

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING
PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION ADVANCED
BY HOMESCHOOL PARENTS

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Causes of School Failure	3
Media Influence	7
Problem Statement	8
Purpose of Study	8
Significance of the Study	9
Nature of the Study	9
Research Questions	11
Social Perspective	11
Definitions of Terms	15
School Choice	15
Charter School	16
Homeschool	16
Voucher	16
Public School District (Type: City-Large)	17
Public School District (Type: Rural Fringe)	17
Theoretical Framework	17
Assumptions and Limitations	19
Summary	21
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	22
Search Strategy	22
Historical Context of Homeschooling	23
Foundation of Modern Homeschooling	24
Cultural Diversity and Homeschooling	26
Frequency of Homeschooling	27
Alternatives to Homeschool and Public Education	28
Charter Schools	29
School Voucher Programs	31
Homeschooling and the Law	32
Impact of Conservative Politics	36
The Religious Right	40
Rationale of Homeschool Parents	43
Religious Conviction	44
Lack of Religious Training	47
Morality	49
Curriculum Control	51
Lack of Confidence in Public Schools	51

Safety	52
Violence, Drugs, and Social Problems	53
Public School Successes	54
Impact of the SAT	55
The Sandia Report.....	56
Improving Scores	57
Impact of Immigration on Achievement.....	58
Increased Spending on Education.....	59
Conclusions.....	59
Summary.....	62
III. METHODOLOGY.....	63
Research Design.....	63
Setting and Participants.....	65
Setting for Focus Groups	66
Participants.....	67
Ethical Assurance.....	70
Role of the Researcher	71
Procedure	72
Pilot Study.....	73
Main Study.....	74
Data Analysis.....	76
Validity and Reliability.....	81
Summary.....	83
IV. FINDINGS.....	84
Findings.....	85
Textual Description.....	86
Discussion Question 1.....	86
Discussion Questions 2 and 3	89
Discussion Question 4.....	92
Discussion Question 5.....	93
Discussion Questions 6, 7, and 8	95
Discussion Question 9.....	98
Discussion Question 10.....	100
Discussion Question 11.....	102
Discussion Question 12.....	103
Discussion Question 13.....	105
Themes of Significance.....	107
Theme One: Public Involvement and Place in the Community.....	107
Theme Two: Involvement of Parents.....	111
Theme Three: Success or Failure and the Needs of Public Schools.....	112
Theme Four: Work the Government Needs to Do.....	115

Theme Five: Moral, Spiritual and Religious Issues in Public Schools.....	116
Theme Six: Administrators and Academic Achievement.....	119
Outlier: A Theory about Size of Buildings.....	122
Summary.....	123
Conclusions.....	125
V. CONCLUSION.....	127
Overview of Study Findings.....	127
Research Question 1.....	129
Research Question 2.....	131
Research Question 3.....	133
Discussion of Study Findings.....	135
Implications for Research.....	135
Implications for Practice.....	135
Implications for Theory.....	138
Suggestions for Future Research.....	138
Summary.....	140
Reflections.....	141
REFERENCES.....	143
APPENDICES.....	151
Appendix A (NCES Survey Information).....	151
Appendix B (Letter of Invitation).....	152
Appendix C (Participant Consent Form).....	153
Appendix D (Consent Form for Facilitator).....	154
Appendix E (Consent Form for Videographer).....	155
Appendix F (Consent Form for Transcriptionist).....	156
Appendix G (Food Service Consent Form).....	157
Appendix H (Demographic Survey).....	158
Appendix I (Discussion Protocol and Questions).....	159

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.....	18

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following statement is found in the state statutes of Oklahoma:

It shall be unlawful for a parent, guardian, or other person having custody of a child who is over the age of five (5) years, and under the age of eighteen (18) years, to neglect or refuse to cause or compel such child to attend and comply with the rules of some public, private or other school (O.S. §10-105).

The Constitution of the State of Oklahoma states the following:

The Legislature shall provide for the compulsory attendance at some public or other school, unless other means of education are provided, of all the children in the State who are sound in mind and body, between the ages of eight and sixteen years, for at least three months in each year (O.S. §13-4).

Background of the Study

Home Educators' Resource Organization (2004), in a citation about the Oklahoma constitutional education system, posits that "Oklahoma has few legal restrictions and is still open to interpretation" (p.1). By including the declaration "...unless other means of education are provided" as part of the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma, it is interpreted to mean that Oklahoma is fertile ground for parents who desire to choose from

other educational systems than the public school education provided by the government. Kirkpatrick (2004) mentions some of the choices available to parents, such as charter schools, and public or private voucher programs. Other choices available to parents are public schools in the community, or private schools, some with religious affiliations and others that are operated by the private secular sector. Some parents have also chosen to teach their children at home.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), reporting on the prevalence of homeschooling in the U.S., states:

Homeschooling in the United States: 2003 uses the Parent and Family Involvement Survey of the 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) to estimate the number of and percentage of homeschooled students in the United States in 2003 and to describe the characteristics of these students and their families (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006, p. iii).

In the NCES Survey (Appendix A), parents were given a list of possible reasons for choosing to homeschool their children and were asked to highlight the reasons that applied to them, listing them according to their importance. Princiotta and Bielick (2006) report that the reasons most frequently given by the participating homeschool parents were (a) Concerns about the environment within schools (85.4%), which included issues related to safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure, (b) provisions about religious or moral instruction (72.3%), and (c) dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools (68.2%).

Berliner and Biddle (1999) suggest that public schools are providing (a) a safe environment in public schools, (b) a positive moral atmosphere among public school

students and the religious instruction the government allows, and (c) an excellent education that is evidenced by the academic achievement of many public school students. In summary, a conflict exists between the reasons homeschool parents give for homeschooling their children and the thoughts of public school advocates and administrators. The following section cites some of the prevailing reasons cited for school failure.

Causes of School Failure

Violence and drugs in America have posed many problems. These problems have made their way into public schools, especially urban ghetto schools. Many of America's urban centers are deteriorating because of the plight of those living in poverty (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Children whose lives have been exposed to violence and drug abuse have caused educators to address these problems because of their appearance on public school campuses. In the absence of plans to fight this corruption, many public schools often deteriorate (Berliner & Biddle).

The unequal per capita spending approved by public school boards sometimes brings about violence in America (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). In some instances, inner city schools operate on a fraction of the budgeted funding provided to suburban public schools. Some of the money in inner city schools is spent for counselors and other specialists whose assignment is to talk with terrified students who live each day in unsavory conditions that stem from the home and are subsequently brought to school. Money is spent on metal detectors, armed guards, and barbed wired fences. These devices are in place so outside forces that cause problems can be separated from public school students who desire an education (Berliner & Biddle).

Some Americans believe that public schools are at the root of the violence and social problems America faces. Berliner and Biddle (1995) state that American industries are no longer able to cope with foreign competitors when job vacancies occur, when crime in their neighborhoods climb ever higher, when violence and drug addiction are causing death and detriment, when the divorce rate continuously climbs, and when sexual diseases filter through the community. The people from the same communities that house social discontent create social problems (Berliner & Biddle).

Public school administrators must be held accountable for some of the failed programs that have reached public school students. Some programs have lost their mission and are unable to fulfill their objectives, which were designed to attract public school students away from social problems and return them to a positive, satisfactory education process. Such programs were designed to enable public school graduates to answer American industry's need to remain competitive with businesses from foreign countries.

Poverty is another source of violence and social problems in America. According to Berliner and Biddle (1995), the larger numbers of citizens living in poverty create larger challenges for public schools. In some school districts, students living in poverty far outnumber students who come from either wealthy, middle-class, or working-class homes. The problem that results is that the performance of the large number of impoverished students attending public schools drives down the overall scholastic achievement of the school district. Poverty provides an avenue for failure in many of America's public schools (Berliner & Biddle).

Researchers have linked poor academic achievement to poverty. Berliner (2006) inferred that if those who were poor were made to form their own country, it would be primarily comprised of Black and Latino nationalities, and when compared to other industrialized nations, would score near the bottom of most academic achievement standards. However, White, wealthier students, would be rated near the top of academic achievement. Such students would favorably compare to those in Japan and Sweden. The results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study showed that American students answered 58% of the test items correctly. Only one nation scored more than 10% above the level established by the U.S. Thirty-three other nations had scores that were within 10% of those made by the U.S. (Berliner & Biddle, 1999).

Community leaders work diligently to create public schools that are safe for today's children. To address the seriousness of the problem in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Legislature in 2002 passed a legislative bill known as the School Bullying Prevention Act (Title 70 O.S. § 24-100.3). The Legislature stated that bullying students in public schools has reached enormous proportions and has caused a negative effect among those attending public school campuses, and as a result, has brought the element of fear to students.

The Legislature also declared that bullying has a negative effect on the social environment of schools, creates a climate of fear among students, restrains student's ability or right to learn, and generally causes anti-social behavior. In addition, on the list of anti-social behavior or acts are vandalism, unusual amounts of absences, an increase in the number of dropouts from school, and alcohol and drug abuse. As cited in the Act, it has become necessary in Oklahoma to put into place positive programs to counteract the

negativity of bullying and initiate effective programs that help educators recognize, prevent and eliminate students' desire to engage in such activities. The Act was intended to launch the message that Oklahoma will not tolerate negative activities and instead insists on a safe atmosphere conducive to learning (Title 70 O.S. § 24-100.3).

With the enactment of the School Bullying Prevention Act of 2002, the Oklahoma Legislature placed various mandates on local and state education agencies hoping to reduce or remove disruptive behaviors in Oklahoma's public schools. The law included the initiation of programs, the inclusion of families in the process of alleviation, recommendations from the Safe School Committee, dress code adoption, and a study of research-based programs appropriate for the prevention of bullying. As a result, Oklahoma public schools are moving toward a more thorough analytical approach when reporting the spread of violence in their systems.

Hu (2007) mentions that New Jersey Public Schools reported "a slight increase in violence, vandalism and substance abuse problems in 2005-06 from the previous year" (p. 1). While the New Jersey Public School System reported a slight rise in violence, the report also said, "But for the first time since 2003, not a single school reported enough problems to be considered 'persistently dangerous,' a category outlined in the federal No Child Left Behind Act" (Hu, 2007, p.1). Even with continued reports of violence occurring at colleges and high schools, authorities continue to report a decline in overall violence. Eisman (2007) states, "Notwithstanding the Virginia Tech massacre and other horrific school shootings, violence at colleges and high schools is declining across the country" (p. 1). Threat assessment programs have played a major role in bringing about the decline in violence on American campuses, as reported by Eisman (2007). A

successful threat assessment program “teaches school administrators' to develop and use teams in each school to identify students who may be prone to violence and move them to counseling or other treatment” (p.1).

Media Influence

Statements made by the media often influence parental views about the safety, religious or moral standards, and academic achievement of public schools. For example, the media has written distorted information about sexual activity of teenagers and high-pregnancy rates in public schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1999). This can bring about questions about what moral and spiritual values prevail in the public school setting. Female teenagers are often blamed for the failure of the moral structure of their age group. Some state that the blame lies with adult males who prey on young teenage females to provide sexual gratification. Berliner and Biddle state: “It is not necessarily female teenage sexual morals that are our national problem, but rather adult male morality to which we need to attend” (p.10). Problems of this nature sometimes lead parents to choose homeschooling rather than allow their children to attend secular schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1999).

In summary, many reasons have been cited for school failure, including, but not limited to violence and drugs in the schools, poverty, unequal per capita spending on education, social problems, and bullying, as cited in the previous section. There are conflicting perceptions of the many reasons for failure between the many advocates concerned with school failure, not the least of which are school administrators, and parents who choose homeschooling. Those differences have yet to be resolved.

Problem Statement

The general problem is that there is a difference between the perceptions of public school administrators about the primary reasons why parents choose homeschooling, and those of the parents. The differences represent a gap in the knowledge. The actual causes are complex and interwoven with differing cultural and societal values that produce conflicting findings. The specific problem is that the NCES has reported that parents who choose homeschooling do so for three prevailing reasons; however, those three reasons conflict with the perceptions of school administrators about why parents choose homeschooling.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study using 15 administrators from three public school districts located in Oklahoma County was to discover differences in the perceptions between public school administrators about why parents choose to homeschool their children, and parents' reasons for choosing to homeschool their children, as cited by the NCES. The specific purpose of the study was to determine administrator's perceptions about the validity of the three most prominent reasons homeschool parents cite for choosing to teach their children at home, specifically (a) Concerns about the environment within schools, which include issues related to safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure, (b) concerns about religious or moral instruction, and (c) dissatisfaction with academic instruction.

Creswell (2005) posited that a study design based on interviews of participants that uses leading questions, the collection of data that consists of words, and analysis of those words to identify themes, if conducted in a objective manner, is a form of

qualitative research. Qualitative research requires that the researcher become closely involved with the phenomenon under study (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Mills (2005) observed that qualitative research is employed when the researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon, particularly when little literature exists that addresses that phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

The primary significance of this study is that it adds to the extremely limited literature available regarding the perception of public school administrators about the reasons homeschool parents choose not to send their children to public schools, as opposed to the reasons parents cited in a study by the NCES. Numerous perceptions of parents currently homeschooling their children, or of those who support homeschooling as an alternative educational style, are extant. The results of the study provide new data that defines the perceptions of school administrators about why parents choose to homeschool their children, as opposed to the reasons parents cite for the same action in the NCES study. If disagreement is evident, the results add valuable insights to school administrators to better prepare them to address the issues raised by parents.

Nature of the Study

Yin (2002), posited that case studies in general are the preferred strategy for collecting data when (a) how or why questions are being asked, (b) when the researcher has little control over events, or (c) when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon. As a research approach, the case study can be employed in a number of various instances when the goal is to contribute to the knowledge of individuals, groups, and social, organizational, or political phenomenon (Yin). The proposed study fits Yin's requirement for the unique value of case studies to understand a complex social phenomena. The case

study method allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events, such as school failure and the attitudes of school administrators and parents toward it.

With a goal of identifying perceptions, this qualitative case-study was employed, as described by Eisenhardt (1989), to determine themes that are applicable across a variety of elementary and secondary schools in Oklahoma that were purposefully selected for diversity. Participants within school districts were selected that met the characteristics of a varied cross-sectional sampling. Approaching this type of mix is important to avoid any preconceived theoretical views or propositions that would introduce bias and limit the findings (Eisenhardt). As offered by Yin (2002), the case study is preferred when studying contemporary events when the specific behaviors cannot be manipulated. A case study approach is based on several of the same techniques as the study of history, but includes two sources of evidence not normally included in the historian's repertoire: direct observation, and/or interviews of the persons involved in the events.

The goals of this study were to determine present perceptions about school failure that may be inherent among school administrators, and to append the body of knowledge that has sought to address the differences in the perceptions of school administrators and parents regarding the failure of schools. When identifying populations and participants for this proposed qualitative multiple case study, Patton (2002) observed that it is important to be aware that non-researchers are less intimidated when presented with words dealing with a request to hear and record perceptions, rather than being confronted with words such as "case study," words that sound academic. Yin (2002) referred to the importance of "how" and "why" questions in the context of qualitative research, and the

focus on phenomena in real-life situations. Finally, Yin maintained that qualitative multiple-case study research, when performed with appropriate sampling, triangulation, coding, and analysis, meets the challenges of addressing the research questions, the phenomenon being investigated, and the study context.

Research Questions

The following research questions were based upon the NCES findings about why parents choose to homeschool their children.

1. How do public school administrators perceive the environment of public schools relative to the issues of safety, drugs, and negative peer pressure?
2. How do public school administrators perceive the moral atmosphere within public schools, including any allowed religious instruction?
3. How do public school administrators perceive the quality of instruction and academic learning in public schools?

Social Perspective

Homeschooling resurfaced in America in the 1960s after several decades of quiescence. Religious conviction was one of the most prominent reasons why parents switched from public schools to homeschooling at that time. As cited by Talbot (2001), Raymond and Dorothy Moore, known for their involvement at the beginning stages of the current homeschooling movement, “were religious conservatives who worried that schools undercut the authority of parents and forced children to face peer pressure before they were able to withstand it” (p. 137). Talbot (2001) observed that the message delivered across the country by the Moores was well received by evangelicals and

fundamentalists who were supporters of the Christian Right. These followers had found a great deal of solace in the ideals fostered through homeschooling ideologies.

After beginning their inquiry into homeschooling and child development, the Moore's wrote *Home Grown Kids* and *Home-Spun Schools*, books published in the 1980's. Lyman (1998) writes that the Moore's findings stress a gentler approach to homeschooling, an approach that balances academics with the child's list of things to do each day. Some of these things include study, chores, and work outside the home. The main concern was whether the child was mentally ready to take on the responsibility of handling all that would be required in life.

During the 1960's and early 1970s, John Holt, an alternative school teacher, became another voice inquiring into the worth of public school education when he wrote his books, as cited in the previous paragraph. Lyman (1998) states that Holt was "decrying the lack of humanity toward schoolchildren, even in the most compassionate school settings, and was a critic of the compulsory nature of schooling" (p.65). Talbot (2001) describes Holt as the first homeschool activist. "Holt emerged as an impassioned, slightly moony school reformer, the author of the best-selling diary-style books *How Children Fail* (1964) and *How Children Learn* (1967)" (p. 137). These books advocated Holt's theory that children learn independently, not in clusters. Holt believed that children's desire to learn is propelled by their interest and curiosity, not simply a way to please adults.

Holt saw public school children as obedient, but bland citizens (Lyman, 1998). He felt that public education did little for children other than prepare them to work in boring, bland jobs as adults. In 1977, Holt founded a bi-monthly magazine, *Growing without*

Schooling. This magazine provided a means of voicing his views and spreading the word about the positive steps made by parents who had removed their children from public school. The magazine became a mechanism that allowed homeschool parents and advocates an avenue for networking and exchanging ideas and teaching methods (Lyman, 1998).

The history of homeschooling would not be complete without mentioning the influence of those who based their educational support on their religious beliefs. Romanowski (2001) writes that, while fundamentalist Christians with religious motivations exclusively support homeschooling, homeschooling now reaches out to a huge variety of families and has been favorably listed as one of the alternatives to public school education. Romanowski cites that the largest group of homeschool supporters continues to come from the Christian Right. Although diversity is definitely vested as part of the list of homeschool enthusiasts, its fullest power as a social educational movement is found within the conservative Christian segment of the population. The homeschool picture reflects that homeschool parents are greatly motivated by their desire to provide a sound religious education that is free from what Reich (2002) calls, “the damning influences of secularism and pop culture” (p. 57).

To some, homeschooling seems to be nothing more than a religious cult. It has also been referred to as just a fad that would never last (Reich, 2002). By the 1980s, newspapers and magazines had begun to report that parents were beginning to reject public schools, and instead, choose to teach their children in their homes. Several were skeptical and continued to believe that the idea would never last. They forecasted that it might last awhile, but would never grow (Reich). Upper middle class parents began to

worry over the poor academic performance and lack of healthy socialization skills they noticed coming from their children who were attending public schools.

Public school teachers and administrators, although recognized as experts in their field, were not generating positive growth and development in the areas aforementioned (Talbot, 2001). Mothers from affluent families thought it was not conducive to challenge public school systems with questions and uncertainties about the lack of teaching they felt was being given to their children in public schools. Many of the parents from wealthy communities were also members of the conservative Christian population segment, and therefore, did not believe in rushing children into exposure to academic teachings. Numerous reasons were adding fire to the discontent among some parents early in the movement. The whisperings of the down-home-like atmosphere of bringing children home, and overseeing the care and instruction of children at home, was an idea gaining momentum and support across America (Talbot).

Instead of the idea of homeschooling children gradually going away, it continued to grow and become a promising, clever alternative to public school education (Talbot, 2001). It has developed over the past decade into an educational alternative whose time has come and whose path seems needed by many parents. By 1985, Talbot estimated that more than 50,000 Americans were involved in some form of homeschooling.

By 1986, every state in the Union allowed homeschooling in one form or another (Ishizuka, 2000). The National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that approximately 850,000 students were involved in homeschooling programs in 1999. Bielick, Chandler, and Broughman (2001) stated that a study of homeschoolers done in 1998 suggests that homeschoolers differ from the general population in parents'

educational attainment, household income, parents' marital status, and family size. It also showed that, although homeschooling may have previously been an exclusive property of White, middle-class, Christian families, growth in homeschooling might be reaching a broader range of American families and values.

In summary, the present study is reflective of the growing homeschooling movement in America, and identifies administrator's attitudes and perceptions of the reasons why parents choose to homeschool their children. Drawing upon a foundation of relevant literature in Chapter 2, the study assesses congruence or non-congruence about homeschooling in the perception of administrators and parents who homeschool their children, whose reasons were revealed by the NCES. The following terms, as defined, are critical to understanding the content of the following chapters.

Definition of Terms

School Choice

There are three categories that divide the general topic of school choice:

intradistrict, interdistrict and extrasystem. Unger (1999) states the following:

Intradistrict school choice allows types of school choice within each category.

Intradistrict school choice allows children to attend any public school within the school district where they live—but nowhere else—at public expense, including costs of transportation to and from school, textbooks and other school materials (p. 9).

Interdistrict choice permits students to attend any public school in or outside their home district, within state limits, although not necessarily at public expense. Under interdistrict school choice, the total amount of tax dollars allocated for the child's

education (and transportation) in the home district is simply transferred to the district school the child actually attends. The parents must pay any additional costs; they do not receive the difference if the costs at the new school are less than those at the home district school.

