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THE CHOICE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE
FAILURE OF LOW-INCOME AFRICAN-AMERICAN PARENTS TO UTILIZE
SCHOOL VOUCHERS IN THE CLEVELAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

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BY

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my late grandmother, Mary L. Valrie. My grandmother was a remarkable “Lady” whose values continue to inspire me today. She was my greatest cheerleader. She encouraged and instilled in me at a very early age how important it is to get an education. She, herself, only had an eighth grade education and wanted so much more for me. Mama never missed one of my graduations, and I know she will be there in spirit for me on May 15, 2009. Mama departed this life in 1996. I miss her dearly, but she will always be a part of me. I am who I am today because of her, her prayers, and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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ABSTRACT

Cleveland, Ohio has one of the longest running voucher programs in the United States. The program began in 1995 by offering tuition scholarships and tuition assistance to students for \$2,250. The program was implemented to give low-income and minority students an opportunity to select a school of their choice. In a review of the literature on school vouchers, it is suggested that minorities, specifically, African Americans, choose public schools over private. The research also indicates the majority of the students using vouchers do not fit the low-income/ minority profile. This study examines the reasons why low-income and minority parents fail to utilize vouchers in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

Interviews were held in the city of Cleveland with seven parents that agreed to participate in the research study. The parents were asked a series of questions to determine their opinions and feelings regarding public school, private and Catholic schools, and their neighborhood school. A qualitative analysis was prepared of the data to present a consensus of the minority parents' attitudes and responses.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the 21st century, school reform initiatives designed to improve the educational opportunities of America's children remains a major priority. Legislators, school districts, special interest groups, community organizations, religious institutions, parental groups, and educational professionals have experimented with numerous educational reforms designed to spark innovation and change. Two decades ago, "A Nation at Risk" declared public education unsatisfactory. America's public schools were labeled as "a rising tide of mediocrity".¹ This strong and shocking declaration that the future of our nation and people were at stake, commanded the attention of educational reformers. In view of this declaration, public schools implemented numerous reforms to improve the quality of education. Strategies such as Back-to Basics curricula, class-size reduction, increased graduation requirements, comprehensive school reform, high-stakes testing, abolishment of social promotion, site-based management, and countless reading and mathematics programs were implemented.² None of the reform

¹ *National Commission On Excellence In Education*, 1983, "A Nation At Risk," <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>. (accessed June 6, 2005).

² Brian P. Gill, *Rhetoric Versus Reality* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001), 3.

models advancing public education into the twenty-first century has proven to be the panacea.³

Although citizens value a high-quality education, many are puzzled about characterizing or describing what constitutes a high quality education. A controversy surrounds the quality of today's public schools. Although people in general express a reasonable level of satisfaction with the current public educational program, others believe there is room for improvement. In particular, many critics of the public school system argue that reform is achievable by offering patrons more choices. The most popular and radical reform choices are vouchers, charter schools, and tuition tax credits.⁴

Vouchers represent one the most popular and controversial reform model of the twenty-first century. They have become a major topic of debate among educators, legislators, and decision makers involved in educational reform. For some individuals, vouchers symbolize the decisive means of reforming education. African Americans, low-income families, and other minorities living in at-risk school districts view vouchers as an avenue of opportunity leading to a quality education for their children. On the other hand, opponents of the voucher system view them as a solution with hidden agendas. Voucher opponents also envision them as a winning strategy for the middle and wealthy classes. It is a plan that leaves poor and minority

³ Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890-1990* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

⁴ Thomas L. Good and Jennifer S. Braden, *The Great School Debate: Choice, Vouchers, and Charters* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

children behind in low performing neighborhood schools. Unlike previous educational reforms designed to improve educational opportunities for all children, school vouchers target specific groups. The initial rationale for vouchers endeavored to provide poor and minority families an opportunity of choice.⁵ Although existing voucher programs are ostensibly designed to serve low-income or other at-risk students, they may disproportionately benefit highly educated and upper-income families because of low level funding and supplemental tuition payments.⁶

Throughout our nation's history, policy makers at all levels have diligently struggled to devise various reforms to minimize the educational gap between the rich and poor, whites and minorities, and the literate and illiterate. In 1983, "A Nation at Risk" declared that public education in the United States had miserably failed our nation's youth. The National Commission on Excellence in Education created by then president, Ronald Reagan, acknowledged that:

*"Our Nation is at Risk"..... "We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people."*⁷

⁵ Gerald W. Bracey, *What You Should Know About The War Against America's Public Schools* (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc, 2003), 137.

⁶ Brian P. Gill, *Rhetoric Versus Reality* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001), 3.

⁷ *National Commission On Excellence In Education*, 1983, "A Nation At Risk," <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>. (accessed June 6, 2005).

The statement in this publication was so profound and alarming that public education was accused of putting the nation at economic risk. Even though during this era, the nation faced declining profits, high levels of urban unemployment and declining wages, no evidence existed that public schools were responsible.⁸ Educational policymakers responded with reforms at all levels. As a result, graduation requirements became more rigorous, teacher certification strengthened, more emphasis was placed on testing, teacher pay was increased, and more money spent overall. These changes did not satisfy the experts who defined the problem as being a systemic one requiring some more fundamental innovations represented by school choice and vouchers.⁹ The proposed reform did not succumb to the pressures of the experts. Its recommendation validated current practice over innovation. The report did not address school diversity, student performance across districts, inequitable funding across districts, and dilapidated school facilities.¹⁰ Although the language of the report may have been somewhat startling, it was necessary that the Commission appeared to give a true and accurate account of the state of public schools. Its promise of affording equal opportunities and resources to all children, regardless of race or class, was a promise on which the Commission did not want to

⁸ WEAC, 1996, "Private School Vouchers," <http://www.weac.org/resource/may96/vouchers.htm>. (accessed February 19,2003).

⁹ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Thomas L. Good and Jennifer S. Braden, *The Great School Debate: Choice, Vouchers, and Charters* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

renege.¹¹ Since the publication of “A Nation at Risk,” a major focus of the national agenda has been education. Following “A Nation at Risk,” presidential candidates have made educational reform a major campaign issue, emphasizing the importance of public school reform.

In response to “A Nation at Risk,” former President George Bush established the GI Bill for Children. During this administration, vouchers again emerged as a possible solution to improve educational opportunities for low-income and African-American students. Advocates have argued that providing educational funds for parents to send their children to a school of their choice resembles the GI Bill and will achieve similar results.¹² The plan allotted parents a \$1,000 scholarship to help defray the cost of sending their child to a school of their choosing. The bill, created with the intention of providing new opportunities for choice, attempted to hold schools accountable.¹³ The scholarship or educational voucher was devised to help low to middle-income families obtain a better education. This ingenious plan sought

¹¹ National Commission on Excellence in Education, "A Nation At Risk," [online] Archived: *A Nation At Risk*, 1983, cited 6 June 2005, available from <<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>>.

¹² Robert Lowe, "The Gi Bill Doesn't Vouch For Vouchers," *Rethinking Schools*, 1995, http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/voucher_report/vgibill.shtml/ (accessed June 24, 2005).

¹³ Fredric Rice, "President Bush's Gi Bill For Children," *The Skeptic Tank*, June 26, 1992, <http://www.skepticfiles.org/conspire/b13.htm>. (accessed June 24, 1995).

to contribute to the expansion of educational choice in the United States.¹⁴ Critics of the President's proposal reported no similarities between the GI Bill and the GI Bill for Children. Critics of the bill contended that voucher advocates distorted the true meaning of the original GI Bill in order to make it conform to voucher proposals and have paraphrased language to make the bill appear to be a beneficial course of action. Opponents argued that the proposal ascribed in the language of the bill insinuates an expansion of options and opportunities and disguises its inequities and limits.¹⁵ According to the bill's critics, the most obvious distortion was at the level of intent. The original 1944 GI Bill awarded scholarships to World War II veterans and did not apply to the education of children. Other criticisms leveled at the GI Bill for Children concentrated on its perceived push for vouchers, its expansion of federal funding to religious and private schools, and its placement of federal regulations on private schools.¹⁶

Twenty-two years after President Reagan's "A Nation at Risk," President George W. Bush signed legislation for the "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) Act. Like its predecessor, "A Nation at Risk," NCLB promised to provide a first-rate education for every child. This pledge that all children deserve a quality and

¹⁴ Allyson Tucker, "Assessing Bush's School Voucher Plan," *The Heritage Foundation*, 1992, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/EM336.cfm/> (accessed June 24, 2005).

¹⁵ Robert Lowe, *The GI Bill Doesn't Vouch for Vouchers*, [online] Rethinking Schools Online, 1995, cited 24 June 2005, available from <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/voucher_report/vgibill.shtml>.

¹⁶ Allyson Tucker, *Assessing Bush's School Voucher Plan*, [online] The Heritage Foundation, 1992, cited 24 June 2005, available from <<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/EM336.cfm>>.

equitable education has failed to come to fruition. It is now twenty-two years later, and President Bush has vowed to the American people that no child will be left behind. However, with cuts in educational funding resulting in larger class sizes, limited classroom resources, and inadequate salaries for teachers, public schools continue to be at risk.¹⁷ “No Child Left Behind,” passed in 2002, has failed to fulfill its promise to educate parents, to provide adequate funds to implement mandatory new standards, or to help poor and minority families to have a choice with regard to educating their children. The Board of Education in Kenilworth, New Jersey, reported that the NCLB Act has placed obstacles to their commitment (Kenilworth School District) to high standards and expectations for all children. The report further criticized NCLB for being unfair, rigid, and unfunded.¹⁸

A major initiative of the NCLB legislation was school vouchers.¹⁹ Although NCLB does not blatantly endorse vouchers, vouchers were encouraged as the solution for failing public schools. Bush’s school choice program has given parents control in selecting which school their children would attend regardless of whether it was a public, private, or religious school. The government has provided all public

¹⁷ Boston University, "a Nation At Risk" - 20 Years Later," *On Point*, 2005, http://www.onpointradio.org/shows/2003/04.20030424_b_main.asp/ (accessed June 24, 2005).

¹⁸ Jerome Hule, "Board Sees Federal Legislation As "unfair, Rigid"," *The Leader*, 2005, http://www.localsource.com/articles/2005/06/22/the_leader/news/local/doc42b9ab06e6b2b/ (accessed June 22, 2005).

¹⁹ Barbara Miner, "Keeping Public School Public: Privatizers' Trojan Horse," *Rethinking Schools Online*, 2003, http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/voucher_report/vKPSP173.shtml/ (accessed November 20, 2005).

schools with funds to assist low-income families. If low-income students or minorities attend schools that have been targeted for improvement, and after two years, the school has not met the prescribed improvements, parents would have the option of using a voucher to transfer to another school.²⁰ Voucher opponents have contended that the current NCLB legislation was Bush's voucher plan in disguise. Because of failed voucher legislation in the 2000 election, Congress deleted the voucher provisions from the original NCLB law. However, with the new adequate yearly progress standards of 100 percent proficiency (in state-set academic standards) for all groups (ethnic, economic, English Language Learners, and special education), schools throughout the United States have been receiving failing reports. This has created an excellent defense for vouchers. "Obviously the schools have failed—vouchers are the answer."²¹ Critics have labeled the NCLB Act as "the perfect infernal machine to destroy public education in the United States."²²

There are numerous arguments for and against vouchers. However, the question that remains to be answered by advocates and opponents is whether vouchers offer true equity and choice for racial minority parents? Terry M. Moe, a strong proponent of vouchers, agrees there is public suspicion among minority

²⁰ College Board, "No Child Left Behind: What It Means For Parents," *College Board*, 2005, <http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/article/0,3708,703-704-28284,00.html?layout=print/> (accessed June 22, 2005).

²¹ , .Deborah Bach, "Researcher Blasts No Child Left Behind And Vouchers," *Seattle Post-intelligencer*, 2004, <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/printer2/index.asp?ploc=t&refer=http://seattlepi.nwsourc.co/> (accessed June 30, 2005).

²² Gerald W. Bracey, *What You Should Know About The War Against Americas Public Schools* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2003).

parents regarding the equity effects of vouchers. The issues reported raised questions regarding private school students possibly benefiting at the expense of others, if the wealthy benefit and leave the poor behind in public schools, and whether or not private schools discriminate against the poor. Moe does acknowledge that advocates for vouchers argue that these issues are not the norm (the thinking of ordinary people).²³ Unfortunately, Moe failed to define “the norm” other than that they are voucher advocates. If Moe’s “norm” includes low-income families and other racial minorities, these groups of parents often feel excluded from discourse concerning educational issues of equity and choice.²⁴ Because of this, they believe their opinions are not valued. From this perspective, choice initiatives for minority parents and students increase inequity, prejudice, and unfairness.

Academically adept students, financially stable parents, and parents who value the benefits of a good education comprise the group most likely to exit public schools, leaving minorities and low-income students behind in low-performing schools. Traditionally, this privileged group of students and parents are the true benefactors of choice initiatives and voucher programs. Considering the imbalance of resources between the wealthy and the low-income, perhaps the exodus of the economically privileged should not receive federal funds. If government and state agencies would withdraw the resources available by financial assistance to choose

²³ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

²⁴ Nina Shokraii, "Free At Last: Black America Signs Up For School Choice," *Policy Review*, 1996, <http://www.policyreview.org/nov96/backup/shokraii.html>. (accessed September 28, 2005).

private over public, the educational opportunities would improve for all children without the risk of increasing inequality that choice initiatives and voucher programs promote.²⁵ Other distributional effects are programs without income restrictions. Many of these programs are based on the ability of the receiving family to pay additional tuition. Wealthier families disproportionately utilize programs of this nature because they are available to everyone.²⁶ Peterson and Campbell in 2001 found that removing education-related incentives for wealthy families introduced a desegregating force into society.²⁷ While this measure may appear unreasonable, it would encourage public schools to become more responsive, effective, and efficient without draining necessary funds from community schools.

School Vouchers and Racial Minority Parents

Vouchers are not a new, unanticipated phenomenon. Of the innovations supporting school choice, vouchers are the most popular and most widely used. While vouchers do offer possibilities for some, they do not represent a panacea for minority students as voucher advocates espouse. It is not the answer for children in my neighborhood who can't find transportation to school and whose parents, even with public money, can't afford to go to a private school said Michael Clara, an

²⁵ Paul E. Peterson and Bryan C. Hassel, *Learning from School Choice* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 294.

²⁶ Brian P. Gill et al., *Rhetoric Versus Reality* (California: RAND, 2001), XIX.

²⁷ Paul E. Peterson and David E. Campbell, *Charters, Vouchers, and Public Education* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 96.

activist who lives in western Salt Lake City.²⁸ There are other particulars that impede the empowerment of minorities and preclude low-income families from choosing where they will attend school. Providing financial vouchers constitutes only a small portion of the overall expenses because more often than not, the voucher does not cover the entire tuition of the private school. Many low-income families who receive a voucher via the lottery do not use the voucher, citing limited private school vacancies near their home, lack of special services (including special education and gifted programs) by participating private schools, or out-of-pocket expenses (including tuition not covered by the voucher).²⁹

An on-going controversy between choice advocates and opponents centers on the academic success of low-income African-American voucher students as compared to that of public school students. Much of the research on the academic success of minority voucher students attending private school is conflicting. No conclusive evidence exists supporting the contention that vouchers enable students to get a better education than they might receive in public schools. Witte conducted four evaluations of the Milwaukee voucher experiment. Witte was unable to find any statistically significant differences in the achievement of students attending the

²⁸ Salt Lake Tribune, "Group Says Vouchers Would Aid Utah's Minorities," *Parents For Choice In Education*, September 27, 2007, http://www.choiceineducation.org/Vouchers_would_aid_minorities.php/ (accessed March 16, 2009).

²⁹ Indiana Center for Evaluation, "Cleveland Study: Evidence Undercuts Voucher Claims," *National School Boards Association*, December, 2003, <http://www.nsba.org/MainMenu/Advocacy/FederalLaws/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategy/> (accessed January 6, 2009).

Milwaukee Public Schools and that of students attending choice schools.³⁰ Witte maintains that given similar circumstances, background characteristics, and course assignments, the performance and achievement results for both groups are consistent with 30 years of research. There is little or no significant difference.

