (TNDOE). However, salary and benefit information are nonexistent. It is unclear whether charter school teachers get retirement funds or are guaranteed healthcare benefits. Certain schools advertise their benefits package, but many do not. This is slightly unusual because in the public-school system salaries and benefit packages are available for anyone to find. Even though charter schools are public schools some of their practices are almost like ones from the private sector and the information on them is more student-focused than teacher focused.

A perceived attractive aspect of charter schools for parents is that employment for teachers is at-will and teachers are not protected by tenure or teachers' unions, however this is only true for New York. In Tennessee, it is unclear if that is the case, because the information is not available on the Tennessee Department of Education website or the Tennessee Charter School Center Website. In my next study, I would like to find out if charter school teachers are tenured and how their pay works. Instead of surveying parents at charter schools I would like to survey teachers and get a perspective on how they feel about their jobs, administration, and charter schools in general. For this survey, I would probably do an online version so that the participants can feel more secure that their answers are confidential.

Creating Surveys

This project was the first time I had experienced the process of survey make. When I was initially creating the survey, I had not anticipated the importance of correct wording and question order. Before Dr. Woodward and I submitted my survey into IRB for review, I had several friends look it over to see if it made sense to them. Even after

doing this my survey still had a few kinks when I gave it to parents. If I were to give this survey again, I would change the wording of several questions, and the spacing. The spacing of question 1 seemed to confuse participants because very few participants answered the question. Besides spacing, I would reword some the questions, specifically questions eight. I would change “public school” to “zoned-public school” because charter schools are public schools by definition. I would also change to order of questions 12 and 13 because the questions are so similarly worded that participants misread the questions and had asked for some clarification. The wording, spacing, and question order are more important in surveys than I had previously realized. In future research, I will take what I have learned and apply it to my next survey so that I can have more successful results.

Conclusions on Research

Why do parents choose to send their children to charter schools in the Nashville area? There are a few reasons although the data shows the number one reason parents choose charter schools because of high academic standards. Another research question was if the distance from home played a role in school choice, and in the case of the data from this survey it does because 98 out of 107 parents live less than 20 miles away from their child’s schools with the majority of them living 1-5 miles away. Distance from home plays a significant factor in school choice along with perceived academic excellence. Another factor in why parents choose charter schools is school culture, this can be tied in with academic excellence because many of the schools that I went to pride themselves on making sure their students are college ready – even in kindergarten. My data matches with several other studies done on school choice around the nation particularly in Indiana, Michigan, and Louisiana. Each study cited that parents reported

academics as the main reason they chose their child's school (Kamenetz 2015, Powers 2017, DeGrow 2017). The studies also note that academics are not always the driving decision in school choice and other factors such as driving distance, word of mouth, and public perception can play a role in school choice (Kamenetz 2015, Powers 2017, DeGrow 2017). Although my research did not include public perception or word of mouth, those studies and my study concluded that high academic standards are the most significant factor in parental choice when selecting charter schools.

Another major aspect of this study was to figure out if the racial makeup of the school affected parental choice. Eighty-three out of 107 participants answered that it is very important that their child is educated in a diverse environment. However, out of the eight schools that were surveyed three had over 50% of the student population that is one race, five have not race which makes up over 50% of the student body. The three that have one race make up more than 50% of the student body are located in areas where over half of the population is white (Data Access 2017). However, this may be due to parents self-segregating rather than a conscious choice. My survey touched on race, but there are no definite conclusions as to whether race is a factor in school choice, and this theory would have to be extended upon with further research.

The reason why parents choose any school is important to consider. If free market principals are enacted in the public-school realm, parents are expected to be rational consumers. In theory, parents will choose schools that are doing well academically, and if the school stops doing well, then parents can take their child out and eventually the school will shut down. In theory, market forces will ensure that only the 'cream of the crop' schools are left running. However, parents have more to consider than just

academics; they also consider the distance from home, diversity, and school culture. For parents, sometimes, the best school for their child is not the best school academically, it can be better socially or even closer to home than the neighborhood school. Even in retail environments market forces can be unpredictable, we as educators and citizens need to understand what parents/guardians consider when choosing a school and how these choices impact education as a whole.