Charter School

Unger (1999) defines a charter school in the following manner:

Charter schools are autonomous public schools set up by parents and teachers, with the help of foundations and/or businesses. Although charter schools may be located within an existing school district, they are legally a district of their own, and a transfer to a charter school is therefore an interdistrict transfer (p. 9).

Homeschool

Children are considered to be homeschooled if their parents report them being schooled at home instead of at a public or private school provided their enrollment in public or private schools did not exceed 25 hours a week, or if they were not being homeschooled solely because of a temporary illness.

Voucher

A frequently proposed solution to the choice issue is that of providing a voucher to be spent at a school selected by the parent and student. Numerous versions of this approach have been suggested through the years. Primarily a voucher system is one where parents can use state-funded vouchers of a designated amount to pay for their children to attend a public or private school of their choice. The schools could be of any type, including private, parochial, or public, provided they meet the established state standards. Plans vary as to the amount of government regulation involved and whether

participating private schools can charge more for tuition than the basic voucher amount (Brimley & Garfield, 2002).

Public School District: Type City-Large

The 2005-06 National Center for Education Statistics Common Code of Data Glossary of Terms defines a Large City School District as “territory within an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.”

Public School District: Type-Rural Fringe

The 2005-06 National Center for Education Statistics Common Code of Data Glossary of Terms defines a Rural (Fringe) School District as being “less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, or a rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.”

Theoretical Framework

George Herbert Mead brought the Theory of Socialization to the attention of the world. Although explained in this chapter, the Theory will be mentioned in Chapter 5 under the section, “Implications for Theory.” Baldwin (1986) wrote several books explaining this theory. Mead contends that man’s social development comes in various stages that, through interrelations with others, gradually emerge just like most living organisms. This gradual emergence occurs in three stages, the Preparatory Stage, the Play Stage and the Game Stage.

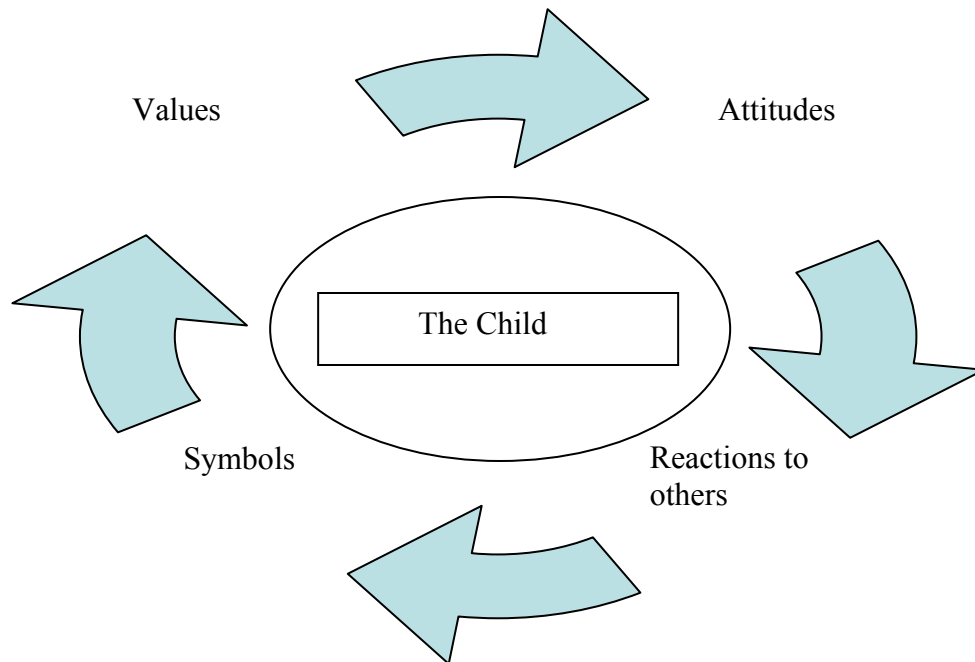


Figure 1. Three Stages of Emergence.

In the preparatory stage, children imitate those that are constantly around them. Initially, this could be a parent or parents, a baby sitter, or young playmates. As they continue to grow, the child will begin to include various symbols that help with communication. Gestures and new words added to their ever-increasing vocabulary combine to form the foundation of their interrelated communication.

The culture that surrounds the child plays a role in shaping the communication skills. Gestures that are identified with the community may be learned. Some multi-cultural societies, because of the interpretation of symbols and gestures, may find disagreement with the usage as the interactions occur. For example, the French see a woman wearing a headscarf as a sign of submission. A Muslim woman wearing a headscarf is thought to be expressing genuine modesty and respect.

The second stage, the Play Stage, is also known as role-playing. This is seen when children take on the personality of other children and/or adults and their movement and

responses are done as the child surmises the model being portrayed reacts. Decisions may change. Body movements begin to mimic others with whom they come in contact. The child is steadily emerging as an organism that is gradually unfolding from an imaginary viewpoint.

The Game Stage begins when the child reaches 8 or 9 years of age. At this point, the child not only plays the role, but also begins to perform tasks and relationships simultaneously. Consider a boy or girl who is part of a children's choir. As the choir practices, the choir director gives specific responsibilities to the child. Not only does the child begin to recognize individual responsibilities, but begins to understand the responsibilities of other choir members, the choir director and other adult leaders, as well.

Mead labeled learned traits developed by the child (attitudes, viewpoints, and expectations of society as a whole, or his or her behavior) as generalized other. The child gradually develops courtesies as a social behavior and value that is approved by parents, teachers and other leaders. Shortly thereafter, the child develops respect for his or her environment.

Mead says children picture their existence as the focal point and everything else moves around them. They find it very difficult to accept the perspective of others. The tendency to be the center of events may never disappear. As the child continues human growth and development, the self begins to recognize the reactions of others.

Assumptions and Limitations

The following assumptions and limitations were inherent in the research design. Every measure that was reasonably possible was taken to assure objectivity and representation of the field of study. It was assumed that all public school administrators responded

honestly and to the best of their abilities. However candid the responses, they cannot be assumed to accurately reflect the experiences of all public school administrators statewide or nationwide. This study was not about individual public school administrators, but about the lived experience public school administrators have as they perform their role. This study was delimited to public school systems located in Oklahoma County; therefore, the findings are organizationally specific.

The following limitations and assumptions also applied to the study. The researcher assumed that all volunteers for this study would be unbiased and truthful in all responses; however, because public school administrators participated in focus groups, each administrator communicated his or her viewpoints face-to-face with other administrators, which may have influenced answers. It was assumed that the interviews would reveal a common area of knowledge. It was assumed that the participants understood the nature and significance of the study and that the database would remain unmodified throughout the data collection and analysis process. It was assumed that the researcher was unbiased.

Interviews were limited to public school administrators. Research was limited to assessing the answers to the research questions as previously stated. The possibility of personality conflicts or problems might have been a factor that could bias participants. Study participants were registered public school administrators at three organizational levels: school superintendent, principals, or assistant principals with at least 1 year of work experience.

Summary

The preceding chapter introduced the subject of this research study and highlighted some of the problems associated with the rationale of school administrators and parents regarding school failure, and posed three research questions that drove the research design. The methodology for the qualitative case study approach was summarized. The participants were identified, and limitations of the study were outlined.

Chapter 2 addresses the literature that surrounds the number of educational choices parents face today. The discussion summarizes the history of homeschooling and reveals some of the events that have caused homeschooling to achieve the legitimate position it holds today among the educational choices available to parents. Additional literature summarizes the role the law plays in the lives of homeschooling in the U.S., especially in the State of Oklahoma.

Chapter 3 gives the experienced investigator enough data to replicate the study. No results are discussed, implied, assessed, evaluated, or interpreted. Chapter 4 summarizes the collected data and the mechanics of analysis of it. Chapter 5 refers to the research questions cited earlier in this chapter, and draws conclusions based upon those questions. The conclusions represent the contribution to the knowledge that resulted from this study. In addition, recommendations for change, and recommendations for further study are included. Finally, the literature cited in this study is included in a references list, and the Appendices contain the major documents related to the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the history of America, the education of children has been a priority of the American democratic society, part of which is based upon the principal of compulsory education through Grade 12. Compulsory education is based on the philosophy that an educated electorate is a free electorate (Hockschild & Scovronick, 2003). Although compulsory, professors, researchers, teachers, legislative leaders, community leaders, parents and patrons have engaged in debates, study sessions, institutes, and forums in an attempt to determine the most appropriate venue for educating the young, whether public, private, or another configuration. The following literature review will address the history of homeschooling, laws pertaining to homeschooling, the influence of conservative politics on public education, other alternatives to public education, and efforts of the religious right to support alternatives to public school education.

Search Strategy

Scholarly books, seminal journal articles, and research documents were reviewed through the Oklahoma State University Library. Additional databases included a review of EBSCO host, InfoTrac One File, Journals@Ovid, ProQuest, and ProQuest Digital Dissertations. The online databases of Google also provided information for this research.

Bibliographic and reference listings were accessed from appropriate titles discovered within the literature review process. Approximately 700 current scholarly articles pertaining to school choice, including homeschooling, charter schools, and use of a voucher system were researched. Support data were also reviewed, including Proposition 13, *A Nation at Risk*, the *Sandia Report*, and the history of early education. The researcher observed socialization activities provided especially for homeschool students, and interviews were held between the researcher and an extra curricular representative for homeschool children's activities.

Historical Context of Homeschooling

Homeschooling is not a new concept in America. Grossman (2001) reported that America has always had some form of homeschool education. Early missionaries and military personnel had to use a parent to teach children while the other parent went about carrying out daily work. Actors in Hollywood, together with wealthy families, boasted of having teacher instruct their children in a homelike setting. Waal and Theron (2003) mention that prior to the 19th century, homeschooling was about the only form of education available in the U.S. Today, parents are choosing to homeschool for a variety of reasons, as shown by the survey published by NCES, which was reviewed in the preceding chapter.

Lines (2001) reported that homeschooling has steadily increased over the past two decades. By the beginning of the 19th century, public schools were quite plentiful and most states had adopted some form of compulsory attendance laws. Homeschooling was not allowed in few states in the Union. In an earlier era, many children studied at home, but by the beginning of the 20th century, school had become commonplace and all states

had adopted compulsory school attendance laws. Only a few states allowed homeschooling as an exception to compulsory attendance at a public school. Over time, and after a few states became more relaxed with their requirements preventing homeschooling, legislatures or another governing body made provisions for the inclusion of homeschooling to be acceptable.

Foundations of Modern Homeschooling

Raymond Moore and John Holt created today's concept of homeschooling. Lyman (1998) stated that Moore was a former U.S. Department of Education employee who earned a Doctor's degree in education from the University of Southern California. His wife, Dorothy, was a reading specialist and former Los Angeles County elementary school teacher. The Moores and others of similar a philosophical approach began a search to answer the following: Is institutionalizing young children a sound educational trend, and what is the best timing for school entrance (Lyman).

Lyman (1998) mentions that the question was presented to 100 family development specialists and researchers, including Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University, Bowlby of the World Health Organization, and White of Harvard University. These three professional educators recommended that a parent use extreme caution when deciding whether a child's nervous system and mind is ready to take on the rigors of academic learning under formal constraints. The Moores felt that developmental problems similar to hyperactivity and dyslexia often occur because the child's nervous system and mind are prematurely introduced to continuous academic tasks such as reading and writing.

The majority of collected information discourages pushing children toward daily attendance in institutionalized school settings. The Moores were convinced that children

should not be introduced to the public school setting until they were at least 8 or 10 years of age, or even as much as 12 years old. The results from this study led the couple and their colleagues to narrow their investigation into two areas: formal learning, and socializing, a path that caused the Moores and early advocates to choose homeschooling for their children.

The National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), founded by Brian D. Ray, is another significant organization in the history of homeschooling. The organization's homepage states that its mission is to (a) Produce high-quality research, such as statistics, facts, and findings on home-based education, (b) serve as a clearinghouse of research for the public, researchers, homeschoolers, the media, and policy makers, and (c) educate the public concerning the findings of all research on home education. Public school administrators generally believe they provide adequately in the areas of concern listed by homeschool parents by the NCES: (a) Concern about environment, including safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure, (b) religious or moral instruction, and (c) academic instruction. The purpose of public school education is to help students prepare for transitional steps while striving to reach the next level, the ultimate goal being the transition into adulthood. It does not matter if the transitional step is from 3rd grade to the 4th grade, or from the middle school to high school; it may be from high school to college. Regardless of the transition, the goal is to become an adult and become part of, finally, the workplace (Locke, 2005).

Advocates of public education say that America should be indebted to compulsory public school education. Giving every child a chance to develop his or her fullest potential provides an opportunity for every citizen. State Senator Jay Paul Gumm

(2007) recently stated that every Oklahoman benefits from the presence of free public education being made available to every child. This is one of the remaining free acts the state can offer to children regardless of the degree of wealth or cultural background held by their parents.

Cultural Diversity and Homeschooling

Today's picture of homeschoolers shows great cultural diversity. Ray (2002) agrees. He contends that homeschooling now includes people in low-income to middle income families. Higher income families have always had great participation in this process as well. Homeschooling includes parents who earned higher education degrees and professional degrees. Indeed, some parents who have earned only general equivalency diplomas are choosing this method for their children, and it includes single-parent families and people from various ethnic and religious persuasions. There are many states that have laws that allow homeschoolers to participate in public school classes or activities such as sports, choir, band, and other extra curricular activities.

African American families make up 5% of the homeschool population. Wahisi (1995) states that religion is a key determinant of school choice among Black families. They are concerned with "the declining academic standards and the breakdown of discipline in many schools" (p.14). Caviness (2002), wrote on the plight of a mother of African American descent whose 13-year old son's failing grades had caused the public school counselor to mention to the mother the possibility of expulsion. After looking at her options, the mother chose to homeschool. A lack of cultural diversity and poor academic achievement were of primary concern. After beginning to homeschool her son, the African American mother saw a noticeable surge in her son's grades. Caviness

contends that homeschooled children receive one-on-one attention that public school teachers with 25 or more students in a class will never achieve.

Mondloch (2000) mentions that a study conducted by the NHERI reports 76% of homeschoolers in three states choose to enroll their children in public or private schools for a portion of the school day. This is sometimes done because of the parent's lack of expertise in one or more areas of study, and the parent prefers the professional skills of a trained teacher in a particular subject for their children. Other parents desire their children to have exposure to extra curricula activities including choir, sports, and school clubs for social reasons. In fact, some homeschool parents in Oklahoma County have opted to organize sports teams, choirs, and high school graduations that only encompass homeschool students. For example, Oklahoma City homeschoolers have competitive soccer, tennis, baseball, football and basketball teams. The National Christian Homeschool Basketball Tournament has been held in Oklahoma City the past 5 years with an estimated 5,000 students, coaches and parents in attendance.

Frequency of Homeschooling

In a published release, Princiotta and Bielick (2006) used data from a 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) to estimate the number and percentage of homeschooled students in the U.S. in 2003. This survey is one of many used to gather data by the NCES. The report states:

The weighted estimate of the number of students being homeschooled in the United States in the spring of 2003 was 1,096,000, a figure which represents a 29 percent increase from the estimated 850,000 students who were being homeschooled in the spring of 1999. In addition, the estimated homeschooling

rate—the percentage of the student population being homeschooled—rose from 1.7 percent in 1999 to 2.2 percent in 2003 (p. iii).

The Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) has also helped to build support for homeschooling in America. Homeschooling advocate Michael Farris founded the organization in 1983. In its website, HSLDA is defined as being a nonprofit advocacy organization designed to advance the causes and constitutional rights of parents who choose to design the educational system they determine to be best suited for their children. Their support comes through soliciting annual memberships from homeschool enthusiasts who desire to have a strong voice speaking on their behalf

Alternatives to Homeschooling and Public Education

Choice of schools is an alternative to public school education. Schneider, Teske, and Marschall (2000) report that discontent with public schools and government intervention causes some citizens to desire other forms of education where the government has little involvement or control within its domain. There are three categories that divide the general topic, school choice-intradistrict, interdistrict, and extrasystem.

Unger (1999) states the following:

Intradistrict school choice allows types of school choice within each category.

Intradistrict school choice allows children to attend any public school within the school district where they live—but nowhere else—at public expense, including costs of transportation to and from school, textbooks and other school materials.

Interdistrict choice permits students to attend any public school in or outside their home district, within state limits, although not necessarily at public expense.

Under interdistrict school choice, the total amount of tax dollars allocated for the

child's education (and transportation) in the home district is simply transferred to the district school the child actually attends. The parents must pay any additional costs; they do not receive the difference if the costs at the new school are less than those at the home district school (p. 23).

Charter Schools

Charter schools are among the choices parents may consider when choosing an educational system for their child. Unger (1999) defines a charter school as a public school that is allowed to operate as a public school with an individual set of rules and regulations. Parents and teachers, along with a charter school foundation or business, usually establish these schools. Although these schools can be physically located within a pre-existing public school district, legally their constitution calls for them to establish a district of their own, thus making a transfer request from a student into the charter school becomes an interdistrict transfer.

The charter school concept is a relatively new idea and approximately 74% of new schools that have followed the concept. These schools are either newly created or classified as a start-up school. Sixteen percent are pre-existing public schools that were granted permission to change their status to the charter school concept. Additional schools (10%) are pre-existing private schools (Paquet, 2006).

Several hypotheses have emerged about what happens when states enact charter school laws. Shoher, Manna, and White (2007) mention the following:

Hypothesis 1 (ideology and flexibility): As a state's elected officials become more politically conservative, state law will allow more flexibility for charter schools.

Hypothesis 2 (ideology and accountability): As a state's elected officials become more politically conservative, state law will allow more flexibility for charter schools.

Hypothesis 3 (partisanship and flexibility): As a state's elected officials become more Republican, state law will allow more flexibility for charter schools.

Hypotheses 4 (partisanship and accountability): As a state's elected officials become more Republican, state law will require charter schools to be less accountable to public authorities.

Hypothesis 5 (demographics and flexibility): As the percentage of at-risk students in a state increases, state law will grant charter schools more flexibility.

Hypothesis 6 (demographics and accountability): As the percentage of at-risk students in a state increases, state law will require less public accountability from charter schools.

Hypothesis 7 (flexibility and number of charters): As state charter school laws grant more flexibility, more charter schools will open.

Hypothesis 8 (accountability and number of charters): As state charter school laws require more public accountability, fewer charter schools will open (p. 2-3).

In summation of research into charter schools, Shober et al. (2007) asserted that states with a heavy conservative population and a Republican governor and legislature tend to have the largest increase of charter schools. This mixture of political allies produces a concerted effort, with the help of the amendment process, to construct growing numbers of charter schools, even when their accountability sometimes begins to decline after reclassification.

School Voucher Programs

The idea of a voucher system as an alternative to public school education first surfaced in 1990 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The program, known as the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, was America's premiere city-operated school-voucher program (Olsen, 1998). It is a program that is intended to widen the choices parents have before them as they compare alternatives to public school education.

Proponents of vouchers suggest that the voucher system provides parents with more choices when selecting an educational system for their children. Additionally, it is believed that the competition between educational choices encourages improved conditions and brings about greater involvement of parents in the education of their children. Proponents also predict that increasing the number of private schools available through the voucher system will bring about improved academic achievement among students and will assist in equalizing educational opportunities (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Further, proponents claim the voucher system as beneficial to the underprivileged, poorer sector of the population. Some voucher system proponents sell this system as being quite beneficial to children who are attending the worst of the public schools in the community. Their implication is that the creation of the voucher system allows impoverished students to attend schools that will provide better schools more conducive for learning. Some supporters look more at the possibility of race or other defining characteristics to receive a better quality education by using their voucher to enter better schools than those closer to home (Hochschild, 2003).

The argument that proponents offer that vouchers help poor families is refuted by critics of the system. Critics of the system report that poorer families do not have the

funds to provide supplemental resources that rich people can provide. Critics cite that, instead of reducing bureaucracy, the voucher system leads to the dominance and control of education by bureaucratic forces. Critics of the voucher system also infer that the voucher system permits America to address many of its educational problems without increased taxation (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Since 1990, vouchers have been a reality for those who support conservative political views. Some public schools are viewed as failures with little hope for the future. For many years, leading conservative-minded individuals have insisted that public schools can no longer offer quality education. They claim that government intervention and control have created a flawed system that is beyond repair. They insist that the intrusion of bureaucrats and teacher unions have ruined public school systems, as well. The two most frequently mentioned alternatives to public schools are publicly funded vouchers for private schools, and charter schools. Those schools that claim to be free of government control and union contracts are the most attractive to those of the conservative persuasion (Miner, 2006).

Homeschooling and the Law

Homeschool advocates are serious about their right to homeschool, and therefore tend to avoid intrusion from outsiders who may want to place constraints and control on the plans and methods used to educate their homeschooled children. Mondloch (2000) maintains that leaders in the fight for homeschooling have refused to be placed in any given category, other than maintaining their right to teach their children as they choose, and to carry out this choice in the privacy of the parent's home. "About a dozen states

with specific home education laws are ranked by the HSLDA as ‘highly regulated,’ with a majority of states falling into the range of ‘moderate’ regulation” (p. 5).