In another study completed by the U.S. General Accounting Office, little or no difference was reported between the academic achievement of voucher students and public school students in Cleveland and Milwaukee.³¹ While additional research supports Witte's findings, other studies contradict Witte's data. Paul Peterson, Jay Green, and Jiangtao Du re-analyzed Witte's data and reported different conclusions. Their study concluded that Milwaukee voucher students outperformed public school students in mathematics and reading. However, limitations do exist to the Peterson study. The study focused only on students in three of the 20 private schools. The results are only statistically significant for the math in the fourth year of the program. In the reading area, no statistically significant advantage was reported for any of the four years.³² Although many people perceive private education as better than public education, the research does not support this claim. Where minor differences are reported in favor of private schools, research attributes the differences to student

³⁰ Alex Molnar, "School Choice," *Wisconsin Education Association Council*, 1996, <http://www.org/resorce/nov96/vouchers.htm>. (accessed October 19, 2003).

³¹ Timothy McDonald, "The False Promise of Vouchers," *Educational Leadership* 59, no. 7 (April 2002), Education [http://ehostvgw5.epnet.com/fulltext.asp?resultSetId=R00000001&hitNum=35&booleanTerm;Internet](http://ehostvgw5.epnet.com/fulltext.asp?resultSetId=R00000001&hitNum=35&booleanTerm;Internet;); (accessed June25,2002).

³² *Weac*, 1999, "School Vouchers: Emerging Track Record," <http://www.weac.org/Resource/1998-99/april99/vouchtrack.htm>. (accessed October 20, 2005).

backgrounds and family characteristics. The most significant predictors of student achievement are family structure, the educational level of the parents, and family size.³³

Research indicates that private schools are unable to accommodate all the voucher applicants that apply. Reasons vary from overcrowding to enrollment caps. In a recent California study of 1000 private schools, twenty-five percent refused to participate in any kind of voucher program and only seventy percent were willing to expand their enrollment to accommodate voucher students by only fifteen percent.³⁴ Additionally, private schools do not accept all students that apply. Private schools are very selective when choosing students. Their selection process increases the possibility for discriminatory practices against low-income African-American voucher applicants.

The strict admission guidelines are designed to give the private schools an advantage in the selection of applicants. Thus, it can be concluded that the true choice lies with the private school and not the parent or student.³⁵ In addition to the selection process, transportation, uniforms, textbooks, and parental involvement are other factors that impede the empowerment of low-income African-American

³³ David W. Grissmer, *Student Achievement and the Changing American Family* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1994).

³⁴ R.R. Dianda and R.G. Corwin, *The Private Sector considers Educational Vouchers in California* (Los Alamitos, CA: Southwest Regional Laboratory, 1992).

³⁵ Nathan Richter and Laurie Boeder, "Voucher Programs Do Not Expand Parent' Or Students' Educational Options," *People For The American Way*, 2004, <http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oid=15148&print=yes/> (accessed September 26, 2005).

students and parents. Many Catholic schools require satisfactory test scores as an admission requirement. Sixty-one percent of private schools require strong academic records, seventy-three percent require principal recommendations, and ninety-eight percent require a successful previous academic year. In addition, approximately fifty percent require parent and student interviews.³⁶

Critics of private school choice argue that while private schools accept government funding (vouchers), they are not held to the same accountability measures as public schools. Ironically, they are not accountable under the No Child Left Behind Act either. Voucher opponents are concerned that the lack of an oversight mechanism to monitor private schools contributes to a general failure of the legislation to guarantee the success of all children.³⁷ Voucher advocates continue to support the position that private schools do a much better job in educating youth, but without an oversight mechanism in place, what evidence is there to support their contention that the voucher program is successful?

For example, Milwaukee's voucher program has been discredited by reports of numerous violations among private schools. The offenses have been so blatant that some schools have been dropped from the program. Two schools, Alex's Academics of Excellence and the Mandella School of Science and Mathematics, were dropped from the program in 2004 due to their failure to comply with financial

³⁶ *Weac*, 1996, "Private Schools And Private School Vouchers: What The Research Shows," <http://www.weac.org/resource/may96/voucher2htm/> (accessed October 20, 2005).

³⁷ Kyo Yamashiro and Lisa Carlos, "Private School Vouchers," *Wested*, 1995, http://www.wested.org/policy/pubs/full_text/pb_ft_vouch.htm. (accessed September 29, 2005).

information requirements. Mandella failed to return overpayments and currently owes the state of Wisconsin \$330,000. Both of these schools have come under fire in the news, suspected of financial mismanagement and illegal activities.³⁸ In 2005, the Academic Solutions Center for Learning, one of the largest voucher schools in the Milwaukee program, was dropped due to safety concerns. Police were called to the school to suppress riot-like activity. When arriving at the school, police discovered the students unsupervised. According to newspaper sources, it was the sixth time the police had been called to the school due to violent activity.³⁹ Other private schools that have been dropped from the Milwaukee program are Louis Tucker School for fraudulent attendance records and progress reports to the state; Ida B. Wells Academy for failure to meet financial and student lists deadlines; Dr. Brenda Noach Choice School for failure to show the school provides a sequentially progressive curriculum of fundamental instruction in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and health; and L.E.A.D.E.R. Institute and Northside High School that did not meet the state requirements to provide 875 instructional hours a school year.⁴⁰ These and other violations not mentioned indicate that Milwaukee's voucher

³⁸ *Weac*, July, 2004, "Dpi Expels Two Voucher Schools From Program," <http://weac.org/News/2003-04/july04/voucher.htm>. (accessed October 20, 2005).

³⁹ *Weac*, January, 2005, "Milwaukee Voucher School Dropped From Program For Safety Issues," <http://weac.org/News/2004-05/jan05/ascl.htm>. (accessed October 20, 2005).

⁴⁰ Molly Thompson, "State Boots Voucher School From Program: Investigates 3 More," *Weac*, October, 2005, <http://www.weac.org/News/2005-06/oct05.voucher.htm>. (accessed October 20, 2005).

program is not without flaws. It is not accountable to the public and should be held to the same requirements as public schools.

In an evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program, the top three reasons cited by low-income African-American families and other minorities for not accepting a voucher were transportation, financial considerations, and lack of an acceptance offer to be admitted to the private school of choice.⁴¹ A study by The Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) reported that private schools have hidden costs that are not covered by vouchers. Many low-income and minority families cannot afford the additional costs, reducing the number of families that actually use vouchers.⁴² In a report by The Heartland Institute, students using unclaimed lottery scholarships were less likely to be black. Since the unclaimed voucher scholarships were most often awarded to white students, this limited the overall number of scholarship recipient population representing low-income African Americans and other minorities. These late-awards were more likely to be awarded to white families with higher incomes than the initial lottery winners.⁴³ A study done

⁴¹ J.P. Greene, Howell, W.G. and Paul E. Peterson, "Cleveland's Education Scholarship Program: An Evaluation Of The Cleveland Scholarship Program," *School Choices*, 1998, <http://www.schoolchoices.org/roo/cleveland1.htm>. (accessed October 19, 2003).

⁴² CTA, "School Vouchers Play On The Fears Of Concerned Minority Communities," *California Educator*, 2000, http://www.cta.org/CalifornaiEducator/v5i2/feature_1.htm. (accessed September 28, 2005).

⁴³ Krista Kafer, "Cleveland Voucher Students Match Public School Peers," *The Heartland Institute*, 2003, <http://www.heartland.org/PrinterFriendly.cfm?theType=artId&theID=12229/> (accessed September 29, 2005).

by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) reported twenty percent of all voucher recipients leave the voucher program each year. GAO cited cost as a major factor as most voucher programs require an additional family contribution. The contributions extend upwards from \$500. The study reported the average tuition varied from twenty percent in Pittsburgh to sixty-five percent in Baton Rouge, LA. The voucher scholarship seldom covered the entire tuition amount. Low-income and minority families often dropped out of private schools because of the extra financial obligations required.⁴⁴

In a longitudinal study by, Kim Metcalf, an Indiana University professor, the following results were released:

1. Statistically, there were no significant differences in the academic achievement of voucher students and public school students in Cleveland.
2. Many of the minority and low-income families eligible to participate in the voucher program declined participation because the expense was too high even with the voucher.
3. The availability and location of private schools discourage many families from using the vouchers.
4. Unused vouchers were likely to be given to non-minority recipients, middle-to-upper income families, and students already enrolled in a private school.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ National PTA, "GAO Releases Study On Privately Funded Voucher Programs," *Parent Teacher Association Of Connecticut*, 2002, <http://www.ctpta.org/legislative/vouchers.htm>. (accessed September 29, 2005).

⁴⁵ NEA Staff, "Cleveland Vouchers Produce No Gains," *National Education Association*, 2003, <http://www.nea.org/vouchers/resources-vouchers.html?mode-print/> (accessed September 26, 2005).

Minority parents, African-American leaders, and other voucher constituents appear to be split with regard to their level of support for or opposition to vouchers. Low-income families and minorities have the same educational priorities for their children as their white counterparts. They believe that without academic achievement they will not achieve economic independence. Like their counterparts, they want to be involved in their children's education, expect high standards, and insist on discipline. They discard the idea that low-income or poverty determines parents' relative interest in their children's education.⁴⁶

None of the research on the success of existing voucher programs is consistent or conclusive. A study by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) concluded that the research information from voucher opponents and proponents are inconclusive and inadequate to accurately determine if vouchers improve student achievement or other outcomes.⁴⁷ Despite study after study, reports reflect no significant difference in the achievement of voucher recipients versus that of students that remain in public school. Although the research indicates little or no significant difference in achievement, low-income and minority parents continue to surface as strong supporters of vouchers. Could this support be a result of despair? The evidence suggests that low-income and minority parents often feel left out of the

⁴⁶ Nina Shokraii, *Free at Last: Black America Signs up for School Choice*, [online] Policy Review, 1996, cited 28 September 2005, available from <<http://www.policyreview.org/nov96/backup/shokraii.html>>.

⁴⁷ Charles Haynes, *Effectiveness of school vouchers still in question*, [online] The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 2000, cited 26 September 2005, available from <<http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=13295&print=erfriend..>>.

decision making process, feel their input is neither solicited nor valued, and are characterized as having a laissez-faire attitude with regard to their children's education. Do they see choice initiatives as the solution to their perception of the system failing to meet the needs of their children? The resultant sense of hopelessness experienced by low-income and minority families inspires them to seek alternatives to the traditional structure, and that alternative is ironically vouchers. In cities where vouchers are an option, they are popular and attract low-income and minority families. These families emerge as visible and vocal advocates for their children. They can no longer be dismissed as unimportant, non-vocal entities, and school vouchers can no longer be labeled as a white, conservative movement designed to take advantage of unsuspecting, innocent, low-income minority families.⁴⁸

There is a lack of consensus between minority parents and black leaders regarding school choice and vouchers. This lack of harmony appears to be divided by a generation gap. According to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, fifty-seven percent of African Americans favor vouchers. This support for vouchers is strongest among African Americans thirty-five years and under.⁴⁹ Older African Americans express more allegiance to government-operated schools and are

⁴⁸ Karla Scoon Reid, "Minority Parents Quietly Embrace School Choice," *Education Week*, 2001, <http://www.secure.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=14introminority.h21/> (accessed September 26, 2005).

⁴⁹ Sean Higgins, "Black Support For Vouchers Fueling A Democratic Divide," *School Choice*, 2001, http://www.schoolchoiceinfo.org/news/index.cfm?action=detail&news_id=607/ (accessed December 8, 2005).

distrustful of school choice advocates. The younger age group is less committed to established institutions and systems. Rather, they seek a quality education for their children, and are therefore more receptive to options outside public schools.⁵⁰ This division or lack of consensus poses a problem when votes are cast regarding voucher initiatives. African Americans thirty-five and under are less likely to vote, and African Americans over thirty-five most likely oppose voucher initiatives.⁵¹ While minority families and African-American leader's support for vouchers has shown a steady increase, Congress and state legislators have not changed their position when it comes to vouchers as a means of school choice.⁵²

Purpose of the Study

This study examined why African-American parents fail to utilize vouchers in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. The purpose of the study was to provide scholars, educators, and researchers with an understanding of the factors that influence the decisions made by low-income African-American families when choosing public or private school. Two long-running voucher programs have been the guiding focus of this research: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and the

⁵⁰ Karla Scoon Reid, *Minority Parents Quietly Embrace School Choice*, [online] Education Week - ON THE WEB, 2001, cited 26 September 2005, available from <<http://www.secure.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=14introminority.h21>>.

⁵¹ Sean Higgins, *Black Support For vouchers Fueling A Democratic Divide*, [online] School Choice News, 2003, cited 8 December 2005, available from <http://www.schoolchoiceinfo.org/news/index.cfm?action=detail&news_id=607>.

⁵² Karla Scoon Reid, *Minority Parents Quietly Embrace School Choice*, [online] Education Week - ON THE WEB, 2001, cited 26 September 2005, available from <<http://www.secure.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=14introminority.h21>>.

Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring program. The research suggested that African-American parents lack initiative and knowledge to make adequate educational choices for their children, lack the necessary resources, and are unconcerned about their children's education.

The United States, unlike many other countries, guarantees a free public education for all children regardless of ethnicity, race, or income. However, over the years, American education has come under scrutiny. Community leaders, supporters of vouchers, and African Americans raise the issue of inequality of opportunity for minorities in urban public schools. The significance of the study was to determine if vouchers are the panacea for minority students living in impoverished neighborhoods attending sub-standard public schools.

The questions listed below guided the research for this study.

1. On what factors do low-income African-American parents base their decision to accept or decline a school voucher?
2. Do African-American parents view school vouchers as the solution to resolving inequity and low student performance in public school by minority students?
3. How do low-income African-American parents perceive the selection process of voucher programs and private schools?
4. What factors influence their decision to return to public school?

Definition of Terms

Empowerment

Empowerment is a feeling of confidence to make choices based on one's own decision.

Equity

Fair and equal distribution of resources

Inequality

For the purpose of this study, inequality refers to disparities in the distribution of resources.

Low-income

Income defined for a family of four at or below the federal poverty level. For this study, it was determined at \$35,000 or less.

Minority

For the purposes of this study, minority is defined as individuals that are not a part of the majority race (specifically for this purpose, African Americans).

Service Hours

Volunteer hours worked to compensate for tuition

Vouchers

Public funds provided to families as a tuition assistance for children to attend any public, private, or parochial school they choose.

Writ of Certiorari

A decision by the Supreme Court to hear an appeal from a lower court.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review presents historical research that comprises the foundation for this research study. It examines the historical characteristics of school vouchers; presents an overview into the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program; the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program; and existing research and studies of African-American voucher recipients. In addition, pertinent issues, criteria, and factors that influence African-American parents in educational decisions are presented.

Over the years, various voucher plans have been implemented throughout the United States. In the 1950s, voucher plans were used to avoid desegregation. Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia enacted voucher programs in response to *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*.⁵³ The 1954 decision declared discriminatory practices of racial segregation of separate educational facilities were inherently unequal and in violation the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees all citizens equal protection under the laws. The decision was

⁵³ *Vermont Education Association*, 2003, "School Vouchers," <http://filebox.vt.edu/users/cecraig/portweb/vouchers.htm>. (accessed November 27, 2005).

declared unconstitutional as the legal basis for segregation in Kansas and 20 other states with segregated classrooms.⁵⁴

In 1972, Alum Rock California School District agreed to participate in a “regulated compensatory voucher” program piloted by the Office of Economic Opportunities. Christopher Jenks, a professor of sociology from Harvard University, spearheaded the program in the poor, semi-rural, predominately Mexican-American community. Manipulated by political factions (specifically, teacher unions), the program excluded private schools. The exclusion of private schools limited the available voucher school choice. The results of the program were disappointing and subsequently after five years the program was abolished.⁵⁵

The idea of providing government money for parents to send their children to a school of choice dates back to Adam Smith’s work, “The Wealth of Nations” in the 1700s.⁵⁶ However, it was not until Milton Friedman’s proposal of the 1950s that a foundation conceptualized voucher plans. Friedman, a free-market economist and political conservative, based his argument for vouchers on the economic theory of markets. He contended that public schools were government-run monopolies.