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APPENDIX B: TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Open Enrollment: Any student within a charter school's district is eligible to attend the school. (TNDOE)

Cultural Diversity - The existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups (Oxford English Dictionary)

Racial Diversity: People of different races, ethnic groups and nationalities (Fingerhut, 2018)

School Culture: The way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share. A positive school climate and school culture promote students' ability to learn. (ASCD)

Zoned Public Schools: Neighborhood public schools for all students living within a designated geographic area, or zone. (WNYC)

Charter School - Public schools operated by independent, non-profit governing bodies. (TNDOE).

APPENDIX C: LIST OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

Name of School	Year Opened	Extra-Curricular Activities Offered
Smithson Craighead	2003	None
KIPP Academy Nashville (Middle)	2005	Vision Quest, Jewels
LEAD Academy High School	2007	Artful Noons, Basketball, Soccer, Debate Team, Drama Club, Fencing, Girls on the Run, Glee Club, Latin Club, Model UN Club, Stock Market Club, Student Government, Track and Field, Volleyball, Yearbook Club
East End Prep	2010	Soccer, Cross-Country, Track, Step, Student Council, Journalism, Choir
New Vision Academy	2010	Volleyball, Cross Country, Soccer, Basketball, Lacrosse,
Liberty Collegiate Academy	2011	None
Nashville Prep	2011	None
STEM Prep Middle	2011	None
Cameron College Prep	2012	None
Knowledge Academies	2012	None

LEAD Brickchurch	2012	None
Intrepid Prep	2013	Theater, Athletics
KIPP Nashville College Prep (Middle)	2013	Soccer, Basketball, Trach & Field, Dance; Charger Comics; Flag Football; Volleyball; Drama; Vintage Video Games; Design Industry; ART-Zilla; Outdoor Exploration; Debate; Yoga/Fitness; Engineering; Knitting; Chess and Checkers; Poetry; Music Production; Songwriting; Women’s Empowerment.
LEAD Prep Southeast	2013	Choir
Nashville Classical	2013	None
Purpose Prep	2013	None
KIPP Nashville Collegiate High	2014	Government Club, Boxing Club, Running Club, Chess Club, Math Club, Book Club, Battle of The Books, Community Service
Nashville Academy of Computer Science	2014	Debate Team
Rocketship Nashville Northeast	2014	None

Elementary		
Valor Flagship	2014	None
Explore Community School	2015	Student Government. LEADers in Action, Dance, Choir, Model UN, Distinguished Gentlemen, LEADing Ladies, Debate Team, Panther Spirit Club, Technology Club
KIPP Kirkpatrick	2015	None
LEAD Neely's Bend	2015	None
RePublic High School	2015	None
Rocketship United Academy	2015	Athletics, Choir
STEM Prep High	2015	Soccer, Basketball, Track and Field, Board Games; Community Service; Foreign Culture; Dance; Drama; Environmental Engineering; Flag Football; Soccer; Knitting; Sociology of Visual Media; Volleyball; Wilderness; Coding; Community Design; Yoga; and Music Industry.
Strive Collegiate Academy	2015	None

KIPP Nashville College Prep Elementary School	2017	African Drum and Dance, Pottery, Printmaking, Student Ambassadors, LEADership Council, Spirit Club, Service Club, Soccer, Basketball, Football, Cheerleading, Volleyball
KIPP Antioch College Prep Elementary	2018	None
Valor College Prep	2018	Volleyball, Cross Country, Soccer, Basketball, Lacrosse
Valor Voyager	2018	None

APPENDIX D: SURVEY

School Choice and Diversity

1. What grade is your child enrolled in at (name of the school)? If you have more than one child in this school, please answer this question and all following questions with your eldest child at this school in mind.