Oklahoma has enjoyed a successful increase in its homeschool population. A portion of the success is attributed to Article XIII of the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma, which states that “it shall be unlawful for a parent, guardian, or other person having custody of a child who is over the age of five (5) years, and under the age of eighteen (18) years, to neglect or refuse to cause or compel such child to attend and comply with the rules of some public, private or other school,...or unless other means of education are provided for the full term the schools of the district are in session” (Title 70 O.S. 10-105).

Homeschooling is a growing phenomenon in Oklahoma (Dutcher, 2004). The Oklahoma Legislative website cites that the state of Oklahoma recognizes a parent’s right to ‘in good faith’ home educate children, and asks only that they provide 180 days of instruction and include an array of subjects typically taught in the public schools including reading, writing, math, science, U.S. constitution and citizenship, health and safety, physical education and conservation. The Home Educators Resource Organization (HERO) observes that homeschool laws in Oklahoma provide few restrictions and are open for interpretation at any time (2002). Few people have chosen to challenge the laws; therefore, the courts have not had to offer much interpretation (Dutcher). Because the laws of the State of Oklahoma contain few restrictions, national experts believe Oklahoma to be one of the best places in the U.S. for homeschooling. There are no requirements for parents or legal guardians to initiate contact with local or state officials prior to teaching children at home. The HSLDA states “Oklahoma is the only state with a

constitutional provision guaranteeing the right to homeschool” (p. 2). The Oklahoma Department of Education does not pull together data obtained from homeschoolers. Brian D. Ray believes that the number of homeschool students in Oklahoma is between 14,000 and 19,000. Mehrens of the National Center for Home Education (NCHE) estimates the number to be near 16,682 (Dutcher, 2004).

When reviewing homeschool laws in the state of Oklahoma, HERO stated that homeschooling in Oklahoma has few legal restrictions, and “is one of the rights protected by the Oklahoma Constitution (Article XIII), along with subsequent amendments later added by Oklahoma Statutes” (2004). This mandate covers any child in the state who is found to be sound in mind and body, and is between the ages of 8 to 16 years of age. These children must attend school for at least 3 months out of every year. HERO states that the key words are “unless other means of education are provided.” The rights of homeschoolers are protected since teaching the child at home is another means of education.

Title 70 O.S. 10-105 addresses exceptions to the neglect or refusal to compel a child to attend school. HERO states that it is against the law for a parent or guardian or other person having custody of a child age 5 through 19 years to neglect to comply with the rules and regulations regarding compulsory attendance in some public, private or other school, unless other means of education are provided for the child for the full term the school or district is in session. HERO also cites several issues of concern for homeschoolers. The new statute changes the age of compliance. Public schools are in session for 180 days per year, with 5 in-service days provided. The total number of in session time is 175 days of classroom instruction. While this may imply that

homeschoolers are required to be in school the same days and hours as the public school system, HERO contends that the law has not been interpreted to mean that they are required to be in school the same days and hours as public schools in the area. There have been instances where districts have insisted that they must have a curriculum in place prior to parents' announcing their plan to homeschool their children. HERO insists that there is no legal basis supporting that request. Private schools in Oklahoma are allowed to establish their own hours, days, schedules, and curriculums. HERO maintains that homeschoolers should be able to enjoy the same rights and privileges.

Additionally, HERO asserts that Oklahoma's Compulsory Attendance Statute has no requirements mandating that a school has to be accredited by the State Department of Education, or that a private teacher must have a valid Oklahoma teaching certificate. It only states that whatever is taught is done in good faith, and is equal to that provided by the State. Furthermore, HERO insists that a Board of Education is not required to furnish textbooks or other learning materials to every child living in the district, including those not attending a district-operated school.

The Attorney General's Opinion, No. 73-129, stated "whether such independent facilities for education, outside of the public schools, are supplied in good faith and whether they are equivalent to those afforded by the state, is a question of fact for the jury, not a question of law for the court" (Wright v. State, OK, 209 p. 179, 1922). This ruling was interpreted to mean that homeschooling is not to hide absences or truancy. The Attorney General hoped that homeschooling families would accept daily attendance as part of their responsibility. HERO states that each family must decide whether it is providing opportunities for learning that are at least as good as those provided by the

district public school system. When looking at the term “school day,” HERO states that this term might be interpreted to mean any day in which the homeschool pupil is under the supervision of their parent or guardian who believes learning is taking place. That day may be considered a day of attendance for legal purposes. In fact, what is ‘compulsory’ for public school students is ‘attendance,’ not ‘education.’

The Oklahoma Driver’s License/Literacy Law states that children between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age who are applying for an Oklahoma Driver’s License must provide proof of their enrollment in school and successful achievement on a criterion-based reading test with eighth grade equivalency. HERO contends that homeschool parents must provide written proof witnessing the enrollment of their child in some program offering instruction as reflected in Section 4 of Article XIII of the Oklahoma Constitution. A statement of this kind can be obtained from the Driver’s License Testing Station. HERO reports that there is currently disagreement about whether providing proof of passing the reading test is necessary for homeschoolers, but homeschoolers should be prepared to provide such proof until such time as the law is understood and applied consistently. At this point, most of the Driver’s License Testing Stations are asking for such proof.

Impact of Conservative Politics

Public school education experienced great support until the mid 1970s when the State of California caught the eye of most Americans. Vertner, Soung, and Bowes (2004) report “America’s most populous state, California, has 9.4 million young people under the age of 18, the largest youth population in the country as well” (p. 81). Known for its liberal stance on issues, all was well in California until the popularity of Richard Nixon

and Ronald Reagan became evident. Programs like Zero Tolerance and Three Strikes started in California and gradually moved throughout the country. California's power at the statewide ballot initiative helped transition the U.S. economy and politics into many of the problems the nation faces today (Vertner et al., 2004).

The original intent of California's ballot initiative was to remove corruption from politics. Vertner et al. (2004) mentions "the ballot initiative process allowed citizens to put legislation to a direct vote by gathering petitions, representing at least five percent of the state's electorate" (p. 81). Some of the state's problems may have found their origin in this attempt at removing corruption in government, along with other practices affecting the people of California.

In 1978, California brought to the ballot a vote on one such attempt at reform as mentioned above. Proposition 13 is now recognized as one of the noteworthy actions to come from California history. It set off a national aversion to taxation and helped Ronald Reagan become the President of the United States. Prop13 was invented to remove some of the unusually high property taxes that affected Californians. The move was designed to seal off future property taxation after a 30% increase. The measure passed and quickly reduced local taxes by 53%.

Proposition 13 gave control of the allocation of property to the state legislature, thus removing revenue from local school districts whose financial well-being greatly depended on this financial source. The effects were disastrous. In an instant, California's public school system went from the envy of most other public school districts nationally to a school system without funds and virtually unable to operate from day-to-day. This new predicament was a result of the numerous programs the school could no longer offer

because of the great loss of funds no longer being paid through property taxes that directly benefited the public school system. By 2003, per capita student spending, innovative programming, and test scores had plummeted California to 37th in per-pupil spending and 43rd in performance (Vertner et al., 2004).

The passing of Proposition 13 became the tool that changed public education throughout the nation. It was seen as an idea whose time had come. Moore (1998) wrote that Proposition 13 was a political earthquake whose shock waves were felt around the entire U.S. The initiative to cut California's heavy taxation also represented Ronald Reagan's introduction of income tax cuts that occurred in 1981. A national tax insurrection followed the California movement within 5 years of the passage of Prop 13. Nearly half of the U.S. found reason to revolt on behalf of an outcry against taxes, and oftentimes the public school systems greatly suffered because of the removal of funds from their budgets. Most of those mandates on the limitation of taxation are still in affect, today (Vertner et al.).

Public schools across America offered statements denouncing efforts similar to Proposition 13 that were being promoted in their district. It became apparent that the American tax revolt era was not easily going away. Moore (1998) contends that "despite a torrent of horror stories from teachers' unions, politicians, newspapers and corporate lobbyists in Sacramento about the potentially devastating effects of Proposition 13, more than 60 percent of the voters took a gamble and approved the ballot measure" (p 1).

A surge of conservative values and aspirations in the U.S. came with the Reagan Era. Fuhrman (1987) reports that 1986 represented a time when school systems had to consolidate districts and devise other methods of change to survive the financial cuts they

were facing. One of the ideas that came from this era was a renewed dedication to offer improvements in the quality of public school education as a strategy to manage the financial disaster they were facing. The public must be shown the benefits of returning assistance back into the coffers of public school systems, according to Fuhrman.

Reagan, who was considered a divisive figure in education, endorsed a system of education that championed local control. He may well be recognized as one of the Godfathers of modern day homeschooling. Cavanagh (2004) reported that in an interview with *Education Week* magazine in 1984, Reagan said, “It is in our homes, where parents guide their children, and in our communities, where local school boards know their own areas’ needs, that responsibility for running our schools has always rested, as it should” (p. 1).

Cavanagh (2004) reported that the authors of the No Child Left Behind Act, a product of the Bush Administration, owe a great deal of gratitude to the educational reform presented by the Reagan Administration, “*A Nation At Risk*.” After Reagan’s presidency ended, he was recognized for helping with the progress of private school voucher programs along with other portions of the conservative educational agenda when he made appointments to the Supreme Court. Reagan named Sandra Day O’Connor, Antonin Scalia, and Anthony M. Kennedy, and elevated William H. Rehnquist to be chief justice. These four justices made up the majority vote that approved the Cleveland voucher program in 2002. The fifth vote came from Clarence Thomas, who had briefly served as civil rights chief under President Reagan’s Department of Education.

The Religious Right

Those who take their religious convictions most seriously and choose to protect their right to an education that respects their beliefs have been involved in American education for all of America's history. Even before public education came into being, parents taught their children that they should use the bible, other religious books, and pamphlets that were available, as textbooks. After America formulated its Constitution, it was quite clear that a separation needed to be maintained between churches, and support from state government.

Whitehead (1994) writes that some commentators insist that the U.S. Constitution supports "a strict separationist view of church and state" (p. 39). There are those who have written that religion should be included in American education. Whitehead (1994) mentions "history, however, provides ample evidence that among the framers of America's founding documents, the universal sentiment was one of accommodation of religion in general, and even at times, encouragement of a particular religion" (p. 39).

The opposing view about the place religion should hold in public education has been debated by both sides. In past years, major Protestant denominations have turned away from helping parents who want their children educated within their own denomination (Lieberman, 1993). This attitude expresses the vivid Protestant direction of public schools, which supports the principle of separation of church and state as a method of covering up the large Protestant presence in public school systems. In more recent years, the tide has turned and evangelical Protestant groups have become critical of public school systems. Programs teaching sex education, restriction of prayer, the

denigration of creationism, and the absence of marriage and family values have been blamed for this removal of support. Religious groups who once were pro-public education now find reasons to support school vouchers and charter schools (Lieberman).

The Far Right began to represent those who embellished conservative beliefs. An emergence of this group began to become apparent during the Reagan Administration, and was known as the New Right, the Radical Right, or the Reactionary Right. Berliner and Biddle (1995) mention such Far Righters as Edwin Meese and David Stockman, prominent conservative figures during the early Reagan White House days. Orrin Hatch and Jesse Helms also upheld the beliefs of the Far Right in the U.S. Senate, later being joined by Rep. Newt Gingrich and the members favoring the ‘Contract with America’.

Far Right supporters blame the federal government for most of the problems public schools face today. Their major goal has been to break down the government’s control and decentralize education so that initiatives like the Department of Education could be abolished and funding for educational research could be all but eliminated. Programs that supported education for minorities would be eliminated, therefore reducing the influence of federal courts (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Another group that surfaced during the Reagan Administration was the Religious Right. They were prominent figures from many areas of American life. Berliner and Biddle say that supporters of the Religious Right “include Jerry Falwell, Tim LeHay, Mel and Norma Gabler, and former presidential candidate Pat Robertson” (p. 135). The Religious Right did not attempt to move into strategic governmental positions within the Reagan or Bush Administration, but were looked upon favorably by both President Reagan and President Bush.

The Religious Right has manipulated the federal government. They believe that federal controls have been the device that successfully removed prayer from public schools and curbed the teaching of scientific creationism (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Furthermore, Religious Right supporters insist that public schools promote homosexuality, anti-family beliefs, and destroy the work ethic of the family. They object to the teaching of sex education and strongly believe that public schools promote anti-American traditions (Berliner & Biddle).

The maneuvering represented above was branded as evil and was believed to be detrimental and destructive to the lives of Americans. The Religious Right insist that any appearance of evil influences similar to those mentioned above should be abolished and never allowed to find fertile ground in public education. Religious Right supporters were urged to do whatever it took to destroy public schools; suggestions included arguing against public schools in public debates, and voting No on all school bond issues and property tax issues relating to public school finance (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

The Religious Right has expressed strong support for private school vouchers. Head (2005) quotes the following remarks made by Television Evangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell:

They say vouchers would spell the end of public school in America. To which we say, so what? TV preacher Jerry Falwell also bashes public schools. He claims the public school system is 'damned' and promotes private Christian schools. 'I hope to live to see the day,' he once said, 'when, as in the early days of our country, there won't be any public schools. The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them. What a happy day that will be (p. 14).

The Religious Right has many supporters eager to gain government funding for religious schools. Roman Catholic Bishops have urgently sought governmental support for their parochial schools. Head (2005) mentions that “Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia once told a Falwell-sponsored magazine, “If we can get [a religious school voucher plan] through in one state then that’s the foot in the door. That’s what I want. I want to see it passed in one state and let it go through the courts to remove that notion of separation of church and state” (p.15).

Rationale of Homeschool Parents

A statement found in the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma cites that “Unless other means of education are provided,” a parent is allowed numerous choices when selecting the educational system that is best for their child. Kirkpatrick (2004) found that choices available to parents are the public schools in the community, private schools, some with religious affiliations, and others operated by the secular private sector. Some parents choose to teach their children at home.

Some of the parents who have chosen homeschooling as the educational path for their children participated in a survey conducted by the NCES on the prevalence of homeschooling in the U.S. (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). *Homeschooling in the United States: 2003* uses the Parent and Family Involvement Survey of the 2003 NHES to estimate the number and percentage of homeschooled students in the U.S. in 2003, and to describe the characteristics of these students and their families (Princiotta & Bielick).

In the survey, parents viewed a list of possible reasons for choosing to homeschool their children. They were asked to highlight the reasons that applied to them and list them according to their importance. Princiotta and Bielick reported the reasons

most frequently given by the participating homeschool parents. The first reason cited by 85.4% of the respondents was concerns about the environment within schools, which included issues related to safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure. The second reason, cited by 72.3% of the respondents, was the need to provide religious or moral instruction lacking in public schools. Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at public schools was the third reason given by homeschool parents, as cited by 68.2% of the respondents. When reviewing these reasons, it could be assumed that public school systems are failing to adequately provide the three educational areas mentioned by homeschool parents: safety, religion or moral instruction, and academic instruction.

Van Galen (1988) divides homeschoolers into two categories: ideologues and pedagogues. The ideologues say they homeschool their children for two reasons: objection to what they believe was being taught in both public and private schools, and their need to strengthen the values, goals, and relationships that needs to exist within their families. Van Galen's second group, pedagogues, believes in the child's right to develop intellect and creativity, but those developmental stages should be centered around the child's innate desire to learn.

Religious Conviction

Religious conviction was one of the most prominent reasons listed in the 1960s, when homeschool resurfaced in America and there are probably as many different reasons for homeschooling as there are families presently involved in this educational alternative (Talbot, 2001). Talbot states that Raymond and Dorothy Moore, widely known for their involvement in the beginning stages of modern day homeschool exploration, "were religious conservatives who worried that schools undercut the

authority of parents and forced children to face peer pressure before they were able to withstand it” (p. 137). Talbot also posits that the message delivered across the country by the Moores was well received by evangelicals and fundamentalists who were supporters of the Christian right. These followers found a great deal of solace in the ideals fostered through homeschooling ideologies. These believers were grounded in removing the evolutionary theory, and secular humanism. They were strong believers in returning America to the days when education taught children to hold to their families and turn away from anything that implied other values. Conservative Christians knew that it was easy to remove Christian families from the influence and beliefs of pop culture principles if they were given other explicit and comprehensive assignments.

There are some conservative Christian parents who object to religion being taught in the public school. Their objections center around their belief that what would be taught in the public school system would not be relevant to the beliefs to which their family adheres. Head (2005) wrote on the views of conservative Christian activist John D. Morris. Head (2005) wrote that John Morris contended that, at this point in American education, every parent should realize that public school education was not invented to enhance the spiritual life of students. There were, indeed, public school administrators who believed and supported religious principles and moral ideas. Local school boards would even show signs of possessing moral fortitude. However, the national strength of teachers’ organizations has been penetrated with aggressive views and agendas supported by very liberal minded forces. Christian values were traded for those of the influential liberal minded Americans (Head).

Much of the criticism that is presented against public education comes from groups that represent the conservative right in America. Berliner (1996) found that this group includes all races and ethnicities, representatives from all social classes, and is balanced by people from every region in the U.S. The media reports that these Christian Fundamentalists are committed to the right to homeschool their children (Berliner). The mission of the Religious Right is to offer a totally dismal picture of public school education. This conservative force reports academic failure, whether supported by proven facts or simply from insinuation, to the media and during school board meetings. Berliner maintains that the goal of the Religious Right is to cast doubt about public school systems “so completely that another 2 or 4 or 6 percent of the parents of public school children will feel compelled to withdraw their children and enroll them in private or religious schools” (p. 5).

The Christian Right has scrutinized the methods used to teach many of the core subjects offered in public education. Berliner (1996) reports that Christian Right educators believe that mathematics should be taught as a representation of God’s orderly representation in the universe. They believe that the new math taught by public school administrators seeks to undermine faith in God’s absolute values. This teaching is thought to possibly lead to the wasting away of a student’s faith in Christian fundamentals. The Christian right also contends that English is taught so that children can learn how to spread God’s word. They teach English while constructing items similar to the following: Jesus died for (your, you’re) sins (Which of the two are correct?). Themes similar to the sentence above are blended with Christianity and help to communicate a strong message intended by the Religious right. These statements are not far removed

from that which the Religious right contends are injuriously promulgated by public schools (Berliner).

Facts about science are often distorted and poorly taught by those who support the beliefs of the Christian Right. Berliner (1996) reports that an Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) program (1986) defines science as “the search for the principles of God’s creation based upon reproducible experiments.... We should always subject a principle to the test of the Bible” (p. 3). The Christian Right is recognized for the light they choose to shine on situations not to their liking.

Lack of Religious Training

Homeschool advocates have mentioned a lack of religious teachings in public schools. Public school advocates say that, because of the number of different religious and non-religious organizations in America, today’s public education cannot use Federal funds to teach the beliefs of a particular religious organization. Lieberman (1993) says that on every level Americans are becoming heterogeneous. There are definite inequalities between wealthy and low income families. Ethnic groups are becoming involved in all issues regarding the foreign policy employed by the U.S. A mixing of those who are religious, along with those who are not religious, populates communities. Different languages, cultures, and lifestyles now form the forefront of life for the typical American (Lieberman). A growing segment of the population is not able to speak proficient English. The more heterogeneous people are, the more difficult it is for them to agree on educational issues. The more difficult it is to agree on educational issues, the stronger the pressure becomes to move away from a system that is meant to adequately serve the public.

Whether a public school should not concern itself with involvement in religion has been a topic of discussion since the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution was amended in 1791. The first amendment says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” Thomas (2006) reveals, “from 1791 until the present day there has been continual debate about what exactly such a church/state policy entails, particularly because in practice its two provisions can be in conflict” (p. 139). Additionally, Thomas believes that jurists tend to lean toward supporting a position that many of our forefathers seemed to favor. People like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison saw a need for a definite division between church and state. Although this interpretation has been used to solve many debates, it leaves the door open for others to interpret its most direct meaning and causes public schools to choose to separate themselves from religion to avoid court proceedings.

The teaching of the principles of creation in public schools has been supported by those with religious convictions and can cause a public school system to get into the problem of supporting a particular denomination. Those in favor of the teaching of principles of creationism in public schools definitely believe that their proposed mandate is founded and based on religious faith, or the conviction that the Bible’s view of human origin is the true Word of God. Removal of prayer from public schools was another heated topic. The enforcement of this policy has caused public school systems to come under scrutiny. When writing about the effect the removal of prayer had on public education, Head (2005) notes that “it is school prayer, and specifically the Engel case, that clearly divided Americans into two camps: those who favor religion in school, and those who do not” (p. 5).

Conservative Christian parents often urge public schools to go against the Supreme Court ruling and allow school-imposed prayer. This kind of suggestion led by conservative politicians and Christian groups has created conflict for public schools and brought about assaults on its supporters. Head (2005) speaks of two families in Oklahoma in the 1990's whose lives were threatened, and the family pet killed. This was simply because two families in the neighborhood dared to challenge the public school right to hold religious meetings while school was in session. Public schools in America have also been greatly scrutinized for the violence that occurs on their campuses. Many of the violent happenings occurring on public school campuses are from social problems that surfaced in the 1970s. Berliner and Biddle (1995) note that violence and drug abuse have increased over time, and urban centers in America are suffering from decay and poverty among children. This has resulted in educators being forced to work among such problems and increased pressure. The lack of funds available to help fight social issues has caused some public schools to live with programs that are failing.