⁵⁴ Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

⁵⁵ Alex Molnar, "Educational Vouchers: A Review Of The Research," *Education Policy Research Unit*, 1999, <http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps1/EPRU/documents/EdVouchers/educationalvouchers.html>. (accessed November 27, 2005).

⁵⁶ David W. Kirkpatrick, "It Began With Adam Smith," *School Choice*, 1998, http://www.schoolreport.com/schoolreport/articles/itbeganwithadamsmith_5_98.htm. (accessed November 22, 2005).

Communities guarantee public schools students, but public schools do not guarantee to produce a high quality education.⁵⁷

Currently, there are five tax-supported school voucher programs: Vermont, Maine, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Florida. The longest running voucher programs in the United States are the Milwaukee and Cleveland programs. The Cleveland program was used to extend the research on the involvement and participation of African Americans in current voucher programs.

Historical Overview of School Vouchers

Vouchers are not a recent phenomenon. Vermont enacted the first voucher legislation in 1869. The program paid tuition expenses for children living in small Vermont towns that lacked a local public school. Parents were given the opportunity to send their children to any public or non-sectarian private school of their choice, including schools outside the state. In the 1998-1999 school year, 6,505 students were covered by the Vermont program and almost a third of those students attended private school.⁵⁸

In 1961, the Vermont Supreme Court prohibited the inclusion of religious schools in the state's voucher program. That decision was eventually amended, but in 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court in *Chittenden Town School District v. Vermont*

⁵⁷ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

⁵⁸ Caire, Kaleem, *The Truth About Vouchers, in Academic Search Elite* [database online] (Washington, D.C.: Educational Leadership, 2002, accessed 25 June 2002); available from Black Alliance for Educational Options, Washington, D.C, accession no. 6530539, Educational Leadership, EBSCO, 0013-1784.

Department of Education⁵⁹ ruled that religiously affiliated schools could not participate in the voucher program. It held that in the absence of adequate safeguards against the use of such funds for religious worship, providing tuition assistance to sectarian schools violated the Vermont constitution's religion clause, Act 60, 1999. The decision was made on state constitutional grounds; therefore, no *Writ of Certiorari* could be made to the U.S. Supreme Court.⁶⁰

In 1873, Maine also began providing state aid for public high schools. The state set up a tuition system that paid a child to attend a school of choice in or out of state.⁶¹ Like the state of Vermont, the Maine Department of Education affirmed that the tuition system could not be used at religiously affiliated schools in towns with public high schools.⁶² This decision was upheld by the state supreme court in Bagley v. Raymond School Department⁶³. The court ruled that imposing a ban on religious schools was not unconstitutional, and therefore did not violate any of the families'

⁵⁹ Chittenden Town School. District. v. Vermont Department. of Education, (97-275); 169 Vt. 310; 738 A.2d 539 (Vermont 1999).

⁶⁰ Adelsheimer, Erica & Kate Rix, What We Know about Vouchers (San Francisco, CA: WestEd, WestEd, Policy Program, 1999), WestEd.

⁶¹ Democracy In America, Legal History of Vouchers, [online] CNN.com, 2002, available from <<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/democracy/privateschools.publicmoney/stories/history>>.

⁶² CNN, Legal History of Vouchers, [Online] Democracy In America, 2001, cited 26 March 2003, Available from <<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/democracy/privateschools.publicmoney/stories/history>>.

⁶³ Bagley v. Raymond School. Department., 728 A.2d 127 (Me. 1999), *cert. denied* 528 U.S. 947 (1999).

rights. The issue was raised again in *Strout v. Albanese*⁶⁴, and the same ruling was made. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review either decision.⁶⁵

The movement for vouchers in the United States stems from a 1955 article by Milton Friedman. Friedman argued that government-established educational systems were a kind of monopoly that had no incentive to produce a high-quality education. He maintained that they should be replaced with a market-based system that, by promoting competition, would more efficiently allocate funds and innovate in socially productive ways.⁶⁶ It is suggested that vouchers would allow parents to have a school choice. Friedman's idea did not attract very much support. Instead, the school choice proposals that were advanced during the late 1950s grew out of opposition to court-ordered desegregation programs that followed the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*⁶⁷ decision.⁶⁸ The Virginia legislature, for instance, tried to thwart the integration process with a 1956 tuition-grant and a 1960 scholarship plan that provided tax money to pay tuition at any qualified non-sectarian school in a school district.

⁶⁴ *Strout v. Albanese*, 178 F.3d 57 (1st Cir. 1999), cert. denied 528 U.S. 931 (1999).

⁶⁵ Melanie L. Looney, *School Choice In The Courts*, [Online] National Center for Policy Analysis, 2000, cited 16 January 2006, available from <<http://www.ncpa.org/bg/bg153/bg153.html>>.

⁶⁶ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

⁶⁷ *Brown v. Board. of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

⁶⁸ Alex Molnar, *School Vouchers: The Law, the Research, and Public Policy Implications* (Milwaukee, WI: Arizona State University, Education Policy Studies Laboratory, 2001), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, CERAI-01-17.

In the 1960s, private school vouchers received support from progressives, black nationalists, liberal scholars, social critics, conservative political groups, the business community, and others that supported the views of Ivan Illich. Ivan Illich argued that the program offered by public schools in the 1960s disempowered students.⁶⁹ Lyndon Johnson's administration also experimented with the idea, and the Office of Economic Opportunity tried to interest several communities in an experimental voucher program. However, only one school district participated, and results were unimpressive.⁷⁰ In the late 1960s, the Center for the Study of Public Policy studied the feasibility of a voucher system for the Johnson Administration, and the Office of Economic Opportunity subsequently recommended testing the idea with a five-year pilot.⁷¹ There was little local enthusiasm for the idea: Minneapolis, Rochester, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Gary, and Seattle all declined to participate. Ultimately, only Alum Rock, California, implemented it in its public school system. Results were disappointing, and the city subsequently abandoned it.⁷²

⁶⁹ Danny Weil, *School Vouchers and Privatization* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, INC, 2002).

⁷⁰ Alex Molnar, *The Case Against Vouchers*, Freethought Today , 1996 [Journal On-line]; available from <http://www.ffrf.org/fttoday/nov96/molnar.html>; Internet; accessed 19 February 2003.

⁷¹ David W. Kirkpatrick, *Public School Teachers Who Support Choice*, *School Choice*, April 2001 [journal on-line]; available from http://www.schoolreport.com/schoolreport/articles/teachers_support_4_01.htm; Internet; accessed 19 October 2003.

⁷² Alex Molnar, *Educational Vouchers: A Review of the Research* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, SAGE and Direct Instruction Projects, 1999), CERI, CERI-99-21.

In 1971, the Nixon Administration's Presidential Commission on School Finance advocated financial aid to religious schools. The new financial aid package was not received very favorably and faced widespread public opposition. It also risked being ruled unconstitutional. In its 1971 *Lemon v. Kurtzman*⁷³ decision, the Supreme Court reversed a decision for salary supplements to parochial school teachers teaching secular subjects. The Supreme Court held that any plan directing tax money to religious schools had to meet three standards: its purpose had to be secular; its main effect could neither advance nor inhibit religion; and it could not excessively entangle the state with religion.⁷⁴

There was a new push for vouchers during the Reagan Administration. That administration saw choice and competition as key mechanisms for improving American schools. It actively pushed legislation promoting the use of vouchers and tax credits for private schooling, with one proposal linking vouchers to the Federal Title One program. However, Congress defeated the administration's efforts.⁷⁵ During Reagan's term (early 1980s), Congress did mandate an Advisory Panel on Financing Elementary and Secondary Education that advocated returning control of education to

⁷³ *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

⁷⁴ Paul E. Peterson and David E. Campbell, *Charters, Vouchers, and Public Education* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 96.

⁷⁵ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2001).

the states—a goal commensurate with voucher programs⁷⁶—and the panel’s report also revitalized the voucher movement by reconnecting vouchers with the idea of “empowering the poor.”⁷⁷ Thus, for the first time school choice and vouchers became a part of the nation’s policy agenda. States were encouraged to experiment, to study the worth of vouchers, and to implement reform.

During its first years, the administration of George H. W. Bush differed little from its predecessor with regard to the efficacy of vouchers, but during its second half it began to lean more toward vouchers as a means to promote school reform. Bush (as part of his 1992 budget) asked Congress to pass a voucher plan that was dubbed a “G. I. Bill for Children”, which would have provided vouchers in the amount of \$1,000 to low-income families. The idea did not pass the Democratic controlled Congress, but it did attract national attention, and the Bush administration consistently argued for vouchers.⁷⁸ In fact, critics charged both the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations with “deliberately hyp[ing] any negative findings about American public schools and suppress[ing] positive findings

⁷⁶ David W. Kirkpatrick, *How Many Recommendations are Needed?*, School Report: The Blum Center for Parental Freedom in Education , August 1997 [journal on-line]; available from http://www.schoolreport.com/schoolreport/newsletters/Blum_8_97.htm; Internet; accessed 19 October 2003.

⁷⁷ Alex Molnar, *The Case Against Vouchers*, Freethought Today , 1996 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.ffrf.org/fttoday/nov96/molnar.html>; Internet; accessed 19 February 2003.

⁷⁸ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

whenever they could” so as to “promote the privatization of American education through school vouchers and tuition tax credits.”⁷⁹

Vouchers ceased to be a priority issue with the 1992 election of Bill Clinton, who had received strong support from teachers unions that strongly opposed vouchers. Clinton vetoed bills that supported vouchers, and during his tenure, 92% of national funding for elementary and secondary education was allocated to public schools. Voucher proponents in turn charged that the Clinton administration and the teacher’s unions and their supporters were determined to maintain a monopoly on public education.⁸⁰

The election of George W. Bush would put voucher opponents back on the defensive. President Bush, as part of his new federal budget, proposed a tuition tax credit that would provide \$2,500 a year in private school tuition for children leaving “failing” public schools. A portion of the 2004 budget was used to pilot a voucher plan in Washington, D.C. and other cities. According to the National Education Association, “the Bush tuition tax credit plan would provide more than 1.5 times as much money per child for children to attend private and religious schools than the federal government currently provides per child to public schools to improve student achievement for low-income students.”⁸¹ Republican legislators have been the main

⁷⁹ Gerald W. Bracey, *What You Should Know About The War Against Americas Public Schools* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2003).

⁸⁰ Dorman E. Cordell, *Answering Objections to School Vouchers in D.C.* (Dallas, TX: National Center For Policy Analysis, NCPA, 1988), NCPA, BA#266.

⁸¹ Barbara Miner, *Keeping Public Schools Public - Tuition Tax Credits: Vouchers in Disguise*, Rethinking Schools No 2, no. 17 (Winter 2002/2003).

supporters of school vouchers as an option for low-income families. However, most Washington D.C. school and city officials, convinced that a voucher program would drain needed funds from the school system, oppose vouchers.⁸²

Vouchers are extremely controversial with a multiplicity of arguments for and against them. Each side, regardless of personal biases, presents very valid arguments. Voucher opponents have consistently argued the following points:

1. Vouchers drain funds and other needed resources from already under-funded public schools. This is a major reason public schools have fallen behind the private sector. Due to inflation, public schools are unable to keep up with the ever-increasing cost of textbooks, teacher salaries, technology, security, etc. Diverting public school funds to private schools will make it more difficult for at risk schools to improve.⁸³ Voucher advocates assert that competition between public and private schools will force public schools to improve, thereby yielding a more productive product. Voucher opponents agree that competition could possibly force some improvements, but would also generate cost-cutting, manipulative marketing, and other financial incentives. Although this type of market-

⁸² Lena H. Sun and Strauss, Valerie, *Bush Budget Includes D.C. School Vouchers*, The Washington Post, February 3 2003, Sec. A.

⁸³ Joe Messerli, *Should Government Vouchers Be Given to Pay for Private Schools, Even if they're Religious Schools?*, [online] Balanced Politics, 2003, cited 15 January 2006, available from <http://www.balancedpolitics.org/school_vouchers.htm>.

based competition is acceptable in the business world, it should not be acceptable in education according to voucher opponents.⁸⁴

2. Opponents insist that vouchers create inequities. They contend it is the white, socially privileged, higher socioeconomic, informed, and highly motivated parents that will receive the benefits of vouchers. It is these parents that are most likely to remove their children from public institutions to place them in private school. Evidence has shown that private schools are most likely to select children who test well, are less likely to be behavior problems, and come from the higher echelons of society. Therefore, those that have will escape the disadvantages of public school and the less fortunate will be destined to remain in substandard schools incapable of serving or improving their needs.⁸⁵
3. According to opponents, vouchers increase the possibility of racial segregation. Public schools are prohibited from showing favoritism or discrimination in selecting students. The government system of public education mandates that all children regardless of disabilities, test scores, religion, or other characteristics have access to education. Private schools establish their own criteria for selecting or rejecting students. They are at liberty to discriminate based on race, disabilities, test scores, religion, and

⁸⁴ *So You Wanna Learn About School Vouchers?*, [online] SoYouWanna.com, 2000, cited 15 January 2006, available from <http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/pros_cons/vouchers/vouchersFULL.html>.

⁸⁵ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

other factors. In addition, they often make eligibility requirements more difficult for minority students. Public schools accommodate all students regardless of the challenges they present.⁸⁶ Voucher advocates dismiss the claim by voucher opponents that vouchers create racial segregation. They argue that these claims do not represent currently existing voucher programs. Private schools that traditionally accommodated white students are now more racially and ethnically diverse due to their participation in school voucher programs. Voucher advocates also contend that traditional public schools do not offer the best model of racial and ethnic integration.⁸⁷

4. Opponents contend that vouchers violate the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution (separation of church and state). Voucher opponents argue that religious institutions should not participate in public education programs and government funds should not be used to support school programs that are church affiliated. Proponents of vouchers disagree and argue that parents should have the final decision as to where they want their children educated. Legal scholars declare that nothing in the Establishment Clause prohibits the use of vouchers at religious

⁸⁶ Joe Messerli, *Should Government Vouchers Be Given to Pay for Private Schools, Even if they're Religious Schools?*, [online] Balanced Politics, 2003, cited 15 January 2006, available from <http://www.balancedpolitics.org/school_vouchers.htm>.

⁸⁷ Kaleem M.S Caire, *The Truth About Vouchers*, Educational Leadership 59 Issue 7, April 2002 [journal on-line]; available from <http://ehostvgw5.epnet.com/fulltext.asp?resultSetId=R00000001&hitNum=36&booleanTerm;> Internet; accessed 25 June 2002.

institutions.⁸⁸ The decision on the constitutionality of vouchers being used to attend religious institutions depends on the interpretation of the courts. Court rulings on the constitutionality of voucher programs have varied from state to state and at the Supreme Court. The most recent ruling in an appeal of an Ohio court decision came from the Supreme Court in 2002. The court ruled that the Cleveland program did not violate the establishment clause of the Constitution.⁸⁹ Chief Justice William Rehnquist's majority opinion cited a 1983 precedent allowing a Minnesota program that extended tax deductions for educational expenses that included tuition for religious schools. He also cited 1986 cases holding that it is not a violation of the establishment clause when government money is directed to religious schools through the exercise of independent private choice. Therefore, the court concluded, the Cleveland voucher program showed no bias or special enticement where religious schools were concerned.⁹⁰

Although there are other arguments pro and con, these appear to generate the most public debate. It is a debate that will continue in many forums and for many years.

⁸⁸ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

⁸⁹ Clive Belfield, *The Prospects For Education Vouchers After The Supreme Court Ruling* (New York, NY: Eric Clearinghouse on Urban Education, National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, 2002), Columbia University, 179, U.S. Department of Education, ERIC, EDO-UD-02-8.

⁹⁰ Mark Walsh, *Supreme Court Upholds Cleveland Voucher Program*, [online] Education Week, 2002, cited 6/18/04, available from <http://www.edweek.org.ew/ew_printstory.cnn?slug-42voucher_web.h2l>.

The political views and opinions of government will continue to play a major role in determining the use of vouchers. Vouchers will be the subject of ballot initiatives, legislative bills, campaign pledges, and gubernatorial priorities. The legal challenges will continue in the courts on both the state and federal levels. Regardless of which position is supported, vouchers, unlike other educational reforms of the past and present, have the capacity to transform the system for generations to come.