2. About how far away do you live from your child's school?

A. 1-5 miles

B. 5-10 miles

C. 10-20 miles

D. 20-30 miles

E. 30+ miles

3. What factors did you consider when choosing your child's current school? (Circle all that apply)

A. Subjects taught

B. Distance from home

C. School culture

D. Student demographics

E. Extracurricular activities

F. Dissatisfaction with your child's previous school

G. Other: please explain below in the space provided.

4. What do you feel is most important in your child's education?
- A. Diversity of the student body
 - B. High academic standards
 - C. Student demographics
 - D. Learning to be a part of the community
 - E. Extracurricular opportunities
 - F. The culture of the school
 - G. Other: please explain below.
5. How important is it that your child is educated in a diverse environment?
- A. Very Important
 - B. Somewhat Important
 - C. Neither Important or Unimportant
 - D. Somewhat Unimportant
 - E. Very Unimportant
6. How important is it that your child's school be close to home?
- A. Very Important
 - B. Somewhat Important
 - C. Neither Important or Unimportant
 - D. Somewhat Unimportant
 - E. Very Unimportant

7. Overall, how satisfied are you with your child's current school?
- A. Very Satisfied
 - B. Somewhat Satisfied
 - C. Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied
 - D. Somewhat Dissatisfied
 - E. Very Dissatisfied
8. Why does your child not attend a public, parochial, or private school?
- A. Distance from the home
 - B. Academic programs
 - C. School culture
 - D. Academic standards
 - E. Lack of Extracurricular opportunities
 - F. Student Demographics
 - G. Other: Please explain below
9. What do you think other parents consider in choosing their child's school?
- A. Proximity to home
 - B. Academic Programs
 - C. School culture
 - D. Student Demographics
 - E. Dissatisfaction with your child's previous school

F. Other: please explain below in the space provided.

10. What is the race or ethnicity of your child?

- A. African American or Black
- B. Asian/ Pacific Islander
- C. Hispanic or Latino
- D. Native American or American Indian
- E. White
- F. Other (Please Explain)

11. What is your approximate household income?

- A. Under \$15,000
- B. \$15,000 to \$24,999
- C. \$25,000 to \$34,999
- D. \$35,000 to \$49,999
- E. \$50,000 to \$74,999
- F. \$75,000 to \$99,999
- G. \$100,000 to \$149,999
- H. \$150,000 to \$199,999
- I. \$200,000 and over
- J. Do not Know
- K. Prefer not to answer

12. What do you feel are disadvantages to non-charter school education?

13. What do you feel are disadvantages to charter school education?

14. What do you feel are advantages to non-charter school education?

15. What do you feel advantages to charter school education?

APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Office of Research Compliance,
 010A Sam Ingram Building,
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129



IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE

Friday, April 13, 2018

Investigator(s): Caitlin Miller; Jennifer Woodward; Ashleigh McKinzie
 Investigator(s) Email(s): cem7p@mtmail.mtsu.edu; Jennifer.Woodward@mtsu.edu
 Department: Political Science

Study Title: School Choice and Diversity
 Protocol ID: 18-1238

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the EXEMPT review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category (2) *Educational Tests*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	EXEMPT from further IRB review***	
Date of expiration	NOT APPLICABLE	
Participant Size	00 [One Hundred]	
Participant Pool	Adults 18+	
Mandatory Restrictions	1. Participants must be adults age 18+ 2. Informed consent must be obtained 3. Identifying information may not be collected	
Additional Restrictions	None	
Comments	None	
Amendments	Date	Post-Approval Amendments
	None	

***This exemption determination only allows above defined protocol from further IRB review such as continuing review. However, the following post-approval requirements still apply:

- Addition/removal of subject population should not be implemented without IRB approval
- Change in investigators must be notified and approved
- Modifications to procedures must be clearly articulated in an addendum request and the proposed changes must not be incorporated without an approval
- Be advised that the proposed change must comply within the requirements for exemption
- Changes to the research location must be approved – appropriate permission letter(s) from external institutions must accompany the addendum request form
- Changes to funding source must be notified via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- The exemption does not expire as long as the protocol is in good standing

- Project completion must be reported via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- Research-related injuries to the participants and other events must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to make the following types of changes to this protocol without the need to report to the Office of Compliance, as long as the proposed changes do not result in the cancellation of the protocols eligibility for exemption:

- Editorial and minor administrative revisions to the consent form or other study documents
- Increasing/decreasing the participant size

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all applicable post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website.](#) Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, current & past investigator information, training certificates, survey instruments and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

[Click here](#) for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
More information on exempt procedures can be found [here](#).