Morality

Moral development and character building is a concern of homeschool parents. Romanowski (2001) found that some homeschool enthusiasts believe that moral values held dear to the growth and stability of families are not being adequately taught or demonstrated in public schools. It is their concern that the absence of these principles brings on the growth of pop culture within children, and soon those social problems that occur in many American cities could be found within their own families. These problems are portions of the reasoning that caused conservative families to pursue homeschool

education. The parents could openly teach and embrace those moral and spiritual values they deemed necessary for the success of their children.

The moral values of America's public schools have come under scrutiny by homeschool parents. Prior to 1962, the moral values that were being taught in public schools were never questioned. Berliner and Biddle (1995) reported the remarks of William E. Dannemeyer (U. S. House of Representatives, 1991), when he noted that, before 1962, the values of Judeo-Christian ethics were unquestionably having a positive influence on public education. Students believed in the moral and historical values that were part of the inalienable rights they read about every day. The principles of the Ten Commandments formed the backbone of America's laws. The Commandments gave U.S. mandates weight and helped to add substance to individual self-government. This is no longer true, according to Dannemeyer. The moral values, once held so dear by students have been removed from public schools. Consequently, this has cost America a great loss, according to Dannemeyer.

To prove this theory, research would have to compare the methods used to teach values prior to 1962, against today's methods of teaching morality and values, according to Berliner and Biddle (1995). The inferences made by homeschool advocates about the moral values of public school students are groundless. Berliner and Biddle contend that most of America's teachers still believe and support American values. They favor sharing and caring, punctuality, and things like rewarding students for their efforts. Public school teachers express many of these beliefs as they follow their daily lesson plans. Students are still punished for fighting, and believe in working for a living continues to be emphasized as the best way to get those things that are desired in life. Berliner and Biddle

believe that our public schools were “originally conceived, in part, as institutions where social integration was promoted by introducing students to shared moral values. It appears that they still perform this function” (p. 111).

Romanowski (2001) posits that Van Galen’s ideologues have grave contentions about the failure of both public and private schools, and insist that those items found to be lacking in public and private schools must be taught at home under the watchful guidance of parents. All parents want their children to experience success. Ray (2002) confirms this by stressing that all parents, including homeschoolers, want their children to have comprehensive skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Curriculum Control

Parents desire that the fundamental principles that propel the sciences be operable in the minds of their children (Paul, 2002). Additionally, homeschoolers want the responsibility of disbursing the knowledge necessary for attaining the desired academic achievement within the home place. Homeschoolers feel comfortable when teaching and raising their children within the home instead of in strange places surrounded by strange people. Homeschool parents desire an in-depth understanding and involvement in the progress of the child’s academic growth. This growth is thought to be done more creatively and with greater liberty when done around the culture of the child’s family. This is done free from the dominance of the curriculum-controlling hands of local, state and federal government (Paul).

Lack of Confidence in Public Schools

The estrangement homeschool parents have against public schools may hinge on their bewilderment with the public school system. Paul (2002) emphasizes, “Since 1973,

Americans' confidence in public schools has declined sharply. Back then, 58 percent had 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in public schools; by 1999, this had fallen to 36 percent, according to the Gallup Organization" (p. 20). Homeschooled children have scored as well as their public school counterparts on national achievement tests. In some cases, homeschool students have outscored public school children. Being free from the confinement of governmental mandates enables homeschool parents to be more creative in what they teach and how they teach it (Bellarose, 2005).

Safety

Public school violence is causing some parents to look at homeschooling as an alternative choice for educating their children. The number of horrendous acts that America witnesses on public school campuses today attests to the need and desire of parents to teach their children in the safety of their homes (Hargrove, 2001). There has been a definite rise in the number of parents moving toward homeschooling after the Columbine High School incident in Littleton, Colorado during April 1999. This incident was followed by similar occurrences in both Canada and other schools throughout the U.S. (Basham, 2001).

Both parents and students have reported incidents of violence on campus. Mondloch (2000) asserts "a significant portion of school children nationwide fall victim to ongoing assaults by schoolyard bullies, beginning as early as the first grade" (p. 290). These early acts of campus violence cause parents to be fearful of the lack of safety provided on public school campuses. Homeschooling to some parents may seem to be the best alternative for their children. These feelings are just the natural instincts of any concerned parent to protect their children (Ray, 2002).

Violence, Drugs, and Social Problems

Some Americans believe that public schools are the cause of the violence and social problems America faces. Berliner and Biddle (1995) announced that when American industries begin to lose their competitive edge to foreign competitors, when people begin to lose their jobs, and as crime soars to outrageous heights, those living in the midst of those social issues are responsible for their own fate, and the schools in those neighborhoods must realize they have failed in their mission to strengthen students to rise above those social problems. Poverty is one of the sources of violence and social problems in America. The greater the number of citizens affected, the greater the challenge becomes for public schools in the area. Students living in poverty have a more rugged educational agenda than their wealthy, middle-class, or working-class counterparts. The schools from poorer communities suffer as the results of the presence of poverty's accompanying social problems (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Violence and drugs in America have posed many problems in the U.S. These problems have made their way to our public schools, especially urban ghetto schools. Berliner and Biddle (1995) mention that city-centered schools often receive only a fraction of the funding given to schools in suburbia. This lack of equalization among schools causes additional stress on schools that receive the lesser funds because they must spend money to hire specialists who are able to explain away the problems associated with poverty and impoverished lifestyles. Money must instead be spent to fund metal detectors and armed guards who are hired to protect students and teachers from assailants attempting to bring outside problems and philosophies inside public school facilities.

Public School Successes

Many of the facts printed about the poor academic performance of public school students are unfounded and propelled by groups similar to the Christian Right supporters. A study of seventh and eighth graders from 41 nations showed that the students from the U.S. remained average among the nations in academic achievement. Singapore was an overwhelming winner, while Asian nations clearly outscored the U.S. Recently-released twelfth grade data displayed a more depressing picture, but it reported that this data is difficult to understand and needs further study (Berliner & Biddle, 1999). Data can often be interpreted by those who are not informed enough to accurately report or understand the information. Berliner and Biddle reported that the San Diego Union-Tribune found cause to celebrate when they announced that a recent test among 41 countries showed that students from the U.S. were showing some improvement in scores received from academic testing.

The word “average” has been used to describe the achievement of public schools in the U.S. It seems however, that “average” is not a level that many critics of America’s public school education accept. Countries like England, Australia, Sweden, Germany, Canada, Norway, New Zealand, Thailand, Israel, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Scotland and Russia were found to receive the same average scores as students from the U.S. in the area of science (Berliner & Biddle, 1999). Amidst the report of academic failure of the public schools in America produced by homeschool advocates, Rothstein (1993), when speaking of school outcomes since 1965, reported significant gains being made by American students. This rise was attributed to the adoption of higher academic standards and more curricular reforms set into place within the last 15 years. Some of these changes

included the move of conceptual math embellishing arithmetic, and literature replacing the old basic reader. The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* brought about a reform that had already begun to stir educational minds. Since the report was published, a change in the low expectations of teachers to high expectations of working class and minority students has caused a surge in student academic achievement from these groups. Though small, the changes mentioned above have produced improved achievement, especially among minority students.

Berliner and Biddle (1995) believe that America has received inaccurate and biased information about the achievement of students in the public school system. They mentioned the report of the Secretary of Education in the Reagan Administration, William Bennett, who spoke of American education being in the middle of a crisis. Public education was failing. Our youth were not measuring up to other nations and were losing their competitive edge. Many instances have showed that the media take words that are unfounded and print them as truths that establish certain points (Berliner & Biddle). When Secretary Bennett spoke about his findings printed in *A Nation at Risk*, the media printed these remarks as if they were strict truths, in fact, almost biblical truths. Federal government and the business industry were commissioning many of these reports. The majority of these reports spoke to the downward spiral of America's public education, and that the facts that supported this decline were found in the poor academic test results of students from public schools.

Impact of the SAT

Berliner and Biddle (1995) reported that they could not find instances that revealed decreases in student scores, but did see cases where modest gains were being

made in the knowledge of students. There was only one standardized test that reported falling combined test scores, namely, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The SAT test is given to high school seniors, and for many years has required that students answer 138 multiple choice questions, 78 concerned with verbal materials, and 60 focused on mathematics. Unfortunately, it has not examined student awareness of history, the sciences, the arts, humanities, foreign language, social sciences, or other subjects listed among the curriculum made available for high school students.

Additionally, Berliner and Biddle (1995) write that numbers of correct answers are not reported as scores for the SAT, but are transformed, with the help of vague rules, into a scale received by each student for each subtest ranging from 200 to 800 points. This means that scores made on the SAT can range from 400 to 1,600 points. However, this rather large range of scores represents a much smaller number of correct and incorrect answers. In the middle range of the SAT, a difference of one correct or incorrect answer can produce about a ten point difference in the overall SAT score.

The Sandia Report

After the release of Bennett's *A Nation at Risk*, some educational organizations began to question the published announcement of the decay that was occurring in the American public education system. The Department of Energy's Sandia National Laboratories produced one such report (Stedman, 1994). *The Sandia Report* sought to offer "An objective, 'outsiders' look at U.S. education" (Huelskamp, 1993, p. 1). Instead of failure, *The Sandia Report* found a slight to steady improvement in nearly every area of public education that was researched.

Public education has experienced a steady, consistent number of high school students who graduate on time, after entering a 3 or 4-year high school program. Some graduates may require a longer time frame before reaching graduation status. There are dropouts who later choose to return to school and complete the requirements for graduation. This may be done through a night school program or through the General Education Development (GED) testing program. The dropout/retention rate has enabled America to have an overall high school completion rate of young adults of more than 85%. This rate has been found to be among the best in the world and continues to improve (Huelskamp, 1993).

The Sandia Report revealed, however, that the dropout problems within public school systems continue to be more prevalent among minority youth and students attending urban schools. The report also revealed the following:

Nearly 80% of white students complete high school on time, and roughly 88% do so by age 25. Only 70% of black students and 50% of Hispanic students graduate on time. By age 25, roughly 82% of blacks have completed high school, but only 60% of Hispanics have done so. Finally, dropout reports indicate that urban students, regardless of race, drop out at very high rates.

...Recent immigration of undereducated young adults who are beyond high school age is significantly inflating dropout figures for the overall Hispanic population (p. 2).

Improving Scores

Student performance on both the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the SAT has showed steady and improving trends. The NAEP experienced

the most significant increase in basic skills. This statement poses an unclear picture to cloud the many reports that have cited the decline in average SAT scores. *The Sandia Report* emphasized that while the average score made by students from the U.S. has declined since 1960, it is not due to student performance. The reason for this decline is attributed to the fact that more students from the bottom half of the graduating classes are now taking the test. The average percentile score of a student in 1971 has experienced a decline from 79% down to 73%. The desire of more Americans to receive a college education today has caused the average SAT score to lower because of the large numbers of students in the lower quartiles who now take the test. Minority youths continue to score lower on standardized tests, but each minority ethnic group has raised their scores from the low levels recorded 15 years ago.

Impact of Immigration on Achievement

Immigration into the U.S. has played a part in the decrease of scores on standardized tests because the number of immigrants in the 1980s showed a more rapid increase than any other decade except the first decade of the 1900s (Huelskamp, 1993). Projections according to *The Sandia Report* show that even higher escalations were projected for the 1990s. These facts, when combined with the low native-born birthrates, have helped change the demographic makeup of public school classrooms. An estimated 5 million children of immigrants entered the public school system during the 1990s. That means approximately 150 languages were brought into the nationwide public school melting pot. The report concludes by pointing out the need in the U.S. for clarity and agreement on what changes are needed in public education. Strong leadership must guide

these changes. America must find ways to improve the performance of the disadvantaged, minorities, urban students and the ever-growing immigration population (Huelskamp).

Increased Spending on Education

In the area of spending for K-12 systems, *The Sandia Report* indicates that per capita spending increased by roughly 30% per pupil in constant dollars. Unfortunately, little of the increase was spent on “regular” education. A majority of the funds was used for the support of “special” education, insurance, and retirement funds. According to *The Sandia Report*, the constant change that occurs in America’s demographic makeup of its student body has greatly affected future education requirements.

The unequal per capita spending approved by public school boards sometimes brings about violence in America. The presence of this educational inequality feeds the belief that the poor are responsible for their own dilemma. Students who must live this lifestyle every day are usually trapped by its problems, and consequently must attend America’s worst public schools. These same schools often receive the smaller amount of government subsidy. Accompanying this syndrome, the student usually has few opportunities, experiences feelings of being trapped, degradation, self-blame, and often live out their lives involved in crime or violence. These students pay a horrible price because of their impoverished state. When the impoverished student suffers, we all suffer because murder, pillage, drug addiction and all other acts of violence finds its way into the lives of all; the rich, the poor and those placed in between (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Conclusions

Since the idea of school choice has gained popularity, the number of parents choosing to homeschool their children has increased. Princiotta and Bielick (2006)

reports that “the number of students being homeschooled in the United States in the spring of 2003 was 1,096,000, a figure which represents a 29 percent increase from the estimated 850,000 students who were being homeschooled in the spring of 1999” (p. iii). Lines (1993) reported that the United States Government defines homeschooling as “the education of school-aged children at home rather than at a school” (p. 1). Princiotta and Bielick (2006) reported that children are considered as being homeschooled if their parents report them as officially being schooled at home, instead of at some public or private school. The child must not be enrolled in public or private schools more than 25 hours a week, or the child must not be homeschooled because of a temporary illness.

Homeschool parents were typically homogeneous in nature, highly religious, and members of various conservative-based organizations. Basham (2001) posited that “By the mid-1980’s, however most homeschooling parents could be accurately described as part of the Christian Right. Today, 75 percent of American homeschoolers are practicing Christians” (p. 6).

Homeschooling continues to be supported by a large number of those who have joined Religious Right organizations or foster their beliefs. Although diverse reasoning now causes a great mixture of homeschool supporters in the past 10 years, the strength of the group remains with those who are conservative Christians. Although most printed information about homeschool families is scarce, the majority of homeschools in the 1980s and 1990s found their support among conservative, religious expressions of educational matters (Carper, 2000). By keeping their children at home, homeschool parents say they are providing an acceptable religious education that is free from the

horrible influence of secularism and pop culture. They hope to avoid the public school no matter the cost.

Noted educators have addressed objection to the conservative persuasive influence involved in homeschooling. Reich (2002) writes that developing a child's education in the home completely directed by parents represents a triumph over consumer involvement in education. This decisive move by homeschool parents is done so that the world will know that they support the principle purpose that education should serve to please and satisfy the preferences of the consumer. Those offering opposition to homeschooling center their objection around the negativity of customization and the role of a citizen that lives in a democratic society.

In a democratic society, one must recognize the rights and convictions of others. Their religious beliefs may conflict with one's own, but both parties have that right to differ. This is what provides equality. It is true that people can live harmoniously together and differ on issues without denouncing doom on any person whose thoughts are different from their own. This principle must be taught to children. Children must learn how to debate and disagree with others while co-existing in the public sector. These ideas must be carefully taught and well thought-out in advance prior to sharing them with children (Reich, 2002).

There is an inherent danger when parents choose to customize a child's education. When parents choose to remove their children to a homeschool and fine tune the customization process of the child's education down to the tiniest degree, they also choose to ignore democratic principles that make America the country that it is. The homeschool process seems wonderful when looked at it as a consumption item. However,

public schooling is based on developing good citizenship. This process should never be the outcome of the education we offer our children. This process is often called civil peril (Reich, 2002).

Summary

Homeschooling has taken its place among the many avenues and possibilities parents consider when choosing an educational path for their children. The circumstances surrounding the growth and popularity of this educational phenomenon has caused it to be attractive and the answer for a growing number of parents.

Whether it is a conservative mind, a nervous parent who is overly protective of his children, or a parent who found that other circumstances brought about the decision, homeschooling has been placed on the agenda of parents in America. Many things have occurred behind the scenes that have added to the growth and popularity of homeschooling. It is an educational alternative that needs extensive study, continued research, and additional comparative analysis when deciding between public school education and homeschooling.

The following chapter details the methodology used to explore reasons administrators cite when discussion the reasons why parent choose to homeschool, including a descriptions of each of the 15 participants in this focus group study. The procedures for collecting data are summarized, as well as the process used to analyze the collected data. Also included are ethical considerations and disposition of the collected data after the study is completed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to discover the perceptions of public school administrators relative to the inferences made against them when homeschool parents cite their three most prominent reasons for choosing to teach their children at home, as reported by the NCES. The three most prominent reasons were: (a) Concerns about the environment within schools which included issues related to safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure, (b) to provide religious or moral instruction, and (c) dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools.

Research Design

An exploratory case study design was chosen as the research methodology after careful consideration of other possible design, as cited in the following paragraphs. Stake (1995) says that case studies are designed to capture the intricacies of a single case. Usually the case selected for study is of very special interest to someone or some group. The researcher looks for interactive frequencies to occur between participants. Case studies are unusually helpful when analyzing a single case for particular similarities and differences, together with various degrees of complexity that are relevant to the case being studied.

Qualitative research encompasses a wide range of techniques that provide descriptions, translations, and other processes for dealing with meanings (Cooper &

Schindler, 2006). Cooper and Schindler observed that, when collecting data, the researcher may employ focus groups, surveys, individual in-depth interviews, case studies, ethnography, action research, observation, and ground theory. Cooper and Schindler remarked that qualitative studies focus on analysis of the content collected from written or recorded evidence drawn from the participant's expressions, observations of behaviors, or the study of evidence from the physical environment. Fifteen administrators from school districts located in Oklahoma County were purposively selected for the study; consequently, a qualitative focus-group study was deemed to be most appropriate from among the qualitative alternatives available.

Patton (2002) mentions that the purpose of a case study is to bring together comprehensive, in-depth information associated with a given situation. The process of performing the analysis ultimately leads to a finished product termed a case study. A case study can represent the process of analysis, or the product, that results from the analysis. The researcher gathers the information after deciding that a gap in the knowledge calls for the application of a research process. The researcher pulls the information together. The result is known as a case record, a collection of information that ultimately leads to a case study (Cresswell, 2005).

Qualitative research does not look for the fixed answers provided by quantitative research. Instead, qualitative research looks for validity. Cresswell (2005) mentions that qualitative research seeks to know why respondents reply as they do, and how situations may cause the respondent to behave in a given way. One of the methods used to assist the researcher searching for qualitative research through case studies is the use of focus groups wherein groups of subjects come together to talk about a subject that has been

selected for study. They discuss how the situation affects them under varied conditions. A successful focus group depends on the selection of participants that are familiar with the subject being researched. The physical arrangement of the respondents adds to the success of the group and helps to elicit factual unassisted information from the respondents (Hock, 2002). This aspect is reviewed in a section later in this Chapter.

Gibbs (1997) maintains that interviewing focus groups works well when the researcher wishes to obtain data from several respondents about the same topic while in one setting. Gibbs says “the benefit of focus group research includes gaining insights into people’s shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation” (p. 2).

The advantages of focus groups begins with a gathering of respondents who are comfortable and familiar with the research subject and who will act and react in a way that allows the researcher the opportunity for listening, watching, and deducing information quickly and at minimum cost (Gibbs). The expense for doing the same research with each respondent individually would be much higher than the cost of using all respondents at the same time. The respondents will gradually begin to establish lines of communication among each other, as well as with the researcher, or facilitator who may represent the researcher (Kitzinger, 1995).

Setting and Participants

Oklahoma City is the capital and largest city in Oklahoma and ranks 31st in the U.S. in population, which numbered an estimated 1,192,989 in 2007. Oklahoma City was settled in 1889 as part of “The Oklahoma Land Run” when approximately 10,000 homesteaders raced from a starting line and settled in a tent city in what is now downtown Oklahoma

City. Before WWII it was a center for cattle stockyard; however, after the war the major industry turned to oil production. As of the 2000 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), the racial makeup of the city was 68.4 White, 15.4 Black or African American, 3.5 Native American, 3.5 Asian America, and the remaining percentages from other racial groups. Oklahoma City Public Schools (OCPS) are divided into six Regions with approximately 15 schools in each Region. There are also 11 charter schools, as well as numerous suburban school districts that surround the urban OCPS. In addition, there are numerous well-developed private and parochial schools.

Setting for Focus Groups

The setting for the three focus groups was the Fellowship Hall of Oklahoma City's St. John Missionary Baptist Church, which has is a large rectangular area suitable for the site of data collection. Accordion-style folding partitions divide the hall into classrooms. A six-foot walkway runs down the center of the room in an open classroom concept, dividing the hall into 20 classrooms. The décor of the hall is warm with light, earth tone colors. Each classroom area has a folding 8-foot table that accommodates 6 people. Tables were placed in an open square design so all respondents could see and hear clearly.

Each of three focus groups met at a time when only the focus group respondents would occupy the building. The Food Service Supervisor for the facility provided light refreshments for the respondents during a break period that occurred during each session. A 15-minute time frame was allotted for this purpose and the focus group resumed at 8:05 p.m. Each of the three sessions concluded at 9:00 p.m. with closing remarks given by the researcher. Each session included the respondents, the researcher as observer, a

facilitator, a food service person managing light refreshments, a videographer, and a transcriptionist.

Participants

The 15 respondents purposively selected to participate in the three focus groups were public school administrators, or people who retired from administrative positions in public schools located in Oklahoma County, and there was a distributive number of respondents representing middle school and high school grade levels. The grade level they represented and their willingness to participate in this study determined the final participants.