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is the largest and longest-running school voucher program in the United States. Governor Tommy Thompson submitted the first proposal for a voucher program in 1988. It would have allowed both religious and nonsectarian private schools to participate and receive vouchers. In an effort to preserve the right of private schools to select their own students, the plan would not have required them to implement a “random selection” process; nor would they have been accountable to any state or federal authority.⁹¹ The initial plan was not implemented.

Shortly afterward, state representative Polly Williams, a liberal Democrat frustrated with the quality of education in the Milwaukee Public Schools, became a strong supporter of vouchers and allied with Republicans and Governor Thompson to get a voucher plan enacted. Williams wanted more educational opportunities extended to low-income children, and she rejected the idea that those students be

⁹¹ Danny Weil, *School Vouchers and Privatization* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, INC, 2002).

required to commute to the suburbs to get a better education. Her support for vouchers was based on the sense that vouchers represented a practical solution to the problems of the disadvantaged.⁹²

In 1989, Williams and Thompson introduced an experimental “targeted” voucher program that would be limited to 1% of the total student population—about 900 students. It would also be open only to families whose income was equal to 1.75 times the poverty rate or lower. The program would exclude private religious schools and require that participating students could not have been enrolled in a private school the previous year or be enrolled in another public school district.⁹³ In 1994, the 1% cap was raised to 1.5%. However, the cap was subsequently removed but then reinstated in June of 1995 when other significant changes were implemented. Among these changes, the program included other implications: private schools could fill up to 65% of their enrollment with choice students; religious schools became eligible for the program; students in grades K–3 who were already attending private school would be eligible for the program; and all funding for data collection and evaluation was eliminated.⁹⁴ During the 2000–2001 school year, 9,638 students used vouchers to attend 103 schools at a cost to Wisconsin taxpayers of \$51 million.

⁹² Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2001).

⁹³ Danny Weil, *School Vouchers and Privatization* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, INC, 2002).

⁹⁴ Thomas L. Good and Jennifer S. Braden, *The Great School Debate: Choice, Vouchers, and Charters* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

In 2001–2002, 10,739 students used vouchers worth \$5,553 apiece at a total cost to Wisconsin taxpayers of over \$60 million.⁹⁵

By January 2003, 11,621 students and 102 private and religious schools participated in Milwaukee’s voucher program. Under the plan, the state paid for each pupil the lesser of two amounts: Milwaukee’s per-pupil state expenditure or the private school tuition. During the 2002–2003 school year, the amount was estimated at \$5,783. Using the established formula adopted under the Wisconsin’s voucher law, state taxpayers were actually paying many of the private and religious schools a “surcharge,” a per-pupil amount above the tuition rates. Milwaukee’s voucher formula is more expensive than any other established voucher program. “Voucher students in religious schools generated revenues for the schools three to four times greater than the actual tuition paid by those families of children who attended without taxpayer voucher aid,” according to researchers. In addition, because of unconventional and very generous provisions in the voucher law, private schools entering the Milwaukee voucher program were allowed to depreciate pre-existing facilities at 100%. The depreciation resulted in annual windfall voucher payments of \$1,300 per pupil in low-cost religious schools and \$302 per pupil in high-cost religious schools.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Gerald W. Bracey, *What You Should Know About The War Against Americas Public Schools* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2003).

⁹⁶ Alex Molnar, *School Vouchers: The Law, the Research, and Public Policy Implications* (Milwaukee, WI: Arizona State University, Education Policy Studies Laboratory, 2001), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, CERAI-01-17.

Alex Molnar of the Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee compared three methodological studies of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Molnar summarized the findings in the table below.

Table 1

Findings of Three Studies of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program⁹⁷

	Witte	Greene, Peterson, and Du	Rouse
Main Comparison	Compares voucher students' achievement with that of a random sample of Milwaukee Public School (MPS) students, controlling for observed individual and family characteristics.	Compares voucher students' achievement with that of unsuccessful applicants who returned to the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).	Compares achievement of successful applicants for vouchers with that of a random sample of Milwaukee Public School (MPS) students, controlling for an estimate of innate ability and family influences.
	No significant difference between voucher students' achievement and that of the MPS comparison group.	In their 1997 "main analysis": 2–3 percentile rank advantage for voucher students in year four. Conventional levels of statistical significance approached only when 3 rd and 4 th years are jointly estimated. When background characteristics are controlled for, voucher students' advantage in 1 st and 3 rd years	Similar to Witte: no statistically significant difference between successful voucher applicants' achievement and that of the MPS comparison group.

⁹⁷ Danny Weil, *School Vouchers and Privatization* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, INC, 2002).

		approaches significance.	
Math Findings	No significant difference between choice students and MPS sample.	5–11 percentile rank advantage for voucher students over unsuccessful Choice applicants in years 3 and 4. Conventional levels of statistical significance achieved in 4 th year and in joint estimate of 3 rd and 4 th years.	Similar to GPD: statistically significant advantage in years 3 and 4 for students selected for Choice Effect size of 0.08–0.12 per year.
Main Statistical	Does not control for unobserved individual differences. Voucher students who remain in program may be a nonrandom high-scoring group. Does not include school variables (e.g., class size, curricula).	Control group of unsuccessful voucher applicants who return to MPS is a small and shrinking sample (26 in year 4). Control group maybe a nonrandom, low-scoring group. Voucher students who remain in program may be a nonrandom, high-scoring group. Does not include school variables (e.g., class size, curricula) that may explain observed differences.	Successful voucher applicants have more educated parents with high expectations; improvement in math scores over time might take place without voucher program. Does not include school variables (e.g., class size, curricula) that may explain observed differences.

Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program

The Cleveland Metropolitan School District was no different than any other failing inner-city public education system. Like many others, the Cleveland school system had high drop-out rates, low-performing students, ninth-graders who could not pass the Ohio Proficiency test, and low graduation rates.⁹⁸ In an effort to improve the educational opportunities for low-income students, the Ohio legislature in

⁹⁸ David W. Kirkpatrick, *Cleveland's Public Schools: You Wouldn't Want Your Child To Go There*, [online] School Choice, 2002, cited 10 January 2005, available from <http://www.schoolreport.com/schoolreport/cleveland_03_02htm>.

September 1996 adopted the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. This program, which gained national recognition as the first state-funded scholarship program for low-income students, offered vouchers that could be used at any participating private, secular, or religious institution.⁹⁹ The program's major political advocates were then-Governor George Voinovich of Ohio and Cleveland councilwoman Fannie Lewis.

The scholarships were dispensed by lottery and covered the cost of tuition up to \$2,250. Priority was given to low-income families earning \$35,000 or less for a family of four. Students had to reside within the school district, and participating private schools could not discriminate because of race, religion or ethnicity.¹⁰⁰ The Cleveland program was the first voucher program to include religious schools, to cover low-income students enrolled in private schools, and to provide tutoring grants for a comparable number of students remaining in public schools.¹⁰¹

Cleveland's scholarship and tutoring program serves approximately one in twenty students—a small ratio because suburban schools usually deny the applications of voucher students and the allocated voucher is not enough to cover the

⁹⁹ J.P. Greene, Howell, W.G., Peterson, P.E, *CLEVELAND'S EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: An Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program*, [online] School Choices, 1998, cited 19 October 2003, available from <<http://www.schoolchoices.org/roo/cleveland1.htm>>.

¹⁰⁰ Jason Pierce, *High Court to Decide Constitutionality of School Vouchers*, [online] CNSNews, 2002, cited 20 October 2003, available from <http://www.aclj.org/news/studentrights/020219_vouchers.asp>.

¹⁰¹ American Federation of Teachers, "The Cleveland Voucher Program: Who Chooses? Who Gets Chosen? Who Pays?," *American Federation Of Teachers*, 1997, <http://www.aft.org/research/reports/clev/summary.htm>. (accessed October 20, 2003).

tuition at elite private schools. The majority of voucher students therefore attend subsidized religious schools.¹⁰²

The program would face many court challenges, the first being filed in 1996. In *Simmons-Harris v. Goff*¹⁰³, a state judge upheld the program.¹⁰⁴ Simmons-Harris presented the first legal challenge to the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. Several groups filed the lawsuit shortly before the program began in 1996. The lawsuit was filed on the basis that the program violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and the “compelled support” clause of the Ohio Constitution.¹⁰⁵ The Ohio Tenth Appellate District Court overturned this decision in 1997. The Ohio Supreme Court also struck down the program when it ruled that the legislature had not authorized it in a constitutional manner.¹⁰⁶ Fundamentally, the case involved First Amendment principles: Did the program violate principles that

¹⁰² Derrick Z. Jackson, *The Realities of School Vouchers*, [online] Common Dreams NEWSCENTER, 2002, cited 11 November 2003, available from <file://A:\The%20of%20School%20Vouchers.htm>.

¹⁰³ *Simmons-Harris v. Goff*, 711 N.E.2d 203 (Ohio 1999).

¹⁰⁴ People for the American Way, "Simmons-Harris V. Zelman," *People For The American Way*, 2002, <http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oid=2869&print=yes/> (accessed January 17, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ *Ohio School Choice (State Case)*, [online] Institute for Justice, 1996, cited 17 January 2006, available from <<http://www.ij.org/schoolchoice/ohio>>.

¹⁰⁶ Americans United. *Vouchers at the Supreme Court: America's Traditions of Church-State Separation and Public Education Hang in the Balance*, [online] Americans United: For the Separation of Church and State, 2001, cited 6 August 2003, available from <<http://www.au.org/press/pr92501back.htm>>.

prohibit the government from instituting policies that advance or inhibit religion?¹⁰⁷

The appellate court ruled that the program favored sectarian education, finding that due to “a lack of participation by adjacent public school systems, the sectarian status of the majority of private schools, the comparatively lower value of the tutorial grants, and the abysmal state of Cleveland public education,” the program “contributed to an improper incentive for religious education.”¹⁰⁸ The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit declined to review the lower panel’s ruling, but it did allow the program to continue operating while supporters sought a U.S. Supreme Court review of the decision.¹⁰⁹

That review culminated in a June 2002 ruling that the Cleveland program did not violate the establishment clause of the Constitution—even though over 90% of the voucher-using students attended religious schools.¹¹⁰ Chief Justice William Rehnquist’s majority opinion cited a 1983 precedent allowing a Minnesota program

¹⁰⁷ Internet Education Exchange. *School Vouchers: What is the U.S. Supreme Court's Cleveland Voucher Case All About?*, [online] Internet Education Exchange (iEdx), 2002, cited 11 November 2003, available from <http://www.iedx.org/article_1.asp?ContentID=FAQ7&SectionGroupID=NEWS>.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Alt, *Cleveland's School Voucher Program: The Politics and the Law* (Ashland, Ohio: Ashland University, John M. Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs, 1998), Ashbrook Center, On Principle, v6n1.

¹⁰⁹ John Kramer, *Court Grants Stay for Choice Program: Kids Safe Through U.S. Supreme Court Appeal*, [online] Institute For Justice, 2001, cited 11 November 2003, available from <http://www.Ij.org/media/school_choice/ohio/4_8_01pr.shtml>.

¹¹⁰ Clive Belfield, *The Prospects For Education Vouchers After The Supreme Court Ruling* (New York, NY: Eric Clearinghouse on Urban Education, National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, 2002), Columbia University, 179, U.S. Department of Education, ERIC, EDO-UD-02-8.

that extended tax deductions for educational expenses that included tuition for religious schools. He also cited 1986 cases holding that it is not a violation of the establishment clause when government money is directed to religious schools through the exercise of independent private choice. Therefore, the Court concluded the Cleveland voucher program showed no bias or special enticement where religious schools were concerned.¹¹¹ Dissenting justices argued that the majority's ruling contradicted its 1947 *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing*.¹¹² The decision allowed the public transportation of private school students, but found that any federal financial support to religious institutions violated the Establishment Clause. "Whenever we remove a brick from the wall that was designed to separate religion and government, we increase the risk of religious strife and weaken the foundation of our democracy," wrote Justice Stevens. Justice Breyer expressed fears that the voucher decision would lead to more "religiously-based social conflict" and that "the majority's analysis here appears to permit a considerable shift of taxpayer dollars from public secular schools to private religious schools."¹¹³

Although court rulings on the constitutionality of voucher programs have varied, they have in no way affected a program's success or failure. Rather, the

¹¹¹ Mark Walsh, *Supreme Court Upholds Cleveland Voucher Program*, [online] Education Week, 2002, cited 6/18/04, available from <http://www.edweek.org.ew/ew_printstory.cnn?slug-42voucher_web.h2l>.

¹¹² *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing TP*, [online] 330 U.S. 1, (1947), cited 17 January 2006, available from <<http://members.aol.com/TestOath/Everson.htm>>.

¹¹³ Mark Walsh, *Supreme Court Upholds Cleveland Voucher Program*, [online] Education Week, 2002, cited 6/18/04, available from <http://www.edweek.org.ew/ew_printstory.cnn?slug-42voucher_web.h2l>.

success rate of voucher programs appears to depend on individual interpretations of the data. Overall, the information reported indicates little or no difference between the academic achievement of voucher students and public school students. Current data shows no significant gain in the academic achievement of students participating in the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. Actually, while the variables between public school students and scholarship students are similar, significant gains have been realized by both groups. Students who have participated in a scholarship program since kindergarten, although minimal, show the only difference. These students demonstrated a slight achievement gain.¹¹⁴ In a similar report issued by Harvard's Program on Education Policy and Governance, the academic success of students in the Cleveland voucher program had inconsistent findings. The Program on Education Policy and Governance examined two pilot schools with large enrollments of voucher students. The study revealed academic gains in reading and math, with the math gains more significant than those in reading. During this time, Indiana University also completed a study of third grade voucher students. It did not study students in pilot schools, however. Their research found no significant differences between public school third graders and third grade vouchers students when characteristics and variables are similar. Research using different methodologies, control groups, populations, and methods of analyzing information

¹¹⁴ Kim K. Metcalf, West, Stephen D., Legan, Natalie A., Paul, Kelli M., Boone, William J, *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, Indiana Center for Evaluation, 2001), Indiana University.

should be thoroughly scrutinized. This is necessary because research of this nature is often flawed and limited.¹¹⁵

African Americans and School Vouchers

Over the last decade, the American public has seen a paradigm shift with respect to African Americans in favor of school vouchers. In spite of numerous reforms over the years, school districts throughout the United States continue to be highly stratified by race and socioeconomic status. This methodical change grows out of their discontent and disappointment with neighborhood school's ability to provide a quality and equitable education for children of color. African Americans view school choice as a means to realize better educational opportunities for their children. Present disillusionment is the result of African American perceptions about the bureaucracy and the labels (low-income, minority, at-risk, disadvantaged, behavior disorder, learning disabled, dysfunctional, etc.) that have been placed on African-American children to support the cause of others. Voucher opponents assert that voucher supporters have cynically used minorities and other low-income families' cause to support their own agenda of universal vouchers for all students-regardless of wealth or poverty, urban or suburban.¹¹⁶ Minority groups believe the public school system has failed their children and lost sight of its promise and vision.

¹¹⁵ Erica Adelsheimer, *What We Know about Vouchers: The Facts Behind the Rhetoric* (Washington, DC.: WestED, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), 1999), WestEd, EA 030 112, WestEd, EDRS, ED 435 128.

¹¹⁶ Barbara Miner, *Vouchers: Turning Back the Clock*, [online] Rethinking Schools - Online, 2002, cited 28 September 2005, available from <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/voucher_report/vclock.shtml>.

Fundamentally, public schools are about fulfilling the vision of a democratic America with the promise to provide an equal education to all.¹¹⁷ In the simplest of terms, African Americans only want a high-quality, equitable education for their children.

While flaunting opportunities represented by vouchers in front of dissatisfied, low-income African-American parents has produced a definite, positive response, it has not changed the mindset and position of African-American leaders and organizations such as the NAACP, New York Civil Rights Coalition, and Congressional and State legislators. Their concerns range from losing the best students to private schools, segregation, loss of funds to public schools, competition, and privatization. Michael Myers, New York Civil Rights Coalition president, remarked, “School choice is a gimmick for African-American children who have no choice” since private schools (even for voucher applicants) are selective in whom they choose. Daniel Katz, legal counsel for the Washington, American Civil Liberties Union, says “School choice creams the best students from public schools and takes funds needed for educating the students left behind.” According to Felmers Chaney, director of the Milwaukee NAACP, “Choice is just a subterfuge for segregation, like it was in the South,” Brian Jones offered the most compelling argument as to why the civil-rights establishment opposes choice. He said, “They strongly feel that competition and privatization will leave African Americans out in

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

the cold.”¹¹⁸ In spite of the overwhelming opposition to school choice vouchers by African-American leaders, this new generation of African-American parents are steadfast in their conviction and are standing up and speaking out.

Understanding the new movement by African-American parents in favor of school choice requires a look into the issues of their knowledge base, equity, educational preference, and the right to choose. Research indicates that since the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*,¹¹⁹ African Americans and minorities have made tremendous gains in educational opportunities.¹²⁰ Despite the gains in educational opportunities, low-income families, minorities, and African Americans are still subjected to a second-class education in poor urban areas. They have traditionally been unsuccessful in attaining the quality of education required for competitive success. Is this because these parents lack the initiative and knowledge to make adequate educational choices, lack the resources, or are passively unconcerned and resigned to inferior quality schools charged with educating their children? This position may well be indicative of low-income, minority parents of previous years, but not of young parents raising children in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many, regardless of financial restraints, neighborhood schools, and other factors want more choices and educational opportunities for their children.

¹¹⁸ Nina Shokraii, *Free at Last: Black America Signs up for School Choice*, [online] Policy Review, 1996, cited 28 September 2005, available from <<http://www.policyreview.org/nov96/backup/shokraii.html>>.

¹¹⁹ *Brown v. Board. of Education*, 347 U.S. 483. (1954)).

¹²⁰ Woodstock Report, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka: 40 Years Later*, [online] Woodstock Theological Center, 1993, cited 5 October 2005, available from <<http://www.georgetown.edu/centers/woodstock/report/r-fea34.htm>>.

They have patiently waited for their community schools to improve and for their voices to be heard. In spite of their patience, very little progress is evident. Lack of progress has caused frustration and loss of patience; therefore, more and more African Americans and Hispanics have turned to school vouchers as a solution to improving educational opportunities for their children.¹²¹

Are low-income families, African Americans and other minority parents knowledgeable and capable enough to make competent choices regarding the education of their children? In a five-year study conducted in St. Louis on what motivates African Americans to participate in choice programs, the researchers interviewed seventy-one parents and students to gain insight into the phenomenon. They reported that African-American parents are influenced by a different set of factors than their white counterparts when it comes to making school choices. Since they have not been accustomed to having a choice, many have found themselves preoccupied with other life struggles. A major struggle that has historically faced African Americans is real estate. Having limited resources and minimum wage jobs limits their housing options. As a result, African-American children end up in the poorest communities with the worst public schools.¹²² This in itself may impact their

¹²¹ Karla Scoon Reid, *Minority Parents Quietly Embrace School Choice*, [online] Education Week - ON THE WEB, 2001, cited 26 September 2005, available from <<http://www.secure.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=14introminority.h21>>.

¹²² Paul E. Peterson and William G. Howell, *School Choice: A Civil Rights Issue*, [online] Hoover Institution, 2002, cited 3 October 2005, available from <http://www.-hoover.stanford.edu/pubaffairs/we/2002/peterson_0602.html>.

ability to make the best decision, along with their level of achievement, cultural myths, and lack of vision.¹²³

A survey done by “Phi Delta Kappa” reported a public division regarding parents’ knowledge of their rights under NCLB when it comes to choosing another school.

Table 2

How much, if anything, would you say you know about the No Child Left Behind Act—the federal education bill that was passed by Congress in 2001- a great deal, a fair amount, very little, or nothing at all?			
	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A great deal plus a fair amount	24	25	22
A great deal	6	5	7
A fair amount	18	20	15
Very little	40	37	44
Nothing at all	36	38	34
Don't know	*	*	*
* Less than one-half of 1%			

The survey reported that 69% of respondents lacked knowledge of the Act, 40% knew very little about the Act, 36% knew nothing at all about NCLB.¹²⁴

¹²³ A.S. Wells and R. L. Crain, *Stepping over the colorline: African-American students in White suburban schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹²⁴ Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, *The 35th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward The Public Schools*, [online] Phi Delta Kappan, 2003, cited 14 September 2003, available from <<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0309pol.htm>>.

Table 3

From what you know or have heard or read about the No Child Left Behind Act, do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of the act—or don't you know enough about it to say?			
	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Very favorable plus somewhat favorable	18	17	20
Very favorable	5	4	7
Somewhat favorable	13	13	13
Somewhat unfavorable	7	7	6
Very unfavorable	6	6	6
Don't know enough to say	69	69	68
Don't know	*	1	*

The survey reported that 69% of the parents lacked the information required to determine a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the NCLB Act.¹²⁵ Another theoretical argument is whether low-income African Americans and other minorities with low levels of education living in segregated neighborhoods are at a disadvantaged in the decision making process.¹²⁶

Although communities over the last decade have witnessed more and more involvement by African Americans and other minorities, it has not been enough to have impacted the system. Underprivileged parents continue to be left out of the process and do not have the resources or influence to infiltrate the system. However, school districts are experiencing more and more involvement by low-income African Americans and other minorities into the participation and operation of their

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Brian P. Gill et al., *Rhetoric Versus Reality* (California: RAND, 2001), XIX.

community schools. They have used whatever advantages are available to assist them in being heard. Low-income African-American parents are no longer content to be pacified or silenced at local school board meetings. African-American parents and other minorities are gaining more awareness of their choice options and some have acquired adequate socioeconomic resources and used them to their advantage. This has resulted in a strong push to assert their presence at community schools or take their business elsewhere, i.e. school vouchers. The results of two polls taken in the summer of 2002 indicate that minorities and low-income families are demanding and receiving more educational options and choices.¹²⁷ Is this an indication that low-income African-American parents are seeking empowerment? Will empowerment result in African-American parents becoming more responsible for their children's education? Regardless, low-income families, African Americans, and other minorities simply want the same things for their children as wealthy, white, middle-class Americans have always had.

Polly Williams, a democratic state legislator, suggests that white America must move away from the mindset that low-income people, minorities, and African Americans are illiterate and incapable of making sound educational choices. Being poor and a minority does not mean you are unintelligent. The difference is that the poor and minorities have been deprived of resources and denied access. Choice allows empowerment and empowerment intensifies opportunities and

¹²⁷ Jay C. Grelen, *Christian Ethics and Choice in the Classroom*, [online] Christian Research Institute, 2005, cited 7 October 2005, available from <<http://www.equip.org/free/DC998.htm>>.

responsibility.¹²⁸ Parents do not need a degree to know if their children are receiving a quality education. The best guarantor of a quality education is an empowered parent who can take his/her child out of a sub-standard neighborhood school.¹²⁹ Although this study does not support any choice program that takes tax dollars from public schools, the research does indicate that choice initiatives, such as vouchers, have had positive results in some school districts. These districts have seen a “Black flight” to private schools by empowered parents. The people left in the neighborhood schools are the least empowered families, families with the least parental involvement, and households that do not help with homework. This trend has been accelerating for the last ten years and will continue until public schools implement true reform.¹³⁰

An investigation into the second concern reveals apprehension regarding equity when considering vouchers. Voucher advocates have not wavered on their contention that vouchers are the solution to providing better educational opportunities for low-income African-American students. On the other hand, voucher opponents maintain that vouchers will only exacerbate an already existing

¹²⁸ Nina Shokraii, *Free at Last: Black America Signs up for School Choice*, [online] Policy Review, 1996, cited 28 September 2005, available from <<http://www.policyreview.org/nov96/backup/shokraii.html>>.

¹²⁹ *America's Public School: Crisis and Cure*, [online] Acton Institute For the Study of Religion and Liberty, 2004, cited 7 October 2005, available from <<http://www.acton.org/print.php>>.

¹³⁰ Samuel G. Freedman, *Increasingly, African Americans Take Flight to Private Schools*, [online] The New York Times, 2004, cited 7 October 2005, available from <<http://www.samuelfreedman.com/articles/education/nyt05192004.html>>.

social inequity. Both groups agree that low-income families, African Americans, and other minority students are getting a substandard education. The controversy that both groups agree with is how to best correct the existing inequities.¹³¹

Vouchers have been the forerunner in choice options for over a decade. Politics have played a major role in their popularity at the national, state, and local levels. Since the Reagan administration, presidential platforms have focused on this most controversial issue. The movement has witnessed many defeats and successes in the courts and state laws. However, as the movement grows stronger, more and more support for choice and voucher programs became evident among low-income families, African Americans, and other minority groups. Will these opportunities for vouchers and other choice programs resolve the inequity issues and low performance in public schools for minority students? Voucher advocates believe they will, but the overwhelming research does not support this position.

A study conducted by Kenneth Howe of the Boulder Valley School District's choice program highlights the controversies of competition and equity. Competition is a key factor in Boulder's choice program in which schools compete for students. With an open enrollment policy, their test scores determine a school's worth. Schools that boast high-test scores are heavily populated with white middle and upper income students. The deserted schools are left with few resources and a disproportionate number of low-income and minority students. Choice advocates attest to their assertion that this kind of competition will increase achievement

¹³¹ Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

overall in the Boulder Valley School district. No data exists to support this claim. In schools that have shown statistical improvement, there is strong evidence that certain schools suspiciously recruited high-achieving students, thereby, increasing their cumulative scores.¹³² Complaints of inequity are repeatedly levied against the Boulder program. The complaints range from unfair competition among schools to inequitable costs and benefits of choice programs. Although Howe's study of the Boulder Valley choice program did not produce positive results, Moe offered the following. "Whatever one's values may be, and even if one puts almost exclusive emphasis on social equity, it is difficult to argue that American Education should not move toward a greater reliance on choice and competition."¹³³

An examination of the ten-year-old Milwaukee Parental Choice Program produced results that are more positive. The study conducted by the Public Policy Forum, an independent civic research organization addressed the following questions:

1. Have choice programs led to a competitive educational environment in Milwaukee?
2. Does choice lead to improvements in the traditional public school system?

¹³² Kenneth Howe, Margaret Eisenhart, and Damian Betebenner, *School Choice Crucible: A Case study of Boulder Valley*, [online] Intercultural Development Research Association, 2001, cited 8 October 2005, available from <<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/0110how.htm>>.

¹³³ George A. Clowes, *Making the Ideal Public School the Enemy of Choice*, [online] Heartland Institute, 2003, cited 8 October 2005, available from <<http://www.heartland.org/PrinterFriendly.cfm?theType=artId&theID=13734>>.

3. Could the Chapter 220 integration program be successfully absorbed into the state's open enrollment program?¹³⁴

The most contentious issue of the parental choice program is the suggestion that voucher programs drain educational funds from public education. Although the district in the 1999-2000 school year reported spending approximately \$40 million dollars to fund private schools for voucher recipients, the research team reported no reduction in state funding for Milwaukee Public Schools. The reason given as to why the funds remained the same is attributed to a change in the per pupil formula. As previously stated, voucher opponents allege that choice programs “cream” the best students from public schools. Meissner’s study did not find this to be the case in Milwaukee, because students are selected by a random lottery. However, this finding does not speak for other programs, unless their choice program mimics the Milwaukee design. The Chapter 220 integration program in Milwaukee has proven to be successful with the percentage of minority students doubling and in some cases quadrupling. Research conducted on the Milwaukee voucher program reports no conclusive evidence that voucher students performed better than the students in the Milwaukee public schools. Given the success of the 220 program, there are still claims of inequity based on race and income.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ David Meissner, *From the Joyce Foundation newsletter, Work In Progress*, [online] Joyce Foundation, 2001, cited 8 October 2005, available from <<http://www.joycefdn.org/articles/eduarticles/0101schoolchoice.html>>.

¹³⁵ David Meissner, *From the Joyce Foundation newsletter, Work In Progress*, [online] Joyce Foundation, 2001, cited 8 October 2005, available from <<http://www.joycefdn.org/articles/eduarticles/0101schoolchoice.html>>.

In order to escape failing neighborhood schools, thousands of students over the past decade have taken advantage of the many choice options available. This study concentrates on why low-income African-American voucher recipients returned to their public schools, why some chose not to accept voucher, and how many accepted the voucher, but the private school did not approve their application. Despite positive comments from the Milwaukee program, the turnover of voucher recipients emulates that of the Milwaukee Public Schools. It is reported that no data or information currently exists regarding students that leave the voucher program.¹³⁶

The conceptual framework that has guided the research and analysis of these two studies is grounded in three areas of concern. These include social equity; student performance; and parental knowledge and understanding. On the issue of social equity, Rothstein explains that the government controlled public schools have always been an inequitable system with respect to low-income African Americans. According to Rothstein, middle and upper income families have always exercised their choice regarding residential location, thereby sending their children to the best schools. Low-income, African-American families and other minority groups often do not have a choice when deciding their neighborhood based on the school district.¹³⁷ Choice programs allow academic achievers and parents that are motivated, informed choosers to select better educational environments for their children. The actions of

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Richard Rothstein and Joe Nathan, *Charters and Choice*, [online] The American Prospect, 1998, cited 8 October 2005, available from <<http://www.prospect.org/web/printfriendly-view.ww?id=4633>>.

these parents increase inequality and injustice for uninformed parents, low-income families, and minority students.¹³⁸

According to Witte's fourth year report of the Milwaukee Choice program, student performance showed no significant improvement when compared to public school students. This report should not be alarming since research indicates that differences in achievement are related to family characteristics rather than educational setting. The family characteristics and social circumstances are the same for Milwaukee public school students as they are for the students in the Milwaukee Choice program.¹³⁹ These conclusions and assumptions overwhelmingly support the contention of voucher opponents that vouchers and other choice programs do not improve student achievement.

¹³⁸ Paul E. Peterson and Bryan C. Hassel, *Learning from School Choice* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 294.

¹³⁹ WEAC Professional Development & Training, *Private Schools and Private School Vouchers: What the Research Shows*, [online] OnWEAC, 1996, cited 9 October 2005, available from <<http://www.weac.org/resource/may96/voucher2.htm>>.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The problem statement guiding this research was to determine the factors underlying low-income African-American parents not utilizing school vouchers in the Cleveland voucher program. Current and former participants of the voucher program in Cleveland were used to provide the research data. The research examined continuing controversy regarding the distribution of vouchers to qualifying low-income minorities and admissions acceptance practices of these students by private schools. The research clarified the uncertainty as to whether these students and parents were hindered or empowered by the selection process, and how the voucher program affected them. The research questions listed below were the basis for this inquiry:

1. On What factors do low-income African-American parents base their decision to accept or decline a school voucher?
2. Do low-income African-American parents view school vouchers as the solution to resolving inequity and low student performance in public school by low-income and minority students?
3. How do low-income African-American parents perceive the selection process of voucher programs and private schools?

4. What factors influence their decision to return to public school?

The purpose of the study was to provide scholars, educators, and researchers with an understanding of the factors that influenced the decisions made by low-income African-American families when choosing public or private school. Were their choices influenced by their lack of knowledge, concern over inequity, or economic status? This study investigated why low-income African Americans choose public over private and private over public, pertinent factors that influenced the decision making process, and their knowledge of school vouchers.

A qualitative naturalistic study was conducted to generate theories that would assist in the comprehension of the presented data. Qualitative research is also referred to as naturalistic research or inquiry into everyday living.¹⁴⁰ Qualitative research has a number of identifiable characteristics. The research is conducted in the natural setting, without intentionally manipulating the environment. More often than not, it involves extremely specific vivid portrayals of human behaviors and opinions. The perspective is that humans construct their own reality, and an understanding of what they do may be based on why they believe they do it. The research questions often evolve as the study does, because the researcher wants to know “What is happening” and may not want to bias the study by focusing the investigation too

¹⁴⁰ J. Taylor, "Toward alternative forms of social work research: The case for naturalistic methods," *Journal of Social Welfare*, 4., (1977): 2-3.

narrowly. The researcher becomes a part of the study by interacting closely with the subjects of the study.¹⁴¹

Using the qualitative research design, the viewpoints of research participants were collected. The participant's viewpoints were compared and analyzed to address the theoretical implications to present commonality of opinions, experiences, and feelings. The data was intended to generate responses of parent's experiences that would thoroughly and accurately present their point of view. The data was collected through interviews and derived from standardized open-ended questions. The advantage of the standardized open-ended interview was to reduce interviewer effects by asking the same question of each interviewee. This technique reduced the personal judgment of the interviewer. In addition, the method facilitated data analysis making it easy to compile because the organization of the questions allowed for easy location of answers.¹⁴² However, drawbacks do exist when using this approach. If the approach had been used as a single interview approach, it would have restricted the interviewer from pursuing other related issues that were not a part of the original interview questionnaire. Used alone, this approach also hinders individual differences and circumstances from being considered. To control this weakness, the interviewer used the interview guide approach along with the standardized open-ended approach. The interviewer, using the interview guide

¹⁴¹ Introduction to Qualitative Research, (AECT) Available from <http://www.aect.org/edtech/ed1/40/40-01.html> (The Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology); (accessed February 13, 2008).