Focus Group A represented a Rural (Fringe) School District (see Chapter One-Definition of Terms) in Northeast Oklahoma County. The National Center for Education Statistics (2005-2006) reported a total of 1,406 enrolled students. Focus Group A was comprised of one superintendent, two elementary principals, a middle school principal, and a high school principal. Descriptive demographic information for Focus Group A follows.

A-1 Superintendent: a female with 35 ½ years of professional association with public education. She worked in the area of school administration for 29 ½ years and served in the position of Superintendent for 13 ½ years.

A-2 Elementary Principal: a male with 17 years of professional association with public education. He worked in the area of school administration for 9 years and has served as Principal for 2 years.

- A-3 Middle School Principal: a female with 28 years of professional association with public education. She worked in the area of school administration for 10 years and has served as Principal for 2 years.
- A-4 High School Principal: a male with 13 years of professional association with public education. He worked in the area of school administration for 8 years and has served as Principal for 7 years.
- A-5 Elementary Assistant Principal: a female with 20 years of professional association with public education. She worked in the area of school administration for 3 years and has served as Assistant Principal for 2 years.

Focus Group B represented a Large City School District (See Chapter One- Definition of Terms) in Oklahoma County. The National Center for Education Statistics (2005-06) reported that the district from which Focus Group B was drawn has a total of 39,884 students. Focus Group B was comprised of a superintendent, two elementary principals, a middle school principal and a high school principal. Demographic information for Focus Group B follows.

- B-1 Superintendent: A retired female with 58 years of professional association with public education. She has worked in the area of school administration for 37 years and served as Superintendent for 12 years. Now retired, she works as Superintendent for a private, religious elementary school.
- B-2 Middle School Principal: A male with 27 years of professional association with public education. He has worked in the area of school administration for 14 years and served as Principal for 7 years.

- B-3 Elementary Principal: A male with 40 years of professional association with public education. He has worked in the area of school administration for 31 years and served as Principal for 22 years.
- B-4 High School Principal: A female with 30 years of professional association with public education. She has worked in the area of school administration for 31 years and served as Principal for 25 years. She entered a new area of administration last year when she became one of the Regional Executive Director's for this district.
- B-5 Assistant Elementary Principal: A female with 17 years of professional association with public education. She has worked in the area of school administration for 7 years and served as Assistant Principal for 7 years.

Focus Group C represented a Rural (Fringe) School District (See Chapter One-Definition of Terms) in Oklahoma County. The National Center for Education Statistics (2005-06) stated that the district from which Focus Group C was drawn has 1,079 students. Focus Group C was comprised of a superintendent, two elementary principals, a middle school principal and a high school principal. Demographic information for Focus Group C follows:

- C-1 Superintendent: A male with 34 years of professional association with public education. He has worked in the area of school administration for 24 years and has served as Superintendent for 9 years.
- C-2 Assistant Elementary Principal: A male with 9 years of professional association with public education. He has worked in the area of school administration for 4 years and has served as Assistant Principal for 4 years.

- C-3 Elementary Principal: A female with 20 years of professional association with public education. She has worked in the area of school administration for 13+ years and has served as Principal for 13 years.
- C-4 High School Principal: A male with 12 years of professional association with public education. He has worked in the area of school administration for 8 years and has served as Principal for 8 years.
- C-5 Middle School Principal: A female with 30 years of professional association with public education. She has worked in the area of school administration for 11 years and has served Principal for 11 years.

Ethical Assurance

Although discussion was not necessarily sensitive information; participant responses will be kept confidential. As shown in the previous section, a numeric identifier was assigned to participants to ensure the anonymity of their responses throughout the research process. The initial contact email noted in the Procedure section of this chapter clearly indicated that the researcher would maintain participant anonymity indefinitely.

Cozby (2004) stated, “Ethical concerns are paramount when planning, conducting, and evaluating research” (p. 35). Education incorporates a workforce whose elements include years of service, number of co-workers, employment status, race, age, gender, and union or non-union membership. Each of these variables contributes to different perceptions of circumstances in education (Cozby),

This study complied with Oklahoma State University’s ethical guidelines and presented minimal risk to participants as it contained neither experimental treatment of

the participants nor exposure to physical or psychological harm. Care was taken to ensure that the participants fully understood the nature of the study and the fact that participation was voluntary. No sanctions were applied if participants declined or withdrew from the study. No information regarding participation of any individual will be communicated to the school districts where they work or have worked in the past. Confidentiality of data will be maintained indefinitely, and identification of participants or the schools where they work or worked was not available during the study, and will not be available after the fact. These conditions were communicated to all participants at the start of the survey. As with all research with human subjects, the Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before the study was conducted.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research principles assist researchers in collecting data from individuals who are experiencing a phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). The object of qualitative research is exploratory, and subsequently, the researcher's role is investigative. This researcher has been associated with homeschooling and its effects for 18 years, a requirement for validity (van Manen, 1990). The researcher must be one with a tolerance for ambiguity, must possess an investigative nature, have sensitivity to personal prejudices, must be a good communicator, and have some knowledge of the subject matter under study (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher taught at the elementary level in the Oklahoma City Public School System from 1969 to 1975. In 1975, the researcher became the full-time Minister of Music at a large church in Oklahoma City. The church opened a private pre-school-through-sixth-grade Christian School Program in 1990. The researcher watched the growth of the

church's private school and saw the school become a popular alternative to public school education. School choice received a great deal of support from the church, including homeschooling, which became another alternative to public school education.

As interest in homeschooling increased, the researcher began to read articles written by homeschool advocates. The literature written in support of homeschooling by parents spoke of the accomplishments homeschoolers were experiencing from homeschool. Some school choice advocates pronounced the end of public school education in America. After reading the survey presented by NCES, and Princiotta and Bielick (2006) reported the reasons homeschool parents listed for choosing to homeschool their children, the researcher felt that the reasons given by homeschool parents were inferences and allegations aimed primarily at public school education. The researcher wondered why public school administrators were not speaking out against the inferences and allegations of failure.

To supplement interest in homeschooling, the researcher observed the Oklahoma City High School Homeschool Choir and the Oklahoma City Middle School Homeschool Choir during their regular rehearsal. Both choirs were outstanding and presented a well-balanced, wholesome sound. On May 19, 2006, the researcher attended the high school graduation of 83 homeschool seniors who had completed all requirements for graduation as stated by the Oklahoma Department of Education. Parents Assisting Teachers (PAT), a local homeschool advocacy group, sponsored the graduation.

Procedure

Approval for the use of human subjects was obtained from Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board. To obtain a list of potential participants, the

researcher called several Superintendents in one of Oklahoma City's five school Regions and asked them to recommend educators who might be interested in participating in the study. The final list contained 40 potential participants. A letter inviting participation in the study was mailed to each potential participant (Appendix B), and upon acceptance of the invitation, a consent letter was obtained (Appendix C) from a purposive sample of 15 educators.

The facilitator for all sessions was a professor from a university within Oklahoma County. This facilitator has over 30 years of professional affiliation with public education. Additionally, on many occasions the facilitator has been invited to numerous academic settings to offer similar facilitative services. A letter of consent from the facilitator will be found in Appendix D. In addition, a letter of consent was obtained from the videographer, the transcriptionist, and a food service personal, and will be found in Appendices E through G. The three focus group sessions were held in the Fellowship Hall of St. John Missionary Baptist Church located in northeast Oklahoma City. Use of the facility is under the purview of the researcher, and consequently no letter of consent for use was required.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in May, 2008 to review the applicability of the questions, and the efficacy of the procedure. Two participants, drawn from the list of participants provided by school Superintendents, were the subjects of the pilot study. The study last 1.2 hours, after which small modifications were made to perfect the protocol. Pilot testing a protocol was required because no amount of intellectual exercise can substitute for testing a procedure or the questions contained within that procedure

(Cresswell, 2005). The pilot study was used to ensure the clarity, user-friendliness, wording, and meaning of the discussion questions. The pilot study had two major objectives. The first objective was to administer the questionnaire to a small sample to refine the questions, as well as the observation and recording procedures. The pilot study assisted the researcher to refine the testing procedures and questionnaire items for content and validity. The second objective was to initiate preliminary data analysis to determine the effectiveness of the resolution of data.

Main Study

After initial phone discussion with participants, all agreed that sessions would meet during school time concurrently on June 3, 4, and 5, 2008, from 10 a.m. to noon. Each session concluded with lunch. The researcher assembled three separate focus groups with the makeup evenly distributed to represent a cross section of those who agreed to participate. Each focus group session was comprised of five respondents: one superintendent, one high school principal, one middle school principal, and two elementary principals.

When the focus groups were assembled on the designated day and time, the researcher opened the session with general remarks and introductions. A cassette recording and a video recording were made of each session. The researcher used the cassette and video recording to review and assess conclusions drawn from the responses of the respondents. After analysis of the collected data, the video recordings will be secured in the researcher's safe deposit box for a period of 3 years so that the confidentiality of the respondents are maintained, after which they will be destroyed.

A copy of the survey listing the reasons homeschool parents in the U.S. give for teaching their children at home (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006) was given to the respondents prior to the meeting of the focus group. A copy of the discussion questions was also given to the respondents prior to the focus group sessions. Each session began with the researcher introducing the facilitator and others in the room such as the videographer, the transcriptionist, and a food preparation person. The researcher gave a brief statement about how homeschooling would be defined for the purposes of the discussion within the focus group session, the reasons for choosing to research the subject, and an explanation of the problem statement. The method of response was discussed and the researcher answered questions from the respondents. Coffee, tea, and bottled water were available when the respondents arrived. They were encouraged to select from the refreshments available as they take their seats.

Each focus group session followed the same procedure. Because of the researcher's concern for protecting the confidentiality of each respondent, place cards marked the seating arrangement of the respondents, as opposed to a name card. A place card showed the pseudonym assigned to each respondent. Respondents were assigned according to the numerical identified mentioned in a previous section of this chapter. An information packet was placed at each seat containing a note pad and pen. After introductions were made the facilitator distributed the demographic survey (Appendix H) and asked for its return, after which the discussion questions were addressed (Appendix I). The discussion protocol for each of the three focus groups sessions was designed with 13 open-ended questions (Appendix I). The facilitator periodically made clarifications or re-directed questions when necessary. Questions were

asked in an informal manner. The facilitator read the question and allowed open discussion from the respondents.

Data Analysis

During the three focus group sessions, the researcher made field notes that identified speakers, together with personal comments that might be needed for the summarization process at the end of the session. Field notes also contained any main ideas, inflections, or reflections that come to the mind of the researcher. After the focus group session concluded, the researcher had the cassette recording from the session transcribed for the purpose of reviewing and writing the results. A transcriptionist was present during the focus group session to ensure that vital information was understood and to reduce the chance of error. Krueger (2006) mentions the following errors that can occur with case study discussions:

- (a) Errors of omission (something is left out).
- (b) Errors of misinterpretation (wrong word is transcribed—“hi” versus “high).
- (c) Errors due to missing names of respondents or incorrect identification of respondents (thereby limiting our ability to detect how many different people responded).
- (d) Errors due to assuming that all statements had equal verbal emphasis.

Krueger (2006) also makes several suggestions about the design of the transcript. He suggests that the transcriptionist type everything that is said, not just main themes. Additionally, Krueger mentions that the researcher should use a transcript design that identifies the comments of the facilitator and keeps those comments identifiable in some discriminating manner. Attaching names to the transcript can prove to be difficult and can

violate the confidentiality of some participants (Krueger). A spot check for accuracy often reveals some discrepancies that need to be corrected. Krueger suggests reading the document aloud while listening to the audio recording to ensure accuracy. When studying the responses made by participants, the researcher should note voice inflections as well as facial and body language (Krueger).

At the conclusion of each focus group session, a transcript of the session was produced following the suggestions of Krueger (2006). The researcher sent a copy of the transcript to each focus group respondent and requested that they check for accuracy or misunderstandings. After the respondents approved the transcript, the researcher assigned a coding method that matched each question the research seeks to answer with the responses made by the respondents. Patton (2002) believes that “developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis” (p. 463).

As the process of analysis continues, the researcher deduced apparent similarities and differences according to suggestions cited by Krueger. The researcher looked for patterns or categories that came together and pointed the way to answers. The analysis process must reflect the purpose of the study and understanding of the lens being used for analyzing the collected data from each focus group session. This requires the researcher to be “open to and reeducated by things he didn’t know about or expect to find” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

The researcher determined what Miles and Huberman (1994) labeled as pattern codes. These codes are not words, but are emerging themes, inferences, and patterns that come from the focus group. These patterns were assigned a “word name” that enabled the researcher to group similar concepts and ideas, as well as refer back to the items as the

data analysis continued. As the data began to fit into various pattern codes, the researcher began to see a mental display emerge that caused theories to develop.

The display of collected data led the researcher to begin to ask “why” of statements made by the respondents. Why do public administrators believe a certain way? Why did the response of respondents to a question seem so overwhelmingly similar? Miles and Huberman (1994) contend the following:

Assumptions have a driving, controlling quality. The first chain assumes that explanations are to be found at the individual level; the second assumes that causes are economic and probably political. And there is a terrifying multitude of possible answers to any ‘why’ question (p. 143).

As the researcher continued to review the data collected from the respondents, conclusions began to emerge (Miles & Huberman, 1994), who observed that “Analytic, summarizing text can be written by cycling back as needed to the written-up field notes for amplification and clarification” (p. 149). The drawing of conclusions results from two approaches to building causal networks: the inductive approach and the deductive approach.

In the inductive approach, the researcher finds recurrent information and recurrent relations. The restricted themes emerge as a result of the application of the inductive ability of the researcher as the data are reviewed with regularity. Ideas begin to cluster together. The deductive approach occurs when the researcher starts with some preconceived theories and ideas and begins to narrow down the ideas until definite causal networks are apparent. Miles and Huberman (1994) state “Pattern codes get extended into memos and then into initial attempts to pull coded data and memos together in the interim

case summary” (p. 156). The researcher is now constructing a logical chain of evidence that leads to final conclusions. Predictions can begin to occur soon after.

As the researcher moves toward final conclusions, it became necessary to construct a case-ordered effects matrix. This occurred when the researcher separated the various statements by “degrees of the major cause being studied, and shows the diverse effects for each case. The effects may be clustered or categorized to help understanding. The focus is on outcomes, dependent variables” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 209). This method allowed the researcher to see how statements had similar effects on the contrast and comparison of public schools when weighted against homeschooling. Through inductive thinking, the researcher began to see continued replication of themes that pointed to predictions and conclusions. This process can lead to a causal chain of thought that will bring about conclusive answers to the research.

The researcher was aware that there may be no matter-of-fact, factual, or literal answers at times. Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to such findings as metaphors when working toward a conclusion in the analysis process. Metaphors “involve comparing two things via their similarities and ignoring their differences” (p. 250). This process also assists in reducing data that is not needed for reaching conclusions. Additionally, Miles and Huberman mention that metaphors help the researcher see pattern-making devices. Like patterns can bring about conclusions. Metaphors show de-centering devices that enable the researcher to move from the great wealth of information collected and to central themes and conclusions. Metaphors help the researcher connect findings to theory.

Miles and Huberman (1994), state that the researcher must move from metaphors and interrelations to constructs and from there to theories. There must be conformity of groups of ideas. The researcher begins to confirm conclusions, always mindful of analytic bias. Miles and Huberman mention three types of bias:

1. Holistic fallacy: interpreting events as more patterned and congruent than they really are.
2. Elite bias: overweighting data from articulate, well-informed, usually high-status informants and under representing data from less articulate, lower-status ones.
3. Going native: losing your perspective or your “bracketing” ability, being co-opted into the perceptions and explanations of local informants.

Triangulation is another method that can be used when confirming findings. This method is “supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 266).

Through triangulation, the researcher can possibly get corroboration of findings coming from different sources. This process may cause the researcher to go back to respondents individually to gain or dismiss inconclusive theories and findings.

Research should always work toward credibility and usefulness. There must never be moments when the researcher will manipulate or distort the data simply to satisfy personal whims. Neutrality must be present in order to certify credibility. The goal of the researcher is to “understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered” (Patton, 2002).

Validity and Reliability

Validity is viewed as the extent to which researchers and instruments are effective in employing measurement methods that only capture the precise data being sought (Richards, 1999). Neuman (2005) observed that researchers desire to ensure that measures are both reliable and valid to confirm credibility (truthfulness). Richards (1999) observed that validity represents the truth and authenticity of the results by ensuring that the correct process, from selection of appropriate population through reliable evaluation of the data, is applied. Validity is discussed from two perspectives: internal and external validity (Richards).

Internal validity is the measure of certainty that study results were produced by the research process, and not from other factors (Richards, 1999). Neuman (2005) viewed internal validity as a confirmation of the correctness of the study design, and this aspect of validity is employed to ensure no alternative explanations or errors within the study exist. *External validity* is the extent to which the results of the study can be expected to reflect similar outcomes in other populations, and therefore, be useful for other studies (Richards). Neuman's explanation is simple and pragmatic, that is, external validity is the ability of the study to be extrapolated from the population and setting used in the study to additional research in other settings and other populations with similar results.

Ensuring consistent measurement, by ensuring each respondent in the sample responds to the same set of questions, is called *reliability* (Fowler, 2004). One way to ensure reliability is to use words that have universal meaning to various cultural groups and educational levels. One challenge in reviewing research literature lies in discriminating the study's validity and reliability. Creswell (2005) states that validity

refers to the extent the increment of measurement truthfully measures what it is intended to measure. Reliability refers to infinite duplicability of the data (Creswell, 2005). Babbie (2003) defines reliability as the capability of the research conclusions to be replicated in a different setting. Because this study is qualitative, using focus groups, the purpose was not to test a theory, but rather to gain a rich appreciative understanding of the homeschooling phenomenon (Farber, 2005). This study's distinctiveness may be valuable to the body of education in the areas of public schooling, and the findings may have generalizability to other settings as well.

In this qualitative focus group study, themes and patterns were isolated to describe, explore, and understand public school systems from administrators' perspectives. Consequently, this qualitative study used methods such as triangulation to determine and compare the merit of the results. The validation of the results at the end will be shared with the study's participants to determine if conclusions drawn were congruent with identified perspectives.

Five dimensions highlight internal validity, which include credibility, meaning, importance, transferability, and implications of the conclusions (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). These five areas allow researchers to demonstrate findings logically concerning the data collected. The internal validity of the study may yield conclusions and recommendations that are already identified in the literature. The outcome findings may yield reasons why parents, from the perspectives of identified administrators, seek to homeschool.

Summary

The current research study employed a focus group case study qualitative methodology to explore themes administrators believe cause parents to place children in homeschooling. The data was collected employing video- and tape-recorded focus group discussions. Fifteen participants divided into three focus groups of five participants each were employed to collect data. Analysis was performed employing assessment of the words employed by participants to describe their thinking. The study may yield data that will assist school administrators to better understand the phenomena of homeschooling by parents. The following chapter summarizes the collected data and the statistical treatment of it. All relevant results will be noted. Implications, speculation, assessment, evaluation, or interpretation of the results will be found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study using focus groups as a data collection tool was to investigate and identify key themes and perceptions of 15 administrators regarding their experience with homeschooling students and parents in Oklahoma County.

Participants in the study had an opportunity to provide their perceptions regarding the causes and problems associated with homeschooling. This approach assisted in the investigation of education administrator's perceptions of parents' reasons for placing their children in homeschooling, and in the effort to expand insight and current understanding of homeschooling decisions. The objective of the study was to develop discussion questions and present the findings to establish perceptions about homeschooling choices.

The participants were members of the public school community who are (or have been) superintendents and principals. Participants were selected because of their outstanding educational reputations in the community and their availability. A pilot study was conducted before the study began using potential respondents in order to provide an evaluation of the demographic and open-ended questions. Open-ended Question 1 was revised upon the pilot study's recommendations to reflect a well-known situation, the

Columbine High School Massacre of 1999, which would bring about additional discussion.

Findings

The first component of the study was a demographic survey to establish the background of the participants. A demographic survey was used to collect data pertinent to background and education of participants. Of the 15 participants (N=15), 46% were males and 54% were female. Twenty percent (3) were Superintendents (20%), 60% were Principals (9) and 20% (3) were Assistant Principals. One hundred percent were administrators. Forty percent had 30 or more years in education, 27% had 20-29 years of experience in education, 27% had 10-19 years of experience in education, and 6% had less than 10 years in educational experience. Of the 15 participants, 73% (11) had prior experience with homeschool students or parents, and 27% (4) had no experience with homeschooling. The ethnic breakdown was represented in the following manner: of the 15 participants, 40% (6) were of African American descent and 60% (9) were of European descent.

The second component of the study involved 13 open-ended questions. Respondents were seated around two 8-foot tables that had been pulled together. Each session started with the facilitator reviewing information that had previously been approved by the respondents. The facilitator reminded the respondents that discussion questions were open-ended and would prove to be most beneficial when each respondent freely voiced their opinions. Prior to the session, each respondent received a copy of the discussion questions (Appendix I). Each respondent used a pseudonym for identification purposes, as did the facilitator.

Textual Description

Discussion questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 were designed to elicit answers to Research Question 1: How do public school administrators perceive the environment of public schools relative to the issues of safety, drugs, and peer pressure?