¹⁴² Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 113.

approach, prepared a list of questions that were queried during the interview. This approach was essential to ensure that the same information was covered in each interview and that the interviewer had freedom to explore and probe into particular subject areas. In addition, this approach allowed for individual perspectives and experiences to emerge. Using the two approaches permitted the interviewer more inquiry flexibility and freedom to explore specific issues in more detail.¹⁴³

Details of this Study

This qualitative study presented the views of African-American parents of voucher and public school students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. The findings are qualitative because they were derived from content analysis and interview data. The research is naturalistic in that the research was conducted in the natural setting of the participants. There is no evidence that the environment was manipulated in any way. The principal researcher (PR) endeavored to present a detailed analysis of the opinions of the participants' understanding of why they made the decisions they made regarding their children's education.

Parental Recruitment

Before interviews could take place, a list of parents was compiled. To generate the group of research participants, the researcher contacted the members of two professional organizations of which she is a member. The interviewer drafted a letter, explained the purpose of the research, and the requirements to participate in

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

and complete the research. An information packet was sent to members of the two professional organizations (Appendix A). Each packet recipient was asked to contact parents in their respective school districts. The participant recruitment generated ten potential research participants. The participants had to meet the criteria and fall into at least one of the categories. Of the ten participants, seven met the criteria were selected to participate in the research study.

The parent participants, for the study, were recruited from three sources. Cleveland parent participants 3, 6, and 7 were recruited through mail-out packets sent to community contacts. During my visit to Cleveland, I attended a community-planning meeting (at the invitation of one of the community contacts) at a Catholic school and recruited parent participants 1, 4, and 6. The remaining parent participant, CP2 was recruited through participant contacts.

The research participants, low-income African-American parents (with incomes at or below the poverty level or earning below middle class status for the location city), were selected using the following criteria.

1. Low-income African-American parents with a child or children attending private school on a voucher
2. Low-income African-American parents with a child in both public and private school
3. Low-income African-American parents of children attending public school
4. Low-income African-American parents of children that attended private school previously on a voucher, but returned to public school.

5. Low-income African-American parents of students that were offered a voucher, but turned the opportunity down.

Parental Interviews

On-site interviews were conducted, in person, except for one. The location of the interview was at the convenience and discretion of the participant. A recording device was used so the interviews could be recorded. The researcher/interviewer took notes during the recorded interview. Recorded interviews increased the accuracy of the data collection and permitted the interviewer to be more attentive during the interview. Note-taking during the interview assisted the interviewer in formulating new questions and was beneficial after the interview to locate important quotes on the tape. The notes consisted of key phrases, major points, and key terms.¹⁴⁴ The interviews lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes.

The interviews were essential to determine how the parents theorize, perceive, and respond to questions about Cleveland Metropolitan School District, vouchers, and private schools. Six of the interviews were conducted in person and one was conducted over the telephone. Each participant determined his or her interview location. The interviews took place at the principle researcher's hotel, at private schools, and at a Boys & Girl's Club. The interviews were conducted on-site, in person, except for one. The location of the interview was at the convenience and

¹⁴⁴ Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 137 & 138.

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In this study, the parents are identified as CP (Cleveland Parent). During the analysis of the data, the researcher attempted to describe the frequency and extensiveness of the participants' comments regarding their children's education as it related to public schools, vouchers, and private schools.

Table 4. presents a description of the parents who participated in the interview process.

¹⁴⁵ Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 137 & 138.

Table 4
Parent Education and Income

	African-American	Gender		High school Graduate		College Associate Degree		Employed		Income Under \$25,000	Income Between \$ 26 -40
		M	F	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N		
CP 1	X		X	X		X		X		X	
CP 2	X		X		X				X	X	
CP 3	X		X	X			X	X		X	
CP 4	X		X	X		X		X			X
CP 5	X		X	X		X		X			X
CP 6	X	X		X			X	X			X
CP 7	X	X		X		X		X			X

All the parent participants interviewed reside in the city of Cleveland or a suburb of Cleveland. All participants have school age children and the children are in grades 2nd through 10th. Of the seven parents participating in the study, only one of them did not complete high school and five of them have some college education. All participants were currently employed, except one. However, it is important to note that only one of the seven participants earn over \$ 40,000 and three of them earn under \$ 25,000.

Table 5, presents family size, residential information, and lunch status.

Table 5
Family Size, Residential Information, & Lunch Status

	Married/Single		Number of Children	Own/Rent		Free/Reduced	
	M	S		O	R	F	R
CP 1		X	3	X		X	
CP 2		X	1		X	X	
CP 3		X	2		X	X	
CP 4		X	1		X		
CP 5	X		1	X		X	
CP 6		X	2	X		X	
CP 7	X		4	X			

The chart above, Table 5, presented additional information on the families. As noted in the table, six of the seven parents are single parent homes. All parents in the study, except for CP4 and CP7, children receive free lunch. Even though the family income of CP4 is under \$ 40,000 a year, the family size is not large enough to qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. Information on CP7 indicates two parents in the home, both working, and the combined income is three times that of the other parents. Therefore, the children do not qualify for the lunch program. Residential information indicates that half of the parents own their homes and the other half rents. Parental salary does not appear to be a determining factor.

Data Analysis

In order to accurately manage and maintain the data, a parent participant packet was assembled for each participant. The packet included parent contact information, parent questionnaire, and the parent response, interview form (Appendix A). Each packet was coded for identification purposes. The parent responses to each interview question were recorded on the response form (Appendix B). These packets were used to assist in translating an accurate explanation of the participant's perspective.

Using the parent packets which contains the question responses that were taken from the recorder and notes taken during the interviews, the data was compiled. The responses from the parent forms were recorded on a master interview form under each question to identify similar responses and opinions. Each parent's response was identifiable by the pre-determined code from the parent packet.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DATA INTERPRETATIONS

The principle researcher, through interviews, gained valuable information on the participants, which helped to understand and explain the factors that affect African-American parent's decisions regarding school vouchers and choice. This data analysis will present the parent's viewpoints regarding school choice in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Where necessary, the PR will use the parents' comments and quotes to add relevance to the data.

QUESTION 1: What is your opinion of Cleveland's public schools?

The majority of the parent responses indicated that the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is not providing a quality education for children. The reasons given were absence of master teachers, lack of teachers and administrators who care and are concerned about students, programs that meet the needs of children, adequate classroom facilities, and teacher/pupil ratio. CP1 parent indicated that on a scale of 1 to 10, she would give the public schools a four. She said, Teachers make or break a school. Her experience with the teachers in Cleveland's schools is one of passiveness and lack of caring. There are some students who are unmotivated and do not want to learn. Because of this, many public school teachers

use this as a reason for not doing the best job they could do, which hinders the educational opportunities for the students that want to learn.

CP3 expressed apprehension regarding the graduation rate of Cleveland Metropolitan School District. This is one of the reasons I made the decision to send my children to private school. Cleveland's current graduation rate is less than 50%, and lower than that for children of color. This parent believes many of the teachers are there only for a paycheck. She expressed her concern for students that are emotionally disturbed and have the need to be understood. Many of these children come from low income, single-family homes, and environments that all but defy them to make it and be successful. The schools need more programs to help these children.

While another parent, CP5, agreed with the majority regarding the conditions for students in Cleveland's school, she felt they still had potential. She felt parents needed to be more involved in the schools. She said, Parents have to be willing to put in the work to make the schools more accountable. She spoke of being visible at her children's school, not just when they might be in trouble, but for open house, PTA, school programs, and other activities. She said, The teachers know me.

Although the majority of the parents voiced disapproval with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, CP5 and CP6 were more optimistic. They concurred there is room for improvement; however, the situation is not as bad as others would have you believe.

QUESTION 2: What do you consider the two greatest weaknesses (areas for improvement) that are currently hindering the academic achievement of African-American students?

Many of the same reasons voiced in question 1 were mentioned; lack of interest on the part of the teachers, programs for children with special needs, and parental involvement. However, there were other concerns that emerged during the discussion of this question.

CP6 was concerned that students in public school are not encouraged to utilize the library. In his opinion, the Cleveland school libraries are inadequately equipped with the latest literary resources. This was a genuine issue for him. He spoke of how important it is for students to be capable of using the library and how often he took his children to the library. Since his children attend public school, and the school is not meeting this need, it is his duty as a parent to provide where the schools fall short.

Another concern for CP6 was access to technology. Here again, Cleveland Metropolitan School District is not keeping up with the times. It is the age of technology. The schools lack the necessary funds to maintain up-to-date technological equipment and software.

While technology was an issue for this parent, the curriculum surfaced as an issue for CP7. He wanted his children to learn more history. CP8's concern had to do with students passing the academic achievement test given by the school district. He was concerned that too many African-American students are not receiving their diplomas because they cannot pass the exit test.

All these parents spoke of empowering their children to be successful. They all believe it is a parent's responsibility to empower their child. However, CP7 thought most parents were not informed enough and lacked interest in their child's education, which hindered their ability to be empowered. CP4 encouraged parents to be advocates for their children. It was her belief, that an involved parent is an informed parent. It gives them power to voice their opinion and dissatisfaction when problems arise in the schools. This is the only way change can and will come about. Being an advocate for your child will empower your child and improve their educational opportunities.

QUESTION 3: What do you feel are important factors when selecting your child's school?

None of the parents hesitated in answering this question. They were very adamant in their response. CP1 wanted compassionate teachers who understand children with disabilities. She also, along with CP6, wanted teachers to be caring and have patience. CP6 commented, it has a lot to do with how the school takes care of your child. CP7 looks for teachers willing to work as hard at school to educate his children, as he works at home. CP2 felt it is important that a school's educational program is up to date with current advancements. Apparently, books are an issue in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. She wanted to make sure that every child is issued a book and does not have to share.

Academics are an important factor for CP3. She felt, in order for the school to provide a good education, the school must meet certain standards and be aligned with current educational trends. A successful graduation rate has been mentioned in

every question thus far. This is probably due to the low graduation rate of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Smaller classrooms are another concern mentioned frequently by 75% of the parents. All the parents believe more attention is given to students when the teacher/pupil ratio is smaller. Interesting enough, CP3 and CP5 thought the administrative principal was a major factor. This person sets the tone for the school. Regardless of where the school is located or how it looks, it is still capable of providing a good education if the principal provides strong leadership.

QUESTION 4: How do you think your child's education, in public school, compares to that of private schools in your community?

By far, the parents preferred private and Catholic school education to that of public school. CP1 moved her children not because the public school was doing a bad job, but because the Cleveland Metropolitan School District was reducing the number of teachers employed in the district. Due to lay offs, she felt the teacher/pupil ratio would increase causing crowded classrooms. She enrolled her children in a charter school on a trial and error basis. By the end of the second year of charter school, she was dissatisfied and enrolled her children in Catholic school. "I did that because I have a Catholic school education and I knew they have a strict educational program. The public school education my children were receiving at the time was good, but I knew it would be better at the Catholic school."

CP6 believes the private schools are too structured and strict. She said, It was a different environment. It was almost as if the kids were robots/ numbers, with no room for individuality. They do not look at a child for what they are good at and

expound on it, they are all just in a very little box. Her son had a bad experience at a private school. She felt they never gave him anything to enhance his talents. She moved her son back to public school and feels he is getting a good education there.

The next parent's response was somewhat lengthy because her children had experiences in both public and private school. CP4's son attended Cleveland Metropolitan School District through 8th grade. When he started high school, she moved him to a private school. Even though he was an "A" student in public school, he received his first "B" in private school. This was attributed to a more challenging curriculum at private school. She acknowledged there are some Cleveland schools that have challenging curriculums, but the process to transfer your child to one of those schools is not an easy one. She indicated the better schools are on the west side of Cleveland and she lived on the eastside.

At one time, CP4 worked as a substitute and had the opportunity to work on the west side of town. Unfortunately, there were apparent differences in the schools from one side of town to the other. She said, the schools on the Westside are cleaner, the curriculum is more challenging, and the buildings look better. There is no comparison to the eastside, where the buildings are crumbling and the classrooms are in disarray. She knew of parents that tried all they knew to get their children enrolled in schools on the west side to no avail. She thinks it is not a fair process and that there should be equal opportunities for all children throughout the district.

Two of the parents were unable to make a comparison because CP2's child never attended a public school and CP7's children have never attended a private school. CP7 never applied for a voucher, and he is not knowledgeable of the process

to receive a voucher. He said he knew they (he and his wife) earned too much money so they did not see the need to apply. Anyway, he thought private schools were too expensive.

The other two parents (CP3 and CP5) both agreed that private schools have a lot to offer. CP3 went on to say that the public schools are no comparison to the private schools. When asked why she moved her child back to public school if this is truly the case, she replied, We moved and she would have had to ride a bus and it would not be safe. Therefore, I put her in the neighborhood school. The other parent (CP5) only commented that in private schools the classrooms are smaller and it is a smaller school setting. On a scale of 1 to 10, he gave the public schools a four and the private schools an eight.

QUESTION 5: In your opinion, are there apparent differences in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and private schools in terms of equity, quality, personnel and access?

This question is related to question four; however, there were some differences in responses. The majority of the parents agreed that their children received a better education in private schools. In terms of equity, quality, and personnel, Cleveland Metropolitan School District was no comparison to the private schools. According to CP4, differences in equity did not just exist between public school and private school, but within the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Again, she compared the eastside schools to that of the westside schools. When it comes to schools, it depends on what side of town you live. Property taxes determine the more affluent the neighborhoods; thus, the better the schools. When I say better, I

mean the teacher/pupil ratio is smaller, the curriculum is more challenging, master teachers, and strong leadership. Comments from other parents were caring teachers, one-on-one contact, strict discipline, and strong administrative teams. CP3's concern had to do with communication between the school and the parent. She said, the public schools in Cleveland do not contact parents when students are absent, needing help with class work, or having adjustment concerns. They only contact you can count on is when they are suspending your child from school. In private and Catholic schools, communication between the school and parent is automatic. They make parents feel welcome and a part of the program. CP1 was concerned about special services offered for children with special needs. Her comments were very positive for the public schools. In private schools, students with special needs get the bare minimum. She acknowledged the public schools have more money and can provide more services.

Accessibility on the other hand, did appear to be a concern for all the parents. Although, the public schools provided transportation to private schools by way of the city transit, all the parents saw this as a problem. The reason for the concern was that the children board city transit buses in the early morning hours, which the parents did not consider safe. In addition, to be eligible for school bus transportation, students must live more than two miles from the school. Therefore, most parents provide transportation for their children to and from school.

QUESTION 6: Vouchers usually cover only a portion of the expenses in private school. What knowledge do you have of the expenses incurred in addition to the voucher?

The vouchers cover only a portion of the expenses. The parent's knowledge of additional expenses, if they qualified for a voucher, varied. All the parents, except CP6 and CP7 were very informed of the expenses not covered by the vouchers. Two of the parents, CP1 and CP2 volunteered at their child's school to make up for the additional tuition. The term used for volunteer hours is "service hours." Service hours included working in the school office, janitorial duties after school, after school program, school activities (games etc.), and wherever a need existed in the school. In addition to the parents, the older children were also allowed to do service hours. According to CP1, "we do what we have to do to cover the tuition". All parents agreed they would do what needed to be done to send their children to a better school.

CP4 said her son's scholarship voucher covered all but one thousand dollars of the expenses. She chose not to do service hours; instead, she took out a loan. CP5 said, her child's private school did not offer service hours, but you could sell candy to make up the difference. Half of the candy sale is credited towards the tuition.

QUESTION 7: Why have you chosen to send your children to the school they attend?

CP1 said, her decision to send her children to Catholic school had to do with the conditions of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. She felt they would have a better chance in private school, because they would be in a better environment. She said safety was an issue for her, and her neighborhood school was not a safe place. She commented that having a child with disabilities was another issue. The neighborhood school was not special-education oriented (even though

they have special education classes). “At the Catholic school my children attend, I made sure they could provide for my children needs,” stated CP1.

CP2 said her parents helped her make the choice to put her son in Catholic school. We all felt he would get a better education there. At that time, I did not have a voucher. I am sure I would have qualified for one, but I did not know about them then. My parents helped me pay my son’s tuition. My son is using a voucher now and I do service hours to make up the additional expenses.

The next parent, CP3, selected her 10th grader’s school because they offer a pre-college nursing curriculum. The other children’s school was selected because they have an Excel program for children having difficulties in reading. CP4 chose her children’s school because she felt they offer a quality education, the graduation rate is high, and they have extracurricular activities. This school is also well-supported by parents, most of the parents are professional people, classroom sizes are small, and the students are involved. This school had everything I needed or looked for. It is like a one stop shop, explained CP3.

CP5’s son began his schooling in private school, but transferred back to public school for family reasons. According to the parent, when she got married, the combined income no longer qualified them for a voucher. Therefore, she moved her son back to public school. The other parents only responded that they were satisfied with their neighborhood schools.

QUESTION 8: Explain the process to enrolling your child in a private school on a voucher.

Parents that had previously used a voucher or were currently using a voucher, had no difficulty answering question number 8. The parents who had never qualified for a voucher were not knowledgeable of the process. The process is dictated by the district and is a very simple one. The applicants simply complete an application and submit it to the district. The district determines qualification based on income and family size. If there are more applicants than voucher money, the applicants are placed in a lottery. If they qualify and are selected, they are notified to come in. The qualified applicants must then find a private or Catholic school to accept their child. The enrollment process at the Catholic schools is less complicated than at a private school. Children are more likely to be turned away at a private school than at a Catholic school. CP1 applied to a school to enroll two of her children. One was accepted and one was not. She said she just kept applying at other schools until she was able to get both of them accepted at the same school. This is a key example of the adage, public school takes everyone, but private schools are selective in choice.

QUESTION 9: In your opinion, have school vouchers alleviated the problem of inequality?

Most parent responses were in the affirmative. They felt vouchers gave them a choice they did not have before. While CP4 agreed, it gives parents an option, I am not sure if it has alleviated the problem. She said, some parents just don't know what to do to help their children. Only one parent, CP7, did not totally agree with the other parents. He said, the money used to provide vouchers for private school, should be used to improve the failing Cleveland Metropolitan School District. His concern was for those children who do not qualify for a voucher and parents are not financially

able to send them to a private school. These children have no choice. They deserve a quality education! This is why he is opposed to vouchers. The number of children who actually use vouchers does not justify their use when so many others are left behind in sub-standard schools.

QUESTION 10: What are the criteria to qualify for a voucher?

Question number 10, was answered by the parents in question number 8. The parent responses did not differ from the previous answers given. They all seem to agree it is a fair process and you simply must meet income requirements.

As the principal researcher, desiring more information, I contacted the Ohio Department of Education and received the following information. To qualify for our program, students must be residents of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and must be entering grades Kindergarten through eight (8) in the fall of the school year for which they are applying. The law stipulates that we must give preference to those who are low income, based upon the Federal Poverty Index. Therefore, it depends upon what a family's size is and what the income is concerning the calendar year we request to have documented. If a family is low-income, our program will pay 90% of the tuition not exceeding \$3,450. The family pays the other 10% to the school. If a family is above the Federal Poverty Index, our program will pay 75% of the tuition not exceeding \$3,450. The family pays the other 25% to the school. If tuition exceeds \$3,450, a school may not access low-income recipients in grades K-8. However, the law does not reference the other grades. Thus, anyone in grades K-8 who are not low-income can access the difference not paid by the state. Additionally,

students in grades 9-12 can access the difference not paid by the state at either percentage level.¹⁴⁶

QUESTION 11: What is the process for acceptance of African-American students into private schools on a voucher?

The responses given by the parents indicated the process is a simplified one. You (the parent) select the school of your choice and make an application. They feel the process is fair and if for some reason your child is not accepted by a school, you just keep putting in applications until you get one to accept your child. The enrollment process at the Catholic schools is less complicated than at a private school. Children are more likely to be turned away at a private school than at a Catholic school. CP1 applied to a school to enroll two of her children. One was accepted and one was not. She said she just kept applying at other schools until she got both of them accepted at the same school.

QUESTION 12: How do you feel your own educational experience influenced the decisions you made regarding your child's education?

CP1 said sending her children to Catholic school had nothing to do with her own educational experience. She said, "Things are so different now, although I went to Catholic school, I did not get a voucher." Her reasons had to do with the way the schools are now. Times have changed, and you have to change with the times.

CP3 had a different scenario. She confided her own struggles in life, and how her children had witnessed these struggles, thus influencing her decisions. She said, I

¹⁴⁶ Myesha Atley, Education Consultant. Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, e-mail message to Sylvia Williams, February 20, 2009.

tell them all the time about my struggles because I chose not to get my education when I was in school. I finally got my GED, but not without a struggle and they saw me go through it. I refuse to let them go through what I went through. I struggle everyday, just trying to get a decent job. Yes! My experiences made me want a better education for my children.

The other parents all recounted they just want to provide a good education for their children. CP4 believes everyone is entitled to a quality education. There are many resources available, but people do not use them or know about them. CP5 and CP6 children attend the neighborhood schools. They do not believe it is all the fault of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. CP6 said you have to do more than just show up; you have to put something in to get something out. All the parents interviewed, are products of Cleveland Metropolitan School District. They are all at different career levels based on their educational skills. While their decision was not based totally on their own experiences, they all admitted it probably had some small influence.

QUESTION 13: In your opinion, do you feel being labeled low-income, at-risk African American limits the educational opportunities for African-American children?

Six out of seven parents responded a definite yes. CP1 did not agree with the other parents. She commented, It does not limit their education, it limits where they can get their education from. She went on to say, if a child has a strong will, they would get it anyway.

Comments from the other parents were as follows:

CP3 - African-American children are very intelligent, but they do not get anything outside the box.

CP4 - It depends on who is doing the labeling. A label attached to anything creates a stereotype. Stereotypes cause blocks for children. Yes, it stigmatizes when children are labeled.

CP6 - Absolutely, once they are labeled they do not know how to look beyond that. They feel they are letting the hood down. You have to instill in your children that wherever you come from is not where you have to stay.

CP7 - We try to empower our children to deal with what or how society sees them. It is not what you start with, it is where you end. It gives them a low self-esteem. Once they are labeled, they do not have a chance to be successful.

QUESTION 14: What networking resources are available in your community to assist you with your child's education?

There are numerous after school programs. Many of the private schools offer after school programs for tutoring. Others include, but are not limited to, Boys & Girls Club, churches, Neighborhood Connections, library, and other grass-root organizations.

The parents felt they had the resources, but many parents did not take advantage of the programs offered to help their children. The public schools also offered after-school help in some of the schools.

Conclusions and Discussion of Research Questions

In a review and analysis of the responses to the interview questions, the researcher began to detect common themes and similarities among the parents as to their opinions and beliefs regarding Cleveland Metropolitan School District, private schools and Catholic schools. These similarities are used to answer the four research questions presented in this document. In addition, the responses are compared to previous research on vouchers, charter schools, and Catholic schools.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

In response to the first research question, on what factors do low-income African-American parents base their decision to accept or decline a school voucher, the following conclusion is given. African-American parents are no different than parents of other races/cultures as evidenced by their answers. They want the best possible education they can provide for their children. Having been trapped in low rent neighborhoods and forced to send their children to failing public schools, vouchers presented a choice African-American parents previously did not have. They cited such things as accountability, safety, teachers that care, schools with curriculums that focused on the educational needs of children, classrooms that are not over crowded, and programs for children with special needs.

Accountability appeared to be of major importance to many of the parents who were interviewed. However, one parent believed that accountability was a two-way system. The schools should be accountable, but the parents were responsible to see that the schools were accountable. Parents must be willing to put in the work to improve accountability at their child's school. A parent must not be complacent to

send their children to a school and never take the time to insure they are receiving a quality education. Parents must serve as advocates for their children. Children need parents as individual advocates, given the lack of institutions to promote children's well-being. Parents are natural advocates, due to the special knowledge about their children's needs, strong commitment to their success, and their role as salient models and beneficial gatekeepers.¹⁴⁷

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The second research question inquired if low-income African-American parents view school vouchers as the solution to resolving inequity and low student performance in public school by low-income and minority students. Ninety percent of the parents agreed vouchers gave them a choice, but did not resolve the problem of inequity. There are some who would argue, while it does not solve the problem, it does put pressure on the policy and decision-makers to compete for students in an educational marketplace. It also empowers parents when they are given a choice regarding their children's education. However, until all schools are funded equally (regardless of the neighborhood location), master teachers employed in all educational settings, and the needs of all children met (including those with disabilities), inequality will always be an issue.

¹⁴⁷ Margolie, Lewis H.; Saikind, Neil J., "Parents as Advocates for Their Children," *Journal for a Just and Caring Education* v2, n2. p103-20, Apr. 1996. (ERIC Document EJ522731).

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

How do low-income African-American parents perceive the selection process of voucher programs and private schools? They (the parents) were either knowledgeable of the process or knew nothing at all. Those parents who are active participants in the Cleveland Voucher program were very satisfied with the selection process. This was mainly because the process follows the guidelines established by the State Educational System.

The researcher contacted the Ohio State Department of Education for an explanation of the process. The following information was forwarded in response to the researcher's inquiry. "To qualify for our program, students must be residents of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and must be entering grades Kindergarten through eight in the fall of the school year for which they applying. The law stipulates that we must give preference to those who are low income, based upon the Federal Poverty Index. Therefore, it depends upon what a family's size is and what the income is concerning the calendar year we request to have documented. If a family is low-income, our program will pay 90% of the tuition not exceeding \$3,450. The family pays the other 10% to the school. If a family is above the Federal Poverty Index, our program will pay 75% of the tuition not exceeding \$3,450. The family pays the other 25% to the school. If tuition exceeds \$3,450, a school may not access low-income recipients in grades K-8. However, the law does not reference the other grades. Thus, anyone in grades K-8 who are not low-income can be accessed the difference not paid by the state. Additionally, students in grades 9-12 can be accessed the difference not paid by the state at either percentage level".

“If there are more applicants than there are scholarships to award, then a random selection must be conducted. If the number of applicants is less than the number of awards available, then our program will award, as many scholarships as there are applicants until there are not any more scholarships to award. Preference is given to low-income applicants first. Anyone determined to be above the Federal Poverty Index is not considered low-income and will be placed on the wait list until scholarships can be awarded to that level of applicants¹⁴⁸ (Appendix C).

The parent’s responses regarding the private and Catholic schools did not reveal any concern for the selection process. It was apparent that if they were turned down by one school, they would just go to another school. They were confident they would eventually find a school to take their child. This researcher is of the opinion that some of the Catholic schools are so in need of state funding to revitalize their financially troubled programs, that rejection is almost non-existent. However, this is not true of the private schools. Their programs are such that they can be very selective in their acceptance of students.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

The final research question wanted to know what factors influenced parent’s decision to return their children to public schools. The major factor here was children with disabilities. The Catholic schools or the private schools do not have the available programs or trained personnel to accommodate some children with certain disabilities. This forces many parents to return or leave their children in public

¹⁴⁸ Myesha Atley, Education Consultant, Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, e-mail message to Sylvia Williams, February 20, 2009.

schools where the programs and personnel are available. Another reason was location. Often the schools that accept a voucher student are not in proximity of the student's neighborhood. This requires transportation by city transit or parents. The majority of the parents voiced concern regarding transportation safety. Although the district provides transit coupons, the city transit is not considered safe for school children. Many of the parents, because they are low-income, have jobs that limit their time for transporting their children.

Although the consensus seems to be that parents believe the private and Catholic schools offer a better education, their curriculum is limited by their funds. Courses such as "pre-college nursing" are non-existent in private schools. Therefore, many students return to public schools to take advantage of these types of programs.

Extra-curricular activities were another area that caused students to return to public school. The number of students enrolled at the school, available funds to fund the program, trained coaches, and athletic facilities, limits these activities. Sports are a major activity causing withdrawals at private schools and reenrollment at public schools.

The last to consider is qualification for the voucher. There were situations where a family qualified for a voucher, and the family's financial income changed, then the qualification status for the voucher changed. One parent shared that she got married and the joint income caused non-qualification for the voucher the next school year. Therefore, she had to enroll her child in the neighborhood public school.

Accordingly, in this analysis, the data presented confirms a consensus of the parent's opinions and attitudes in regards to vouchers. For most of the parent

participants, they were satisfied with the voucher program and the qualification process. They did not appear encumbered by the challenges and hardships of the program.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are four research questions presented in this study. The purpose of this study, by answering these questions, was to develop an understanding and clarify any assumptions researchers have regarding African-American parents and their failure to utilize school vouchers in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. In a review of the findings, the principle researcher draws the following conclusions. The African-American parents interviewed in this study are satisfied with the choices they have made for their children's education. Whether their choice was to utilize the voucher program or keep their children in public school, the choice was in the best interest for their children's education. Were there specific factors that influenced their decisions? Yes. There were two: the current graduation rate in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and failure of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to provide a competitive, quality education for all students. In an article reported by the associated press, in 2007, only 34.1 percent of Cleveland's high school students graduated from high school.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Associated Press, "Cities Cited For Low High School Graduation Rates," *Msnbc*, March 31, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23889321/> (accessed March 16, 2009).

Regardless of the mindset and position of African-American leaders and organizations like the NAACP, consistently voicing dissatisfaction with vouchers, the parent participants in this study do not agree with their position. The NAACP has a long-standing policy of opposing school voucher programs based on the premise that these programs use public funds to support private and/or parochial education.¹⁵⁰ These parents are in control of their children's education, are involved in the schools and community, appear to have made some impact in the system (although they may have minor influence), and have used whatever advantages and resources available to provide the best education they can for their children. They do not believe their rights or their children's education have been compromised in any way.

The majority of the African-American parents interviewed whole-heartedly support the voucher program in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. They are satisfied with the choice the voucher program provides them. Do African-American parents believe the choice voucher gives them is the solution to resolving inequity and low-student performance? No. The problem is that vouchers have proved ineffective in closing the achievement gap, because there is no clear evidence that they work, they are not equally accessible to all minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and they weaken public schools by drawing away resources.¹⁵¹ Parents have a responsibility to insure that their children's performance

¹⁵⁰ NAACP, "Opposition To School Voucher Programs," *The NAACP Is Today*, March, 2009, <http://www.naacp.org/programs/education/voucher/index.htm>. (accessed March 16, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Laura Mitchell-Morton, "Leaving School Vouchers Behind: A Plan to Promote Educational Equity" (Thesis., Macalester College, St. Paul, MN, 2005), 1.

is satisfactory. Regardless of the economic, ethnic, or cultural background of the family, parent involvement in a child's education is a major factor in determining success in school. Parent involvement also contributes to other positive outcomes, such as better school attendance, improved homework completion rates, decreased violence and substance abuse, and higher graduation rates. The earlier that parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects.¹⁵²

It is a consensus among the parents that areas in need of improvement in the public schools should and must be a number one priority of the Ohio State Department of Education. However, the interviewed parents hold strong convictions that their children should not suffer or be denied a right to a quality education that the Constitution affords them. With this influencing their choice, they have chosen vouchers as a means of providing a temporary placement until the improvements are completed. While vouchers serve only a small portion of the minority school population, leaving two-thirds of the minority population behind in failing public schools, these parents are concerned only about their children's education, as they believe all parents should be. Currently, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District has a total of 5,626 students enrolled in the voucher program for the 2008-2009 school year. Of the 5,626 students, 4,115 are former public school students, which also included first-year kindergarten students that we designated/considered as public school students, as well.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Rachel Sabella, "The Facts about Vouchers," *Our Children*, November/December, 2003.