Discussion Question 1

The safety of public schools in America has been the subject of national news stories since the Columbine High School incident, on April 20, 1999. More recent campus incidents of seizure and mass murder have been headlines among the media, as well. The National Center for Educational Statistics released its most recent survey results collected from homeschool parents. Listed among the reasons for homeschooling is parental concern for the environment that exists in public schools. Examples given were safety, drugs, and peer pressure. Can you elaborate?

Respondent A-1 opened the discussion by saying the following, “we want safer, drug free, bully free, violent free schools and communities as well as our homes, but to expect our schools to be any safer than our homes may not be as realistic as we would want them to be.” The respondent also mentioned, “there have been reports of homes being invaded while the dwellers were inside; uninvited intruders have murdered family members as they sat in their own homes; and, homes may not provide an environment that keeps a child at a more safe advantage than public schools.”

Additionally, A-1 reminded the group “most of the incidents in our schools and on our school campuses came from the outside. They are trespassers on our campuses.” A-1 believed that sometimes incidents started away from the school grounds and are brought by trespassers and outside students onto school property. A-1 also commented

that, “The same things that can happen in the schools can happen at home or in the communities.” A-3 brought to the attention of the group that, “safety must come from our neighborhoods; we must feel safe at the mall or in a movie; and, we should feel safe wherever our families spend time.”

Respondent A-4 agreed with A-1 and added the belief that school campuses are relatively safe. A-4 mentioned, “We go through an extensive amount of training and an extensive amount of communication with our communities and our parents in order to ensure the safety of our schools.”

Respondent A-2 stated the following, “there is more to school issues and problems than may be detected. Those issues also reach out into society, as well. Society has reversed its stand on several issues. They have changed from their past beliefs. Video games, movies, and television have altered society’s minds from determining acceptable behavior. A-5 added the following, “Schools are just a fabric of our society. We want safety in our homes and we want safety in our society.”

B-1 began by reminding the group that “concern for school safety began long before the Columbine High School incident.” The truth is, said B-1, “Parents have to train their children and administrators have to join in that training...whatever happens in public schools is an outgrowth of what’s happening in the community. Our children do not come from the schools, they come from the community, and if you clean up the community, we’ll have better schools.”

B-2 complimented their public school system for “having certain security devices installed in schools that check and scan those who enter the school buildings. There are programs that help work on the emotional stability of students in the area of bullying and

building up those students found to have low self esteem; counseling being one positive aspect.” B-2 also mentioned “we must look at our culture and get parents and children to buy into the support of our schools.” B-2 confirmed the statement again by saying that “this school district is doing a good job of preparing students to be able to compete in a global society.”

B-4 believed that sensationalism from the media has caused some parents to turn away from public schools. Specifically, B-4 said, “When we look at clear pictures of what goes on in our public schools, if there’s a choice that day between a child getting an award or doing community service and a child bringing a weapon or drugs to school, the media would rather portray the drug story or the weapon story.”

“The other elements children grow-up around plays a great role in the child’s development,” said B-5. B-5 also mentioned “elements like the movies and theaters or any public facility can possibly expose one to unsightly problems. You cannot hide from the public they are with us no matter where we go. Homes school parents must understand that they cannot remain inside the house all of their lives. Some public facilities or not as secure as our public school facilities.”

C-4 started by reminding the group that “public schools are open, public places and it’s tough to completely lock down public areas where all outside elements are avoided. “Most times, drugs and negative peer pressure come from outside the school building and is often brought into the school by outsiders.” Because of the open public school concept it’s much tougher to alleviate every issue that may arise in public school,” said C-4.

C-4 also said, “The wide number of school choices that are available means, there are kids who are going to excel in every one of the areas of school choice, no matter what happens. It is up to the parents to determine which choice is best for their child.”

C-3 commented “because of the lack of government regulations and mandates handed down that concerns those who are choosing homeschool teaching, it’s hard to know who is homeschooling and what is being taught to them. It is also difficult to ascertain the success of their teaching.”

C-1 stated, “because public schools are sometimes left without help from the government in solving some of the problems; things can escalate beyond control. When asking the State Superintendent for assistance in solving some issues, the answer given was, ‘Deal with it!’ We even went to the District Attorney and there’s really not much support for solving discipline problems that was offered from his office, as well.”

Discussion Questions 2 and 3

What program and policies are in place that assure a parent of their child’s safety, exposure to drug related problems and protection from negative peer pressure while attending public schools? Are the aforementioned solutions experiencing success? If not, what are your recommendations?

A-1 initiated the discussion by stating, “We have a drug free policy. We have a policy that relates to student behavior that identifies those expectations. There are about 30 or 40 of those items. We have a gang free school policy; one that addresses weapons. We are required by the State to have a safe schools committee. We have a policy that addresses sexual harassment. We have our campus resource officers. There are two officers on our campus who are provided by the County Sheriff’s Department.”

A-5 and A-3 mentioned that “open lines of communication between students and the school, between students, parents and teachers offer a great deal toward maintaining a safe environment free from drugs, negative peer pressure and other related problems. Rapid responses to reported incidences have contributed to the safe atmosphere that exists on school campuses.”

A-1 said, “As with any program or policy, the effectiveness of those policies and programs are as good as the people. We must recognize that we can improve by applying continuous training, monitoring the implementation and the application of other policies. We must make sure that everyone is consistent and that they’re fair as we implement the programs and policies.” A-4 agreed with this statement.

The facilitator congratulated the administrators from this school district for their handling of the press during times of crises. A-3 mentioned that, “negative things will occur in schools but a number of positive things also occur. Those positive occurrences seemingly don’t affect the public like the negative issues play into the minds of the media. The information provided by students (sometimes called tips) help squelch potential problems has played an important role in maintaining safe schools.”

B-2 mentioned the creation of a “Safe Schools Committee” and “Safe Schools Plan” had proven to be successful. B-2 said the following, “Working with parents and educators have enabled the school to be proactive before things might happen rather than reactive after things happen. Teaching children the appropriate behavior at various events has scored positive points, as well. Public schools are constantly under scrutiny from outsiders.”

B-5 brought up the success of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). B-5 said, “The media is always invited to attend D.A.R.E. awards assemblies and programs. However, most times the media does not respond to these positive gestures. Other programs like Risk Watch and peer tutoring programs have experienced success. Mentoring programs and partnership with the Child Advocacy Program have been used to accomplish positive results in our school system.”

B-2 introduced professional development as a program that has been implemented in the district. B-2 commented that, “This strengthens staff members in areas like behavior and classroom management. We have the responsibility to do all we can to provide adequately for all students who attend our public schools.”

C-1 recalled several programs that had success with drugs and bullying problems. “School Board policies and State policies regarding bullying and peer pressure problems have helped us.” C-4 believes, “the number one defense against these problems is the cooperation of parents.” Also mentioned was the Key Club, which is a branch of the Kiwanis Club. The Key Club is the high school branch of Kiwanis.

Open conversation transmitted between administrators, students and parents has been a tremendous help in squashing potential problems. C-1 recalled “the positive influence of guidance counselors and the Character Education program.”

Many of the respondents mentioned one of the best methods of prevention and control has been “supervision of premises by adults, including parents.” C-1 said, “Occasionally, a drug dog is brought in unannounced to peruse the students and the building. This procedure is more of a deterrent than an improvement.”

C-4 stated, “because of the culture that permeates the area, drinking is a problem among students. Many of the parents drink and consequently don’t necessarily see the potential harm that can be done to the students. There has been a law passed that communities have the right to impose sanctions on parents that provide alcohol for minors.”

Although these solutions are experiencing success, C-3 said, “When the budgets begin to run low and money is drained, many choice programs, although helpful, are the first to be cut from the budget. The high cost of gas is causing the system to re-think the funding of many of our helpful programs.”

Discussion Question 4

What other issues should be addressed in the areas of safety, drugs and peer pressure in public schools?

A-2 expressed the importance of parental involvement within the school system. “This helps provide a safe public school campus. When parental involvement is down, unsafe conditions on public school campuses become more prevalent.” Federal law also is needed to assist in maintaining school safety. A-1 specifically mentioned “the need for federal government to require parents to become more involved in school attendance.” A-5 suggested the following, ‘federal and state laws could also assist public schools by determining if some of the parents who are choosing homeschooling are qualified to teach their children in all of the required subjects.’

B-4 said “understanding how drugs work is most important when you talk about the public school. We’ve got children doing drugs for two reasons; one of them is to make money. They’re drug dealers and you know fast money is a great thing. It’s hard

when you're that young not to want to have a lot of money in your pocket. The other child is trying to escape from whatever the issues are that they're going through. These students have a dependency on drugs. We must educate everyone about these issues Suspend the drug dealer and develop treatment and programs that helps those children who have dependencies.”

Discussion Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 were designed to elicit responses that would answer Research Question 2: How do public school administrators perceive the moral atmosphere within the public schools, including any allowed religious instruction?

Discussion Question 5

How far reaching is governmental involvement or intervention when planning programs and policies that develop the moral and spiritual attitude of public school students?

A-2 began the conversation by emphasizing that, “public school administrators must set aside their own beliefs and Christian values when working with students on a public school campus. Because of the Federal Government’s mandate about prayer not being permitted on public school campuses, it then becomes the administrator’s job to respect and uphold that policy.” The elimination of prayer has brought the creation of problems. A-4 contended “we grew up with moral and spiritual values in our homes. To come to school and find some of those values being removed could possibly be the cause of some of the decay homeschool parents mentioned in the survey published by the NCES.

A-2 believed, “It helps for religious leaders to meet with administrators when they are asked to speak to students on public school campuses.” Information can be shared

concerning the perimeters in which they find themselves when offering a prayer or spiritual message.

B-1 believed that ‘governmental involvement is too heavy for public schools.’ She said, “The government is coming down with too many rules. I don’t think anybody is smart enough to write rules and regulations for public school education for all the various communities that we serve throughout this country. I think that’s ludicrous. It has never worked, and it’s not working now. I just believe that the government should say, based on your allocation of students or whatever, you get X number of dollars and at the end of the year, you give us a report on how well you’ve done. Let me write my own plan.”

B-4 declared “many administrators and teachers have disregarded the exclusion of prayer from their public schools situations when prayer is needed or appropriate. Each administrator must set the standards for morality that he expects.”

C-1 began by discussing a book whose title is similar to “America-To Pray or Not to Pray.” This author believes (and C-1 concurs) that when America began to remove prayer from schools, around 1962, that was also the time that test scores began to go down, moral decay in schools and in the United States began to surface. C-1 said, “The moral and spiritual attitudes in school have gone down.” C-1 also mentioned “the moments of silent reflection is bringing some structure back into public schools.”

C-4 said that a class entitled Biblical Literature is being taught in their curriculum. C-4 said, “It just focuses on the role of the Bible and its influence on literature. It’s not about spirituality in any way. It is looking at the Bible from a literary point of view.” C-4 said, “The Purpose of government intervention is to make sure the school system keeps individual spiritual views and acts away from public school exposure.”

C-3 said, “At the elementary level, teaching right from wrong is a daily process.” C-3 also mentioned that “with new teachers, an administrator has to make sure of what and how that teacher views morality and spirituality and consequently how they choose to approach the subject. Some teachers support Christian beliefs and have not had any problems. Each year the Nativity Scene is used during the Christmas season and Christmas carols have been sung. The only issue that has been problematic has been the stand of the Jehovah Witnesses. They simply ask that their children not be held accountable or required to participate in religious observances or ceremonies. The culture that dominates the community helps keep peace on certain moral and religious issues that the government tries to control. Administrators must know their communities.”

Discussion Question 6

What programs and policies are in place that are structured to develop the moral and spiritual attitude of public school students?

Discussion Question 7

Are the aforementioned programs and policies experiencing success? If not, what are your recommendations?

Discussion Question 8

What other issues should be addressed in the areas of moral atmosphere and religious instruction in public schools?

A-3, A-4 and A-5 talked about the use of Character Education in schools has helped to develop good moral character within students. They said, “Our country will never be able to remove prayer and sacred beliefs from children because of the statement, ‘In God We Trust’ along with the reciting of our ‘Pledge of Allegiance.’”

A-5 mentioned, “The elimination of prayer and religious beliefs is bringing about the positive development of tolerance of others and their right to think differently than the majority around us.” A-3 and A-1 suggested that the use of programs like the study of Kwanzaa principles, Tolbert’s Habits and the Eight Habits of the Heart can become a positive substitute for those religious principles the government removed. Other programs that have been used to teach moral and spiritual beliefs and moral character building have been the Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs.

A-1 believed that “continual focus on positive issues found within the school district can have the greatest rewards of moral growth and spiritual development.” Emphasis on the successful work done by grandparents who are raising their own grandchildren is a good example of this; publish more positive information through newspaper articles and school papers was also suggested.

B-4 said, “The achievements made when using Character Education to develop positive morals had been enormously successful. B-3 suggested, “using a minute of silence that allows everyone in the public school building to express his or her spiritual alignment.” B-4 said, “The student has to decide what he or she will do with that moment. They must decide whether to pray or just maintain silence during the moment.”

B-2 talked about the wide use of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and the “Youth Alive” program when wrestling with this federally mandated issue. B-2 said, “School chaplains have been instrumental when there was a need for counseling with school sports team and the like. A Student Code of Ethics can be quite useful when groups similar to those who believe in satanic rituals are present on school campuses.”

B-3 said, “All of the programs just mentioned have enjoyed success within our school system.”

C-1 stated, “Unofficially, the district has stopped hiding behind this. We do pray at ball games... At any time we’re called about this, we could lose our federal funding for our school but we’re going to continue until such that comes about.” C-1 also believes that “the silent majority (as he calls them) appreciates the district’s stand on the subject.”

C-3 stated, “We still use corporal punishment. That is a big factor in moral decision-making. It is an avenue that most parents have left wide open. Some parents give their permission to apply this when necessary. Some parents have even requested it. An administrator must know and understand the culture and mindset of the community they serve.”

Evidently, these methods are experiencing success because the district continues to have a waiting list of parents move into the community who want to enroll their children in our rural setting. When parents ask what does your school offer, C-3 says he tells them the following, “We’re a Christian based community. The church is a major part of this community and its surroundings, and you’ll see that prevalent in the schools indirectly not directly because we don’t teach that. But you will see that we still have little Vacation Bible School Choirs at the end of school. And, you know, not everybody does that, but we still do that.” C-1 stated, “Gideon’s Bibles are now freely passed out to all school children.” When ask by the Facilitator if these programs are experiencing success, C-3 said, “Yes, Exactly!”

Discussion questions 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 were designed to ascertain the answer to Research Question 3: How do public school administrators perceive the quality of instruction and academic learning in the public schools?

Discussion Question 9

Some parents say that public schools are not promoting academic achievement. Therefore, many parents have removed their children from public school systems and have chosen to teach them at home. How would you respond to this perception?

A-1 suggested, “Parents should choose to stay and work with those charged with this allegation instead of removing their children from the school. Public schools should be held accountable for what is done under their administration.” A-3 shared an incident where a parent who had removed her children from public school and later returned them to the public school was asked about this discussion question. The parent said, “Academically, we were on top.” Socially the parent said, her “children lost many of the social skills that had been developed while attending public schools.”

A-1 believed that “homeschool children do well on national tests like the ACT and SAT because the parents use the tests as their priority-teaching tool.” This is called teaching to the test. A-5 mentioned, “The public school is the balancing agent in the child’s education. The public school makes sure the child has a good balance of academic success as well as well-groomed social skills, as well. Our teachers continually receive professional development training and are exposed to other services that enable them to offer the best instruction possible, both academically and socially.”

B-5 began this discussion by commending this school system for “offering a balanced education for children. Education is more than just academics. There are other

factors that make a well-rounded child. Isolation at home is not going to give homeschoolers this balance. The socialization and emotional skills will lack development.”

B-1 thought the public schools might not be doing a good job of letting the public know what our public schools have to offer. She mentions the use of a program known as “PASSKEY that targets specific areas where the student is struggling.” B-5 says that, “more than any other time before, administrators are making sure teachers are highly qualified and have achieved the credentials to cope with today’s students.”

B-3 maintained, “The success of public schools is seen when students who have been taken out of public school in favor of homeschooling are brought back.” B-2 said, “When they come back, they have not progressed like the children who remained in public schools.”

B-1 stated the following, “I just want you to remember that the public schools are still turning out most of the doctors, lawyers, politicians, astronauts, computer whiz kids, as well as administrators; and they’re doing very well, they’re running this country and doing quite well.”

Several of the administrators said they stand on the premise that they have never met a public school administrator that wanted a child to fail in the area of academic achievement. However, C-1 said, “The ills of this society are also found within our children. They bring their problems to school and then our money is spent on deputy resource officers, and extra counseling. The more money we spend to deal with society’s ills, the less money we have for academic achievement; for classroom teachers having more enhanced teaching tools. We suffer from a lack of funding.”

C-1 said “parents should know that public schools cannot take it on themselves anymore to fail a student. It has to be consensual with the parent.” C-3 said, “On the elementary level the biggest reason for the failure of children is the inadequacy of parents.” An example was given of a parent being angry about the grades of the child. It was determined that the teacher was adequately presenting the information to the child. The problem was personality and/or expectations of the parents. C-1 reminded the respondents “he had never seen a parent homeschool a troubled or special needs student in the 34 years of his working in public schools. They prefer to send them to public schools. When a homeschooled child returns to the public school setting and joins in with 19 or 20 classmates, they usually become disruptive and fall short of being able to achieve adequate socialization skills.”

Discussion Question 10

The mother of a 13-year-old boy came to school to talk with counselors about her son’s failing grades. The counselor mentioned the possibility of expulsion to the mother. After looking at her options, the mother chose to homeschool. Homeschool advocates believe that a homeschooled child gets the close attention that a teacher charged with 25 or more students simply cannot give. What are your feelings about this statement?

A-1 said, “The biggest problem in the statement is that the counselor was totally out of line with the suggestion of the possibility of expulsion. The success of a teacher is not determined by the teacher/pupil ratio. It is more greatly determined by the knowledge and resources developed by the teacher.” Parental input and involvement was also

encouraged. There is a role both parents, teacher and child must play in order to attain success.

All respondents immediately expressed strong criticism of the words spoken to the mother by the counselor. Expulsion should not have been mentioned in any case. A child should not be removed from school but an administrator solely because he is failing academically.

B-1 believed that “mothers sometimes have a hard time accepting the fact that their child may have a learning difficulty or disability. It is more bearable for them to place the blame on the classroom or the administrators.” B-2 suggested, “more time should have been spent examining reasons why the child was not achieving academically. The school, the parent and the child must discover how to jointly work together in order to achieve success.”

B-3 declared, “Teachers in this school system are highly qualified and if the State mandates a student/teacher ratio of 25 to 1, the teachers will be able to cope with the decision.” B-4 said, “In 2008, on any given day there are not 25 children in a classroom.”

C-4 said that “the one-on-one teaching method that is inferred by the statement is true but there are other things to look into: things like the social and interaction skills children must develop. These traits are best developed during the time when children learn to work, play and interact with each other during class time. Students have different ability levels and different personalities.”

C-3 and C-4 agreed that some of the high level math and science courses cannot be taught by parents who have no prior training in the subject matter. All respondents

agreed that the information given to the parent by the counselor was not correct. A student should never be sent home solely because of failing grades. C-4 added, “The most an administrator can do is to “suspend the child for the remaining semester or maybe this semester and all of the next; which isn’t even a year.”

Discussion Question 11

What do most recent test results indicate about public school students on national tests (i.e. SAT, ACAT, PSAT)?

A-1 mentioned, “Test scores are not the only indication of the academic achievement of a child. We must combine their test scores with other indicators. It is recommended that a student take these tests several times prior to their senior year. Test preparation offered by the school and other available outlets will also help to prepare the child for better test results.” A-5 suggested, “Parental teaching that informs parents about various aspects of successful testing results could improve the test scores of their children.”

B-2, B-3 and B-4 all agreed that the large amount of scholarships that are presented to graduating seniors from public high schools attests to the successful academic achievement that is going on in this school system, today. B-2 expresses concern that “those working with our students begin to integrate terminology that is being found on academic tests with the everyday teaching and exposure to which the children are exposed.” B-2 stated, “We have found that when we really targeted vocabulary and power words into our children’s studies, they do a lot better on standardized tests.” B-4 mentioned, “We must acquaint students with how scores from standardized tests affect their entrance into college.”

C-3 said, “Schools in Oklahoma are running the gamut of score results. Some schools continue to be listed on the improvement list which means that the scores are not meeting the standards laid down by state educators. Other schools are showing a sturdy increase among student’s test scores. If they want to look specifically at our school, they’re going to find that our students typically do well on national as well as criterion efforts testing. They’re above average; they’ve maintained that through out the history of the school and testing is not a big dilemma in our school district. We’re very seldom worried about being on the improvement list.” C-4 stated “our school district does well on the SAT scores and scores a little lower on the ACT test.”

Discussion Question 12

It seems that public school students are having the greatest amount of difficulty in the subject areas of mathematics and science. What is being done to strengthen the academic achievement in those areas? Are those plans proving to be successful?

A-3 mentioned the success they are having with a program called “double-dose scheduling.” An example of this occurs when a ninth grade student is enrolled in Algebra I. In order to strengthen the student in Algebra I, the student is also enrolled in a foundation class that will help strengthen the student’s mathematical skills.

A-1 said, “The school district is looking at restructuring childhood education. Some suggestions included starting earlier, teacher training and professional development. They are looking at ways to integrate math in a number of subject areas.” Hands-on teaching will always prove to be successful, as well. Using the world around the student to strengthen math and science skills is another successful tool, other respondents added.