¹⁵³ Myesha Atley Education Consultant, Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, e-mail message to Sylvia Williams, February 20, 2009.

Another assumption by voucher opponents regarding African-American parents is that they lack the knowledge and information to make sound choices regarding their children's education. In the literature review, an indication implied that minorities (specifically African Americans) lack initiative and knowledge to make adequate educational choices, lack the resources, and are passively unconcerned about their children's education. After interviewing the selected parents for this study, these characteristics do not represent these parents. Although, the odds do not favor the parents and their children, they feel empowered by exercising their right to choose. Parents interviewed in this research are very knowledgeable of the voucher program, the curriculum offered through the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and the process to enroll their children in a private school.

The choices made by the parents interviewed are a result of the issues that continue to plague the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Overcrowded classrooms, teacher/pupil ratio, school safety, accountability, and academics top the list of concerns. In deciding which school they want their children to attend, parents focus first on school safety, followed closely by the perceived quality of the school's teachers and the school's academics. This was found to be true of parents of children attending public, private and charter schools.¹⁵⁴ Cleveland's school district policymakers must deal sufficiently with these issues in order to improve the quality

¹⁵⁴ Marc Egan, "Cleveland Study: Evidence Undercuts Voucher Claims," *National School Boards Association*, December 23, 2003, <http://www.nsba.org/MainMenu/Advocacy/FederalLaws/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategy/> (accessed January 6, 2009).

of their schools. Until that happens, informed minority parents will continue to seek other avenues to educate their children.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of this study are pertinent in providing insight to voucher advocates and opponents, school leaders, and policy makers for a better understanding into the attitudes of African-American parents regarding the use of vouchers. Voucher advocates can gain support for their case from the positive comments parents made regarding their use and support of vouchers. Previous research indicated that African-American parents have negative opinions of vouchers and do not support them. However, five of the seven parents interviewed in this study supported the voucher program. This is an indication that the debate on the issues of equality, fairness and constitutionality of vouchers has somewhat deescalated among African-American parents. Vouchers opponents can appreciate these new attitudes and use them in their arguments for public school improvements. If more and more African-American parents are choosing private over public, this could possible force change through economic pressure. This pressure will place public schools in a position to “vie” for these students and their dollars. This could provide an incentive or push to improve the quality of public schools. State and school policy makers can use their influence to propose new legislation for school reform.

Parents in this study expressed a definite concern for the neighborhood school. African-American parents feel a sense of ownership in their schools. They

fear the use of vouchers will cause many of them to close. With the emerging involvement by African-American parents in their children's education, this is an opportunity for them to work with school officials to help preserve their neighborhood schools.

An area of concern that is shared by all the parents interviewed is that of qualified, caring teachers and administrators. It is an appeal by parents for the school leaders to up grade and improve their hiring practices and policies for teachers and administrators. In addition, more professional development and training is required for teachers and administrators employed by the district. Improvement in these areas will improve the quality of education offered to students and helpful to school leaders considering the concerns of parents.

Another area that concerned parents is the difference between the public schools on the east side of Cleveland when compared with the schools on the west side. All parents agreed that the schools on the west side of Cleveland employed master educators, offered a more diverse and challenging curriculum, have modern technology, and maintenance of facilities is top quality. Improvements require modification of the transfer policy, financial allocations to all schools should be equitable (although this might require legislative action due to property taxes), same hiring and placement practices for all schools, and a review by school leaders to identify differences in individual school programs.

The parents interviewed in this study applauded the after school programs offered in the community. The programs are located at local churches, Boys and Girls Clubs, community centers, and Catholic schools. The after-school programs

offer tutoring, organized games, and incentives for students earning good grades in school. Many of the parents in this study serve as volunteers at various after-school programs. This is an indication to school leaders that African-American parents, regardless of education and income status, are concerned about the education of their children. Cleveland school leaders are encouraged to include more minority parents in the reformation of Cleveland's public schools.

The appeal to Cleveland's public school leaders by African-American parents is to improve the quality of the public schools and restoration of the neighborhood schools. Vouchers are the choice the public schools have given in response to low-performing public schools and low graduation rates. This sends a clear message to Cleveland's school leaders. Develop and implement strategies to change and improve the quality of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, teachers and administrators, and equity.

Limitations of the Study

This research was limited to low-income African-American parents in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Seven parents participated in the interview process. The parents selected, represent only a small percentage of African-American parents with children attending Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Charter schools, private schools, and Catholic schools. The interviews took place at different locations, parents were asked the same questions and in the same order, and the principal researcher endeavored to be consistent and accurate. The principal researcher's objective was to determine the reason African-American parents fail to

utilize vouchers in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. The opinion and responses of the parents are pertinent to this research.

Recommendations for Future Research

In view of America's declining economy, there is much change ahead in education. It is apparent that some change will come from the new presidential administration and possibly some from the judicial system's interpretation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. In addition, the makeup of the Supreme Court could change as new judges replace retiring judges. Depending on the appointments, the court could become sympathetic to the plight of African Americans to provide an equitable education for African-American children.

The former president, George W. Bush was a strong supporter of school vouchers. President Barack Obama, has not taken a definite stand on the issue, but resigns to keep an open mind. President Obama said while still a senator that he was open to supporting private school vouchers if research showed they work. "I will not allow my predispositions to stand in the way of making sure that our kids can learn."¹⁵⁵ Interest by voucher opponents and supporters will continue strong and adamant on both sides of the issue.

As the principle researcher, I began this research with a very biased position. As a product of public schools, I was very opposed to school district's providing vouchers that will take funds from public schools to be used at religiously affiliated

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Green, "Obama Open To Private School Vouchers," *The New York Sun*, February 15, 2008, <http://www.nysun.com/natonal/obama-open-to-private-school-vouchers/71403/?print=517/> (accessed March 15, 2009).

and private schools. Public schools are already underfunded, which attributes to their low performance, and far too many students are left behind. In addition to underfunding, still another issue is that vouchers may take away some of the progress made over the years to desegregate. America's goal is to move forward, not backwards. Public schools serve all children, while private schools select only a few.

While I will concede that vouchers may give some students an opportunity of choice, I am not content with the majority left behind in low performing schools. The American system of government-run schools promised a quality education for all citizens. It is time the government and the policymakers to take responsibility for failing public schools by implementing and mandating true educational reforms. Failing schools must be reorganized, districts must hire master teachers, academic programs must be strengthened, and standards increased.

As a result, the use of vouchers by African-American parents and students will remain an important issue for educational research. The following recommendations are made for future research.

1. It is recommended that this research be replicated in the near future to increase the number of participants to determine if these results are consistent among a broader sampling of African Americans.
2. It is recommended that this research be replicated in the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to compare the opinions of African Americans in Milwaukee to those of parents in Cleveland.

3. It is recommended that a study be conducted in a city where vouchers have not been implemented to determine if African-American parents would consider the idea of using vouchers to send their children to private school.

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APPENDIX A

PACKET INTRODUCTION LETTER

January, 2008

Dear

My Name is Sylvia M. Williams. I am a life member of “The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. and a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. I am a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. *“The University of Oklahoma is an Equal Opportunity Institution.”* I will be conducting a study to investigate the reasons why low-income, African-American parents fail to utilize vouchers in the Cleveland school districts.

I am writing to ask your help in making parental contacts in your city. Cleveland has the longest running voucher program in the United States. You can help by assisting me in generating a list of parents to interview for this study. I will need about four to six parents for the interview. The interviewees must meet the criteria and fall into one of the categories.

- Ethnicity - African American
- Income - At or below \$ 35,000 per year.
- Parents with children attending a private school on a voucher
- Parents of children that previously attended a private school on a voucher, but returned to public school.
- Parents offered a voucher, but turned the opportunity down.
- Parents that accepted the voucher, but the child was not accepted by a private school.
- Parents that were not offered the opportunity.

If you know of a parent that would be willing to participate in this study, through an interview, with their permission, please forward their contact information to me by e-mail. I need only their name, address or e-mail address, and telephone number. I have enclosed an information strip for you to provide the requested parent information.

I can be reached by e-mail at spdkakawms@sbcglobal.net or swilliams@lawtonps.org, by telephone at 580 284-5074 or 580 536-3798, and by mail at Sylvia M. Williams, 512 SW 75th St. Lawton, OK 73505.

Thank you for any assistance you are able to render in the research. This is my first correspondence to see if this system will work for me. I have enclosed a self-addressed envelope for your response. If I can be of any assistance to you in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sisterly,

Sylvia M. Williams

PARENT INTRODUCTION LETTER

January, 2008

Dear Parent:

My name is Sylvia M. Williams. I am a graduate student completing my doctorate at the University of Oklahoma. ***“The University of Oklahoma is an Equal Opportunity Institution.”*** I will be conducting a study to investigate the reasons why African-American parents fail to utilize vouchers in the Cleveland school district. I am conducting this study as a requirement for my educational program and not for any political agency or organization or business in your city.

Your participation will involve completing a short questionnaire (which will remain confidential) and participating in a recorded interview. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience (once the date for the interview has been set) and will last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. All written and recorded information will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

Your participation is voluntary. Should you change your mind at any time about participating, you may do so without any repercussions. The results of the study will be published, but your name will not be used. Once I receive your contact information, you will receive a permission form and a questionnaire (that will take approximately five minutes to complete) that must be signed by you to participate in the research. After these forms have been returned to me, I will contact you by telephone to set up a date and time for the interview.

If you have any questions concerning this parent packet or the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me at 580 284-5074 or by e-mail spdkakawms@sbcglobal.net or swilliams@lawtonps.org.

Sincerely,

Sylvia M. Williams

PARENT PACKET FORM 1**PACKET INSTRUCTION SHEET**

- Read parent letter carefully and use contact information contained in the letter if you have any questions.
- Complete parent contact information sheet (Parent packet form 2).
- Complete Personal Information Questionnaire (Parent packet form 3).
- Place all completed forms in the enclosed, stamped envelope and return to me at your earliest convenience.
- You will be contacted by me within three days after I receive your packet information.

PARENT PACKET FORM 2**PARENT CONTACT INFORMATION FORM**
(For Research Purposes Only)

NAME: _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____

HOME TELEPHONE: _____

CELL: _____

E-MAIL: _____

CITY & STATE: _____

The above information will be held strictly confidential.

PARENT PACKET FORM 3**PERSONAL INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE****1. Ethnic Background**

- African American African American/Caucasian
 African American/Hispanic African American/Native American
 African American/Asian African American/Other

2. Number of school age children

- 1 2 3 4 5 6
 Children have graduated from high school.

3. Level of Education

- Did not complete high school
 Highest grade completed: 6 7 8 9 10 11
 GED High School Graduate
 Associate Degree 4 Year College Degree
 Graduate Student Graduate Degree (Masters, PhD, EDD)

4. Employment

- Currently Employed: Yes No
 Annual Yearly Income:
 Below \$25,000 \$26,000 - \$40,000 \$41,000 - \$60,000
 \$61,000 - \$75,000 \$75,000 - \$100,000 Above \$100,000

5. Residence Information

- Do you own or rent your home? Own Rent
 How long have you lived at your current address?
 1 Year 2 Years 3 to 5 Years 6 to 10 Years Over 10

6. School Information

- Do your children attend the neighborhood public school? Yes No
 Do your children attend a public school not in your neighborhood? Yes No
 Do your children attend private school? Yes No
 Are your children attending school on a voucher? Yes No
 Do your children receive free or reduced lunch? Yes No

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. What is your opinion of Cleveland's public schools?
2. What do you consider their two greatest weaknesses/areas for improvement that are currently hindering the academic achievement of African-American students?
3. What do you feel are important factors when selecting your child's school?
4. How do you think your child's education, in public school, compares to that of private schools in your community?
5. In your opinion, are there apparent differences in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and private schools in terms of equity, quality, personnel, and access? Please explain your answer.
6. Vouchers usually cover only a portion of the expenses in private school. Are you knowledgeable of the other expenses should you enroll your child in private school? Please explain you level of knowledge and how you would (or are) compensating for the additional expense.
7. Why have you chosen to send your child(ren) to the school they are currently enrolled in?
8. If your child(ren) attend a private school, on a voucher, please explain the process leading up to enrolling your child(ren) in private school.
9. In your opinion, have school vouchers alleviated the problem of inequality?
10. What are the criteria to qualify for a voucher? What is your opinion of the voucher selection process in your school district?
11. What is the process for acceptance of African-American students into private schools on a voucher? What is your opinion of the selection process of private schools for students on a voucher?
12. How do you feel your own educational experience influences the decisions you make regarding your child's education? Please explain.
13. In your view point, do you feel being labeled low-income, at-risk African American limits the educational opportunity for children of color?

14. What networking resources are available in your community to assist you in providing the best education possible for your children?

APPENDIX C

Letter to Ohio Department of Education

Date: February 19, 2009

To: Nina Pace
Nonpublic Educational Options Coordinator
Ohio Department of Education

Re: Questions on School Vouchers in the Cleveland School District

Hello Ms. Pace:

My name is Sylvia Williams. I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma. My dissertation is on school vouchers in the Cleveland School district. I am in need of some information on private schools that accept vouchers. It is not necessary that I know the name of the school, I only need the information. If you could pick a high school and a middle school and provide the following information for me on each school.

1. What is the school's enrollment?
2. How many of the students enrolled at the school are attending on a voucher?
3. Is the school a Catholic school or a community private school?

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for whatever assistance you can give at this time.

Sincerely,
Sylvia M. Williams
Asst. Principal, Tomlinson Middle School
580 585-6416
580 284-5074

Response from Ohio Department of Education

Date: February 20, 2009

To: Sylvia M. Williams

From: Myesha Atley
Education Consultant
Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program

Re: Questions on CSTP

1. What percentage of public school students in Cleveland Public schools are attending private schools on a voucher?

[CSTP] Currently, our program has a total of 5,626 students enrolled for the 2008-2009 school year. Of the 5,626 students, 4,115 are former public school students, which also included first-year kindergarten students that we designated/considered as public school students, as well. We don't know the percentage of the Cleveland Public School's enrollment. All we can tell you is the number of students enrolled and of that number which students were in public school at the time of application or were entering the program as first-year kindergarteners.

2. What is the maximum income amount to qualify for a voucher or family size?

[CSTP] To qualify for our program, students must be residents of the Cleveland Municipal School District and must be entering grades kindergarten through eight in the fall of the school year for which they are applying. The law stipulates that we must give preference to those that are low income, based upon the Federal Poverty Index. So, it depends upon what a family's size is and what the income is concerning the calendar year we request to have documented. If a family is low-income, our program will pay 90% of the tuition not exceeding \$3,450. The family pays the other 10% to the school. If a family is above the Federal Poverty Index, our program will pay 75% of the tuition not exceeding \$3,450. The family pays the other 25% to the school. If tuition exceeds \$3,450, a school may not access low-income recipients in grades K-8. However, the law does not reference the other grades. Thus anyone in grades K-8 that are not low-income can be accessed the difference not paid by the state. Additionally, students in grades 9-12 can be access the difference not paid by the state at either percentage level.

3. How is the lottery determined?

[CSTP] If there are more applicants than there are scholarships to award, then a random selection must be conducted. If the number of applicants is less than the number of awards available, then our program will award as many scholarships as there are

applicants until there aren't any more scholarships to award. Remember, preference is given to the low-income applicants first. Anyone determined to be above the Federal Poverty Index is not considered low-income and will be placed on the wait list until scholarships can be awarded to that level of applicants.

4. What is the process after you qualify for the voucher?

5. How is transportation to and from the private schools provided for?

Additional information can be obtained by contacting the following sites below.

You can read the law regarding our program at <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3313.97>.

Myesha R. Atley, Education Consultant
Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program
615 West Superior Avenue, Suite 535
Cleveland, Ohio 44113
(216) 787-5680 Ph.
(216) 787-5679 Fx.
(877) 644-6338 Toll Free - General Information
Email Address: Cleveland.Scholarship@ode.state.oh.us
Web Address: www.education.ohio.gov
[CSTP on the Web](#)
[Other ODE scholarship programs](#)
Take the [CSTP Survey!](#)