A-4 mentioned he had successful results “when outside people were brought into the classroom as special guest teachers and lecturers. Bring a partner from outside. Look into someone from a university or an engineering firm. Utilizing the Army Core of Engineers has also been successful.”

A-3 mentioned the success of, “the use of bringing teams of math teachers together on weekends to dialogue about successful ventures they have taken-on individually. These ideas have gone on to experience success with other teachers in the team. The collaboration of teachers talking about the possibilities of students and projects has proven to be successful.” A-4 mentioned talking with the National Council Team of Magnetics for additional success. A-2 related successful cohesion with the Oklahoma National Guard and Will Rogers Airport. 5th grade students were sent to these locales for a five-session workshop.

B-2 said, “Their State Math scores are not up to State average. The Borger Math program enabled us to make a lot of progress. PASSKEY has strengthened us, as well. The students seemed to make greater progress when they are involved with technology that has been integrated into the curriculum. Professional development has strengthened our teachers in the subject area.”

B-2 also mentioned “switching to gender core classes has brought about increase in scores. Females, based on research, have always scored higher than males. Because we have the online results back from our CRT, the males are right up there with the girls. Next year we will have a collaborative competency period built into secondary schools where teachers will work together everyday in order to reach collaborative competency of students.”

C-1 said, “There is a shortage of quality math and science teachers. When competing with the salaries of businesses, computer companies and the like, the public school cannot compete. The better, higher-level teachers are constantly moving to better paying positions. We’re limited right out of the gate as far as quality math and science teachers for every public school in Oklahoma plus every grade level.”

C-3 reported, “We attend job fairs at the University of Central Oklahoma looking for high quality new teachers. We look for secondary level teachers because they teach all levels. We are looking for those teachers who are able to teach math and science and bring about enjoyment and understanding of the subject matter at the same time.”

C-4 mentioned, “public schools are finding that not all students will be able to take on the higher-level courses. Some students will do better in “consumer math, balancing a checkbook and understanding compound interest.” The struggle with science has to do with the facility and learning those process skills. Students are usually more interested in science than math. Students are more easily motivated to engage in a scientific learning process.”

Discussion Question 13

What other issues should be addressed in the areas of quality of instruction and academic learning in public schools?

A-4 suggested that we should “start looking into higher order thinking as we plan the coming years for our student’s education. Mathematics and science are critical components of high order thinking.” A-3 says, “The responsibility of planning for our students rest on the shoulders of the administration.”

B-1 believed (and B-4 agrees) that “the day will come when we will benefit from moving away from large, monstrously impressive structures and find that our school situations will be better when we take those buildings and make two or three smaller school buildings out of them.” B-2 talked about the belief that “when you downsize the larger buildings, you take away some of the intimidating factors that freshmen experience when they walk into a large high school building for the first time. Parents, administrators and students must learn how to connect through the various transitional advances from one grade and one level to the next.”

B-5 stated “the method of collaboration among levels and among teachers is proving to bring success to all. Since this school system has started this vertical alignment across grade levels, the person below and the person above can easily conference together.”

All of the respondents were quite dismayed by the lack of accountability that governs those parents who choose to teach their children at home. C-1 said, “There actually is not much clarification of the teaching skills or accomplishments of the parents until the parent decides, for one reason or the other, they must return their child to the public school setting. It is then that the work that is done or not done comes to the surface and the public school system has to accept the child and gradually move the child back into the mainstream of the grade level.”

C-4 believed, “in order for public schools to continue to be prepared for the lack of work done by homeschool parents, they must continue to become involved in professional development within the ranks of public school teachers. Additional development in the area of altercation development programs for each district needs to be

strengthened. There needs to be more money to fund professional development programs. C-3 mentioned, “Another goal of public education must be the retention of good teachers. Public schools must find ways to stop the flight of good teachers.”

Themes of Significance

All 15 participants stated that the three public school districts they represent were committed to the education of every student who is enrolled in their district. The superintendents of each school district spoke about the size and location of their districts. Despite the formal nature of the structure of each district, all respondents spoke of the family like atmosphere and relationships that existed across the district. This contributed to the betterment of students, faculty, and staff.

The majority of the respondents expressed their tremendous respect for the leadership of their Superintendent and for the strategic planning that had taken place over the last few years or even more recently. All who mentioned the planning that had taken place also mentioned the democratic atmosphere that existed under their Superintendent’s time in office. Additionally, it was stated that this process has allowed for the input of other staff members in developing the goals and success of their district. The Superintendent’s commended their administrative teams for their involvement. Their involvement provided an adequate and satisfactory school system for the children in their district. Each Superintendent agreed that the work of administrators never ends; it is an ongoing process.

Theme One: Public Involvement and Place in the Community

Three sub-themes make up the structure of Theme One: The Public. The first sub-theme is, “Safety in Homes Versus Safety in Public Facilities.” The respondents stated

that a child is just as safe in a public school as when attending a movie, a church outing or shopping in a shopping center. Public facilities are expressly built to encompass the needs of everyone: if you are a living being, you are part of what is recognized as the public. Twenty-six percent of the 15 respondents commented on this theme.

Respondent	Comment
A-1	We want safer, drug free, bully free, violent free schools and communities as well as our homes, but to expect our schools to be any safer than our homes may not be as realistic as we would want them to be.
B-5	Elements like the movies and theaters or any public facility can possibly expose one to unsightly problems.
C-4	Public schools are open, public places and it's tough to completely lock down public areas where all outside elements are avoided. Most times, drugs and negative peer pressure come from outside the school building and is often brought into the school by outsiders.

The second sub-theme is, "The Source of the Problem." The respondents agreed that students find potential problems that develop then cause problems when they start to attend public schools. Some of the sources of these problems are found at home while others are in the neighborhoods in which children spend time. Children are derivatives of their homes and surroundings. Twenty percent of the respondents commented on this sub-theme. Examples of comments include:

Respondent	Comment
A-1	Most of the incidents in our schools and on our school campuses came

	from the outside. They are trespassers on our campuses. Sometimes incidents started away from the school grounds and are brought by trespassers and outside students onto school property.
B-1	Whatever happens in public schools is an outgrowth of what’s happening in the community. Our children do not come from the schools. They come from the community, and if you clean up the community, we’ll have better schools.

The third sub theme is, “Influence of Culture and Society.” Some respondents believe that the culture in which we live and the society around us plants the seeds that contributes to the success or failure of children. Our ethnic culture and the accepted rules and regulations of our immediate society are great determinants, as well. Thirty-three percent of the respondents commented on this sub theme. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
A-2	There is more to school issues and problems than may be detected. Those issues also reach out into society, as well. Society has reversed its stand on several issues. They have changed from their past beliefs. Video games, movies, and television have altered society’s minds from determining acceptable behavior.

B-2	We must look at our culture and get parents and children to buy into the support of our schools...this school is doing a good job of preparing students to be able to compete in a global society.
A-5	Schools are just a fabric of our society. We want safety in our homes and we want safety in our society.
C-4	Because of the culture that permeates the area, drinking is a problem among students. Many of the parents drink and consequently don't necessarily see the potential harm that can be done to the students.
C-1	The ills of this society are also found within our children. They bring their problems to school and then our money is spent on deputy resource officers and extra counseling. The more money we spend to deal with society's ills, the less money we have for academic achievement; for classroom teachers have more enhanced teaching tools. We suffer from a lack of

	funding.
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Theme One: “Public Involvement and Place in the Community” establishes the belief of respondents that there are problems in public schools just as are found in any public facility. Most of these problems did not begin in public schools but came to the school from many other resources. A total of 86% of the respondents supported this theme (some respondents commented more than once on one of the three sub-themes that made up Theme One).

Theme Two: Involvement of Parents

The involvement of parents is said by respondents to be crucial to the child’s successful venture in public school. Parental involvement is a key issue in each of the three research questions that propels this research. Sixty percent of the respondents commented on theme two (some respondents commented more than once on theme two).

Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
A-2	Parental involvement helps provide a safe public school campus. When parental involvement is down, unsafe conditions on public school campuses become more prevalent.
C-4	The wide number of school choices that are available means, there are kids who are

	going to excel in every one of the areas of school choice, no matter what happens. It is up to the parents to determine which choice is best for their child.
A-5 and A-3	Open lines of communication between students and the school, between students, parents and teachers offer a great deal toward maintaining a safe environment free from drugs, negative peer pressure and other related problems.
C-4	The number one defense against these problems is the cooperation of parents.
A-1	Parental input and involvement is encouraged.
A-1	There is a role both parents, teacher and child must play in order to attain success.

All 15 respondents pronounced doom on any program, whether it is public school or any other educational choice that fails to have parental involvement in the child's education.

Theme Three: Success or Failure and the Needs of Public Schools

Theme Three received the largest amount of comments from the respondents. The respondents voiced support and approval for 95% of the programs that have been

introduced into public schools. These programs range from in-house planning and implementation to successful programs brought into the school from parents and community organizations. All respondents offered comments while discussing Theme Three. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comment
A-1 and A-4	As with any program or policy, the effectiveness of those policies and programs are as good as the people. We must recognize that we can improve by applying continuous training, monitoring the implementation and the application of other policies. We must make sure that everyone is consistent and that they're fair as we implement the programs and policies.
B-2	Complimented the district he represents for having certain security devices installed in schools that check and scan those who enter the school buildings.
C-1	School Board policies and State policies regarding bullying and peer pressure problems have helped us.
B-2	The Safe Schools Committee and the Safe

	Schools Plan have proven to be successful.
C-1, A-3, A-4, and A-5	Gave highest commendation to the Character Education program in their schools.
C-3	When the budgets begin to run low and money is drained, many choice programs, although helpful, are the first to be cut from the budget.
A-3	Negative things will occur in schools but a number of positive things also occur. Those positive occurrences seemingly don't affect the public like the negative issues play into the minds of the media.
B-5	The media is always invited to attend D.A.R.E. awards assemblies and programs. However, most times the media does not respond to these positive gestures.
B-1	Public schools might not be doing a good job of letting the public know what our public schools have to offer.

The opinion of the 15 respondents is that their school districts are providing excellent programs that are producing favorable results. However, there are areas that need additional attention.

Theme Four: Work the Government Needs to Do

All levels of government were encouraged by the respondents to strengthen their involvement and in public school education. Sixty percent of the respondents offered comments in this area. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
C-3	Because of the lack of government regulations and mandates handed down that concerns those who are homeschool teaching, it's hard to know who is homeschooling and what is being taught to them. It is also difficult to ascertain the success of their teaching.
A-5	Federal and State laws could also assist public schools by determining if some of the parents who are choosing homeschooling are qualified to teach their children in all of the required subjects.
C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, C-5	All five respondents were amazed by the lack of accountability the government requires of parents who are homeschooling.

Respondents continued to question the lack of control and accountability required by the government of those parents who homeschool their children. Two respondents asked for laws that support public school administrators who daily deal with attendance and disciplinary problems.

Theme Five: Moral, Spiritual and Religious Issues in Public Schools

Three sub-themes represent Theme Five. Sub-theme one is, “Administrators Involvement.” Thirty-three percent of the respondents offered a variety of statements about the role of religion, prayer, and morale issues play in the curriculum and daily planning structure of students in their district. Comments of the respondents indicated that the three districts approach this sub-theme differently. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
A-2	Public school administrators must set aside their own beliefs and Christian values when working with students on a public school campus. Because of the Federal Government’s law on prayer not being permitted in official public school programs, it then becomes the administrator’s job to respect and uphold that policy.
A-1	Continual focus on positive issues found within the school district can have the

	greatest rewards of moral growth and spiritual development.
C-1	Unofficially, the district has stopped hiding behind this. We do pray at ball games...At any time we're called about this, we could lose our federal funding for our school but we're going to continue until such time that comes about
B-4	Many administrators and teachers have disregarded the exclusion of prayer from their public school situations when prayer is needed or appropriate. Each administrator must set the standards for morality that he expects.

Sub-theme two of Theme Five is “Successful Programs.” Sixty percent of the respondents commented on the success of programs used to develop moral and spiritual values in their school districts. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
B-4	The Achievements made when using Character Education to develop positive morals has been enormously successful.
A-3, A-1	Have used the principles of Kwanzaa,

	Tolbert’s Habits, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts as good moral development tools.
B-2	Talked about the wide use of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and the Youth Alive program when wrestling with government-mandated decisions.
C-3	At the elementary level, teaching right from wrong is a daily process.
B-3, C-1	The moment of silent reflection is bringing some structure back into public schools.

The third sub-theme of Theme Five is, “Effects of the Elimination of Prayer.” All participants saw negative affects from the removal of prayer from public school programs. Thirty-three percent of the respondents commented. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
C-1	When America began to remove prayer from schools, around 1962, that was also the time that test scores began to go down, moral decay in schools and in the United States began to surface. The moral and spiritual attitudes in schools have gone

	down.
C-4	The purpose of government intervention is to make sure the school system keeps individual spiritual views and acts away from public school exposure.
A-5	The elimination of prayer and religious beliefs is bringing about the positive development of tolerance of others and their right to think differently than the majority around us.

Theme Six: Administrators and Academic Achievement

Theme six identified the success and additional needs administrators found within public school education. Respondents stated they believe that homeschooling a child will not necessarily improve the academic achievement of a child. There is a definite difference of opinion on the importance placed on academic achievement and the best way to handle the subject between homeschool parents and public school administrators.

Two sub-themes represent Theme Six. Sub-theme one of Theme Six is, “The Success of Academic Achievement in Public Schools.” All of the respondents commented on this sub-theme. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
A-5	The public school is the balancing agent in the child’s education. The public school

	<p>makes sure the child has a good balance of academic success as well as well-groomed social skills, as well. Our teachers continually receive professional development training and are exposed to other services that enable them to offer the best instruction possible, both academically and socially.</p>
B-3	<p>Teachers in this school system are highly qualified and if the State mandates a student/teacher ratio of 25 to 1, the teachers will be able to cope with the decision.</p>
B-2, B-3 and B-4	<p>All agreed that the large amount of scholarships that are presented to graduating seniors from public high schools attests to the successful academic achievement that is going on in this school system, today.</p>
All Respondents	<p>Said they stand on the premise that they have never met a public school administrator that wanted a child to fail in the area of academic achievement.</p>
C-1	<p>I have never seen a parent homeschool a</p>

	<p>troubled or special needs student in the 34 years of working in public schools. They prefer to send them to public schools.</p> <p>When a homeschooled child returns to the public school setting and joins in with 19 or 20 classmates, they usually become disruptive and fall short of being able to achieve adequate socialization skills.</p>
C-4	<p>Our school district does well on the SAT scores and scores a little lower on the ACT test.</p>

The second sub-theme of Theme Six: Administrators and Academic Achievement is, “Academic Needs that will Strengthen Public Schools.” Forty-six percent of the respondents offered numerous comments regarding what is needed to strengthen the academic achievement of students in their district. Examples of comments include:

Respondents	Comments
A-1	<p>Test scores are not the only indication of the academic achievement of a child. We must combine their test scores with other indicators. It is recommended that a student take these tests several times prior to their senior year.</p>

A-5	Parental teaching that informs parents about various aspects of successful testing results could improve the test scores of their children.
C-1	There is a shortage of quality math and science teachers. When competing with the salaries of businesses, computer companies and the like, the public school cannot compete. The better, higher-level teachers are constantly moving to better paying positions.
C-3	Another goal of public education must be the retention of good teachers. Public schools must find ways to stop the flight of good teachers.

Outlier: A Theory about Size of Buildings

Two comments were made relative to downsizing the design of new school buildings so that students don't feel loss when they enter for the first time. Examples of comments are:

Respondents	Comments
B-1	The day will come when we will benefit from moving away from large, monstrosly

	impressive structures and find that our school situations will be better when we take those buildings and make two or three smaller school buildings out of them.
B-2	When you downsize the larger buildings, you take away some of the intimidating factors that freshmen experience when they walk into a large high school building for the first time.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study using focus groups was to examine and categorize key themes and patterns of the assessment and comments of public school administrators representing three public school districts located in Oklahoma County. The respondents discussed their assessment of comments made by homeschool parents relative to reasons for choosing to homeschool their children. Public school administrators were intentionally selected to serve as the sampling group because they represent public schools located Oklahoma County, which has been greatly affected by the statements and allegations made by homeschool parents. Participants in this study had an opportunity to provide insight into the allegations expressed about public school education, as well as give an account of what the public school is doing to refute these alleged inferences.

The study employed the principles that, according to Lincoln and Guba (as

cited in Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2001) must include orientation and overview, focused exploration, and confirmation and closure to assist with data collection, coding, synthesis, and analysis. Adherence to these rigorous steps enhances the significance of the study. Data coded from the administrative group reflected the need to understand that public schools serve the public. Respondents inferred that it is easy to remove a child from public exposure when the parent attempts to protect the child from those things that can happen in public situations. The question discussed by most respondents is “How does the child function when he can no longer live in the cocoon-like protection of a home environment.”

According to participating respondents, a large percentage of drug related problems, cases of bullying, problems from peer pressure incidents and safety issues come from outside public schools. They are created at home (or around the home), and then transported into public schools. The respondents believe that the majority of public schools are coping with these outside forces and doing as much as the government and the public will allow toward alleviating the intrusion of these outside forces.

The removal of prayer from public schools has not been accepted as a positive mandate from federal government. Since it has been mandated, the respondents believe that public schools must adhere to it. The enforcement of the law however, has not been wholeheartedly enforced and the head of each public school district determines the degree of acceptance or non-acceptance. The study of religions in the world has been introduced on some public school campuses but the majority of districts use religiously based organizations and programs to promote religious principles.

Respondents believe that a lack of financial support is the missing ingredient in solidifying academic excellence and improvement. When so much is required in order to eliminate the flow of outsiders into public school facilities, and when the lack of salaries causes public school teachers to look toward business opportunities and outside resources to provide adequate/lucrative salaries, the academic achievement of public school education sorely suffers.

Conclusions

Chapter 4 presented the data collected in the study. Findings suggested that there is a disparity between perceptions of homeschool parents and those of public school administrators regarding the success and/or failure of public education. Public school administrators continue to play a key role in determining how the public perceives the pre-mature announcement of the failure of America's public education programs. An absence of parental involvement, an absence of financial support and an unclear definition of the role the public must play in order to successfully teach today's children is a multilateral responsibility of every citizen. A child taken away from the public school education program and taught in a homeschool atmosphere will probably miss the opportunity to learn the art of survival, the joy of sharing and the possibilities that living our lives in coexistence requires. It is a venture that requires further assessment and the assurance that the total needs of the child is being adequately provided. As of today, public school administrators assert there is no certainty of this being done when parents choose to homeschool their child.

Public school administrators recommended the following: (1) that parents fully comprehend the source of those problems that have been linked with public school

education; (2) that parents become totally involved in the school their child attends; 3) that adequate funding be a priority in all phases of public school education; (4) that those programs currently experiencing success in public education be allowed to continue and develop to their fullest capabilities; (5) that each school district decide how to implement the use of prayer on their campuses or remove the mandate on removal of prayer from public school campuses; (6) that academic achievement, while being a priority of public school education, not become the sole method of determining the success of today's children; (7) that more funds be devoted to keeping high level teachers in public schools. The following chapter presents the conclusions, implications, significance, and recommendations of the research findings. Potential beneficiaries, need for future leadership research, and lessons learned are discussed.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 introduced the findings of three focus group sessions comprised of 15 respondents who represented three public school districts located in Oklahoma County. The respondents commented on statements made by homeschool parents relative to the three most significant reasons they listed for choosing to homeschool their children. Six themes with underlying sub-themes were derived from the comments made by the 15 respondents. Examples of comments made by the respondents illustrating the themes and sub-themes were also given. Chapter 4 ended with conclusions and summaries of the themes and sub-themes.

Chapter 5 suggests implications and delineates recommendations. This chapter outlines an abstract of the research findings and highlights (a) overview of study findings, (b) interpretations of the open-ended questions, (c) implications, (d) an evaluation of diverse responses, (f) proposal for additional research studies, (g) organizational recommendations, (h) and limitations of the present study. Chapter 5 closes with a synopsis of the study and closing statements.

Overview of Study Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of public school administrators and the three most prominent reasons homeschool parents list for choosing

to teach their children at home, as reported by NCES. These reasons are (a) concerns about the environment within schools which included issues related to safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure, (b) to provide religious or moral instruction, and (c) dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools. There was a definite difference in the opinion of the two educational choices: homeschool and public school. Regarding the participants in this study, homeschool parents asserted that public schools were not adequately providing for students in the three most significant areas of their concern. Public school administrators believe they are providing adequately for children in the three areas. This research adds to the small amount of literature available that provides comments from public school administrators about the three areas mentioned above.

Focus group research can be most useful when the respondents are encouraged to talk about a particular subject of research (Hock, 2002). The focus groups in this research represented different types of public schools. Focus Group “A” was a rural school thriving off of a community in the Northeast area of Oklahoma County. All of the schools in this district are gathered under one campus location so that the administrators find it convenient for communication and control of the campus. Focus Group “B” was the largest of the groups and represented a vast number of students and school buildings scattered in varied directions across Oklahoma County. The school system had recently been involved in controversy stemming from the removal of the school superintendent after a few months in office. Focus Group “C” came from a small rural community in far Northeast Oklahoma County that has existed for many years as an organization strongly supported by the surrounding residents from that community.

This research focused on studying conditions and responses of public school administrators to three areas of concern mentioned by homeschool parents. In this study, public schools, like all public schools, come under the scrutiny of local, state and federal government and therefore face compliance on key issues that do not apply to homeschool parents. These mandates are usually put in place to protect the public.

The public can include all residents who live and function in an area as members of that community, area, city, or county. The effects of governmental mandates emphasize the strength of its presence when set in place to protect the people who make up the public. When comparing the students involved in public schools with the matched controls of those who choose to homeschool, governmental involvement takes something quite simple and inserts major limitations and control. Listed below are collected thoughts on the three research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1: How do school administrators perceive the environment of public schools relative to the issues of safety, drugs, and negative peer pressure?

In this study there is probably not one public school administrator or teacher who desires that any student attending a public school system fail to succeed. While admittedly, there are problems with safety, drugs, and negative peer pressure found within public school buildings, these problems did not begin inside those buildings. The participating respondents emphasized that children don't come to school and then learn to be disruptive, to cause safety problems, peer pressure or drug problems. Instead of placing the blame for these issues on public schools, it may be more exact to look at the culture and neighborhoods from which the child was reared.

To take a child out of public schools because of the belief that problems like drugs, negative peer pressure, and a lack of safe environment are created and harvested inside public schools is absurd, according to respondents. A parent must compare a public school with the likes of a local place of worship, a shopping center, a movie or amusement park. All of these are public places that one visits within a reasonable amount of time. These places cannot be totally locked down. They were created for public use, meaning to be used by citizens from the community or neighborhood. What would a local place of worship do if all the doors and windows were fastened from the inside, making it all but impossible for worshippers to enter? This research found that public places are created to serve the people and locked doors would mean the purpose of the building could not be carried out. Schools are as safe as neighborhoods, homes, or communities; all are public places we visit. There have been incidents of problems created by deranged members occurring during church services and other religious gatherings.

The respondents emphasized that children don't come from schools; they come from homes and communities. By the time a child reaches school age, a portion of the child's personality, desires, abilities and responses have been set and the school receives the child with the attributes already being cultivated. Society and culture plays a role in helping to determine these attributes, proclaimed the respondents. When we allow these attributes to foster within our homes, the school cannot be blamed for how they manifest themselves upon arriving at school. What we believe, what we accept from our children at home, how our children respond to the authority of parents while at home greatly determines their actions at school. Most occurrences in schools and on our campuses started outside the campus.

This study suggested that parents join with school administrators and teachers and assist with the child's growth and development. One of the greatest defenses against problems is parental involvement. Keep the lines of communication open and flowing between the school and the parents. Isolation from other students does not solve the problem; instead, new problems tend to surface. A lack of socialization skills develops when we remove a child from the joy of daily growth and interaction with other children in public schools.

Respondents all agreed that there are many things in place within our public schools that helps maintain a safe environment free of negative peer pressure, drug problems and violence. Administrators believe that their schools are adequately safe and the atmosphere is conducive for learning. Some middle schools and high schools have installed metal detectors to assist in keeping people away who would attempt to bring guns and other devices into school buildings. Other schools have policemen on duty patrolling the campus. Occasionally, a drug dog is brought in unannounced to peruse the students and the building. This procedure is more of a deterrent than an improvement.

Improvements are also being accomplished by applying continuous training and monitoring of staff through exposure to professional development programs. The media has been asked to assist in conveying to the public those positive achievements that continuously happen on school campuses. Government assistance that strengthens the role of school administrators is greatly needed.

Research Question 2: How do public school administrators perceive the moral atmosphere within public schools, including any allowed religious instruction?

For public schools to be successful, the respondents in this study recommended that public school administrators and teachers put aside their own religious preferences in favor of those policies, and procedures mandated by the government and public school systems. The most formidable foe of public school education, however, surfaced with the elimination of prayer from public schools. One public school administrator said, “We grew up with moral and spiritual values in our homes. To come to school and find some of those values being removed could possibly be the cause of some of the decay homeschool parents mentioned in the survey published by the NCES.” Some administrators choose to disregard the exclusion of prayer and take a chance on losing governmental funding that is based on adherence to the policy. This decision is based on the belief that the dismissal of prayer from public schools has been partially responsible for the decline in test scores and moral decay in schools and in the U.S.

Some public schools have not endorsed or entertained the idea of the removal of prayer from programs according to the respondents in this study. For those school districts it becomes necessary to make sure those from the community that will bring the prayer or offer religiously based statements are given guidelines. The guidelines will make them aware of statements that could arouse concern and possibly governmental intervention. Additionally, the respondents commented that creating moments of meditation and silence have proven to be instrumental in providing time for those on the public school campus who desire time for prayer and reflection.

While schools cannot teach religious beliefs, the study of religions of the world can be taught, said some of the respondents. Schools have begun to include classes like Bible Literature in the curriculum. This class focuses on the role of the Bible and its

influence on literature. It looks at the Bible from a literary point of view. Other programs that are experiencing success in developing positive moral views are Character Education programs, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), Youth Alive Program, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Risk Watch.

Research Question 3: How do public school administrators perceive the quality of instruction and academic learning in public schools?

This study emphasized that parents should choose to work with public school administrators and teachers instead of removing their child from the school.

Homeschooled children do well on standardized tests because homeschool parents use these tests as their priority-teaching tool. They teach to the test. The respondents declared that tests are important in the child's growth and development but there is more to development than academics. The public school is a good balancing agent in the child's education. Public schools make sure there is a balance of academic success as well as well-groomed social skills. This enables the child to be well balanced socially as well as academically.

This study insisted that public schools must do a better job of letting the public know about the academic success that happens on the campus. Applaud the students and let them know their work did not go unnoticed. When children experience moments of success, creating ways of commending them for their achievements causes them to be eager for other positive moments.

Respondents agreed that students should be taught the inner secrets of making better test scores. Parents and students should be told that it is better to begin taking standardized achievement tests early in their high school career and continue testing prior

to their senior year. When children receive unfavorable academic scores, parents should work alongside administrators and teachers to understand where is the underlying problem and how is that problem best solved. Some parents, respondents believe, have a problem accepting the fact that their child may have a learning difficulty or disability. The school, the parent and the child must discover how to jointly work together in order to achieve more favorable results.

It seems that American students have the largest amount of difficulty understanding higher-level math and science classes, insisted some respondents. This is partially due to the continued exit of the better teachers from the school system into more lucrative positions. We must be able to maintain excellent higher-level math and science teachers. Schools in Oklahoma are running the gamut of score results. Parents must also understand that all students will not be able to take on the higher-level courses. Some students will do better in classes that develop skills in consumer math, balancing a checkbook or understanding compound interest.

Many public schools continue to be listed on the need improvement list. This list indicates those schools whose scores are not meeting the standards laid down by state educators. Other schools are showing a sturdy increase among of test scores. Regardless of the school system, a large number of scholarships are presented to graduating seniors from public high schools. This attests to the overall success of instruction and development of academic achievement among public school systems. This study concluded that Public schools are still turning out most of the doctors, lawyers, politicians, astronauts, computer whiz kids, as well as administrators who are running this country.

Discussion of Study Findings

Implications for Research

Early in this study, it was discovered that literature and research directly supporting public school education was not plentiful. Instead, numerous writings have been made available about the positive effects of homeschool education. Many homeschool enthusiasts have pronounced a lack of support, lack of worth, and certain demise of public school programs.

The allegations made by homeschool parents in the survey printed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) could be assumed to be allegations aimed at other types of school choice, as well. This research provides additional statements affirming the tremendous advances made by public school education. The research may also confirm the availability of other educational choices that may be viable alternatives worthy of consideration.

Some of these available choices may possibly be supported by less than favorable means that shrouds the truth about alternatives in education as being a better choice than most of America's public schools. This research speaks truthfully about the finer qualities offered by public school education as seen by public school administrators. It also affirms what programs and procedures are in place that helps public schools feel that they are offering a school program that provides an adequate learning experience for students.

Implications for Practice

When homeschool parents made allegations about the inadequacy of public school education, the impact on the public and its role in the lives of citizens was not considered. Safety in our homes is probably no more definite than the safety maintained

in public facilities. Because of the certainty that public places are made available to all citizens, it is reasonable to believe that all citizens play a role in what goes on all around us.

Unwanted happenings can occur at a mall, in a church setting or an amusement park. Parents don't choose to stop their children from going to the park, to a movie, church activities or other public facilities. Citizens have given accounts of home invasions with robbery, murder and other heinous acts as the outcome. The public must be informed that our schools are as safe as our neighborhoods and communities. When we stop the violence and drug abuse in our neighborhoods and communities, we will stop the violence and drug abuse in our schools. Our lives are greatly determined by our culture, our neighborhoods and our society.

For public schools to experience success, the involvement of parents is almost mandatory. Many public schools need the presence of parents to help with everyday problems. Problems at school usually start outside school property and are brought to the school campus. A successful school is one that has voluntary cooperation occurring between parents, teachers and administrators. When problems arise, parents should feel free to visit the school and work with school administrators to identify the problem. Parents will do well to be prepared to hear things that may not be favorable. A child may have problems with learning disabilities or physical deficiencies. There are ways to work through these problems if both parent and administrators are willing.

Parents, teachers and administrators must work with the media to make sure success stories about positive occurrences are shared with the community. There seems to be a shortage of good news and an over-run of bad news coming from the media when

reporting on public schools in the community. There are however, programs that are experiencing tremendous success within public schools. These stories should be told. On all academic levels, there are successful achievements that can be found if teachers, parents and administrators continue to evaluate and re-evaluate definitions and requirements for being considered a successful student.

Federal and State Government are needed to produce elements that give additional strength to the administrators who work in public school everyday. Most administrators are greatly concerned about the lack of requirements placed on homeschool parents. While the requirements for teaching in public schools seemingly becomes more stringent each year, homeschool parents continue to do as they wish with few requirements and demands. There is no way of knowing if the homeschool parent is academically prepared to teach all classes today's curriculum demands.

The moral and spiritual development of public school children could be greatly enhanced if the government would involve administrators in the planning of programs and curriculum relating to these subjects. Even with the removal of prayer from public schools, the public school is beginning to experience some positive growth especially in the area of moral development. Several programs have been initiated that helps to bring about intense discussion and development especially in the area of morality.

Public schools academic achievement has experienced growth although test scores vary from school to school. It is recommended that parents work very closely with the school to make sure talented math and science teachers remain on public school campuses. Salaries for teachers of higher-level classes must be available in order to match what corporations outside public schools are offering.

The public school must teach parents and students how to make better scores on standardized tests. Suggested improvements include:

- Start taking standardized tests before their 12th grade year
- Use terminology found on standardized tests in everyday vocabulary
- Search for ways to increase pay for teachers and administrators
- Remember, academic achievement is only part of the equation for success

Implications for Theory

Meads Theory of Socialization confirms the need, as public school administrators have stated, for children to have time with other children their age as well as time with adults. Some may argue that homeschool parents have formed homeschool choirs, various sport teams and other forms of extra curricular activity that makes up for the time they miss at public school interacting with other children and adults. Most times however, these sessions provided for homeschoolers only occur once per week. The majority of development time is done in the presence of parents. Typically, the child spends seven to eight hours per day in public school. This allows for the development of problem solving skills and socialization. Children learn the art of solving life's problems and discouragements while working alongside other students.

Suggestions for Future Research

When one talks about public school, there is a need to invest in the continuous flow of new literature that will tell the story of today's public education system. America seemingly is losing touch with public schools and has begun to rely on what is being printed by diverse groups as to its worth and readiness. When talking about politics, Edelman (1967) compares political situations to a well-performed drama. Edelman states

the person viewing a dramatic presentation does not see what goes on behind the curtain. Instead, the person viewing the drama is manipulated by what the director does behind the curtain combined with the action and staging that is visual in front of the curtain.

The director of the drama arranges certain props, costumes, settings, and the script so that the viewer will see things the way the director intends. Oftentimes there is a completely different storyline going on behind the curtain. Things are seldom the way it seems. Edelman's description of what the eye can see against recognizing the truest picture implanted in the mind by the director and the actors explains why future research must continue to be produced by public school educators. If there is failure, report it. If there are successes, then report that, as well. America deserves to know the truth. Future research must go behind the scenes and report accurately who said it, why was it said, and what truths are parts of it.

Quantitative research could be applied in future research. Under controlled situations, testing skills of homeschooled children and representatives of students from other school choices could be tested using different types of academic achievement tests. Teachers or administrators representing different educational choices could be used to offer the test and publish the results to parents and the public, as well. Tests could also be constructed that would rate the moral growth of students.

The history of homeschooling revealed that religion and religious principles has always occupied a pivotal role in the minds and hearts of many parents who choose homeschooling as their educational alternative. Because of the strong religious involvement, future research could center on the influence of religion and religious principles in the lives of public school administrators. The research would delve into the

possibility of strong religious beliefs or a lack of strong religious beliefs having some affect on the education offered by public school administrators.

Some administrators advanced the belief that one's ability to successfully homeschool is dependent upon the family's socio economic status. Future study could center on the socio economic status of homeschool families and/or the socio economic status of public school administrators. In either case, the family's economic status or the public school administrators' economic status could help determine the involvement or lack of involvement in public school education.

Oftentimes, gender comes into play when making decisions. Future study could be constructed to study the affect gender may have on the answers of public school administrators. Research could also be constructed to study the affect gender may have on the allegations of those favoring homeschool education, as well.

Finally, homeschooling has shown increasing appeal on many families, regardless of ethnic persuasion. A study using ethnicity as an important determinant for constructing outcomes and possibilities of public school administrators could be included in future studies. This research revealed that an increasing number of families have begun to look at homeschooling as a viable alternative to public school education.

Summary

Throughout the history of the U.S. and certainly since 1907 when the Red Man's Country became the State of Oklahoma, there has been an interest in providing adequate education for children. How we go about providing this has been the foundation for countless books, movies and the like. For some reason, America has moved from a

wonderful intrigue with public education toward vast possibilities for other educational alternatives.

In 2008, the current collection of literature leans heavily toward the death or sad prognosis pronounced on public school education. It seems almost fashionable that some citizens now choose to denounce the system of education that is provided for the children of the public. When looking for literature that supports the worth and life of public school education, one has to devote more time. It is not available in huge amounts. This lack of availability supports the need for public school administrators, parents, and public school enthusiasts to keep telling public education's story. Public educators must understand how their side of the story has been neglected and even badgered to the point that there or even those that forecast there is no longer a need for a public educational system other than to take care of the poorest among us. With these rumors coming to surface, America's public educational system must continue to have a voice that speaks on its behalf.

Phenomenological research allows for an in depth evaluation and investigation about the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2005). An intentional decision to use a qualitative approach allowed administrators to address homeschool parent's concerns found in the literature.

Reflections

Chapter 5 provided a comprehensive overview of the study's findings and established why public school administrators believe they are providing adequately for students who attend the public school system. The respondents identified areas in which their strengths were immediately noticeable and well founded. In other cases, either

reasons for differences among educational systems was necessary, or required further study. The research suggested that there is a need for government intervention when contrasting public education and homeschooling so that a greater sense of equalization of teaching credentials between public school teachers and administrators and homeschool parents is required. The vague wording of the Oklahoma Constitution fails to clarify points when it simply uses the words, “other schools.”

Oklahoma has been recognized as a haven for those seeking alternatives to public education. “Other means of education are provided” has become a welcomed statement across America because it allows parents to choose systems like homeschooling but does not necessarily carry any other requirements. There are several requirements that are listed in order to be qualified by the government as a certified teacher. Homeschool parents are not required to adhere to these standards. Required regulations mandated by the government for homeschool parents could bring about a lessening of problems when parents transfer their children into the homeschool setting or back into the public school setting.

Conclusively, after the researcher had several failed attempts at reaching public school administrators through normal sources; regular phone, e-mail and the like, it is recommended that whatever method used to advertise contact information for public school administrators be updated several times a year. This will cause for accuracy to be maintained between the public and the school systems. It is also recommended that the administrators follow through with promissory commitments after making initial statements and promises made to constituents desiring pertinent information about the school system.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: NCES SURVEY INFORMATION

Listed below are the results of a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reporting the reasons homeschool parents in the United States list for teaching their children at home (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006).

Number and percentage of homeschooled students whose parents reported particular reasons for homeschooling as being applicable to their situation and as being their most important reason for homeschooling: 2003

<u>Reason for homeschooling</u>	<u>Applicable (1)</u>		<u>Most Important</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Concern about environment of other schools (2)	935,000	85.4	341,000	31.2
Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other Schools	748,000	68.2	180,000	16.5
To provide religious or moral instruction	748,000	72.3	327,000	29.2
Child has a physical or mental health problem	174,000	15.9	71,000	6.5
Child has other special needs	316,000	28.9	79,000	7.2
Other Reasons (3)	221,000	20.1	97,000	8.8

(1) Percentages do not sum to 100 percent because respondents could choose more than one reason.

(2) These include safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure.

(3) Parents homeschool their children for many reasons that are often unique to their family situation. "Other reasons" parents gave for homeschooling include: It was the child's choice; to allow parents more control over what child was learning; and flexibility.

NOTE: Excludes students who were enrolled in school for more than 25 hours a week and students who were homeschooled only because of a temporary illness.

SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family involvement in Education Survey of the 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES).

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INVITATION

May 16, 2008
Public School District
0000 American Blvd
Oklahoma City, OK 73111

Dear (Mr. or Ms.) Name:

First, let me thank you for your participation in a project that will help my dream become a reality. I am so very grateful for you agreeing to participate in one of the focus groups that will lead to the culmination of my doctoral dissertation. Your group will meet on Tuesday, June 3, 2008 from 10 AM to 12 Noon. At the conclusion of our session, we will have lunch together. All focus groups and lunch will be held at St. John Missionary Baptist Church located at 5700 North Kelley Avenue. The pseudonym that you will use for our meeting is A-5.

Upon arriving at the church site, come to the entrance that is named ***W. K. Jackson Educational Center*** inscribed with large letters. You can easily see the entrance from Kelley Street. After reaching the entry, there is a button to your left of the door that must be pushed. This will allow the secretaries to release the locked doors so that you can enter the building. Someone will meet you inside and direct you to the Fellowship Hall.

You will also find enclosed in this letter a ***Respondents Questionnaire*** that I would like for you to complete and bring with you to our session. I hope that the close of the second semester is going smoothly for you and I look forward to our time together on Tuesday, June 3, 2008. Please let me know if there is other material that you need prior to your arrival. You can contact me at my office (418-0053), at home (427-8244) or on my cell (740-6585). Thanks again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Kilgore

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Oklahoma State University

The purpose of this study is to discover the perceptions of public school administrators relative to the inferences made against them when homeschool parents listed the three most prominent reasons homeschool parents list for choosing to teach their children at home, as reported by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES).

Three focus group sessions will allow public school administrators from the Oklahoma City Community to express their perception of the allegations coming from the survey of parents who homeschool their children. You are asked to participate in one focus group session that will last no more than a two hour time period. Open-ended questions will be used that will ask your opinion and invite further discussion of the response of other respondents, as well. You will be given a copy of the questions several weeks prior to your focus group session. All sessions will be held in the Fellowship Hall of St. John Missionary Baptist Church. The Church is located at 5700 North Kelley Avenue in Oklahoma City.

The focus group sessions will be recorded using both audio cassette and video camera. As a participant, you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality. You will be referred to by this pseudonym throughout the recording and analysis of data. Audio cassettes will be destroyed by fire after the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Video tapes will be burned to DVD format and permanently stored in the researcher's safe deposit box. The researcher has the only key to the safe deposit box and is the only person allowed usage of the box. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty. There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

For questions about the research and your rights, feel free to contact either member of the research team listed below. If at any time you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you may contact Dr. Sheila Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, 405-744-1676, irb.okstate.edu.

Kenneth Kilgore
1608 N. E. 46th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73111
kenneth_kilgore@sbcglobal.net
405-427-8244 or 418-0053

Judith Mathers, Ed.D. – Dissertation Advisor
School of Educational Studies
Oklahoma State University
314 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078
Judith.mathers@okstate.edu
405-744-1480

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Kenneth Kilgore, Principle Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR FACILITATOR

Oklahoma State University

The purpose of this study is to discover the perceptions of public school administrators relative to the inferences made against them when homeschool parents listed the three most prominent reasons homeschool parents list for choosing to teach their children at home, as reported by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES).

Three focus group sessions will allow public school administrators from the Oklahoma City Community to express their perception of the allegations coming from the survey of parents who homeschool their children. You are asked to facilitate the three sessions. Each session will held in the evening and will last no more than two hours per session. Open-ended questions will propel the sessions that will ask the opinion of participating respondents and invite further discussion of the response of other respondents, as well. You will be given a copy of the questions several weeks prior to the sessions. All sessions will be held in the Fellowship Hall of St. John Missionary Baptist Church, located at 5700 North Kelley Avenue in Oklahoma City.

The focus group sessions will be recorded using both audio cassette and video camera. As a participant, you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality. You will be referred to by this pseudonym throughout the recording and analysis of data. Audio cassettes will be destroyed by fire after the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Video tapes will be burned to DVD format and permanently stored in the researcher’s safe deposit box. The researcher has the only key to the safe deposit box and is the only person allowed usage of the box. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by the research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and well being of people who participate in the research.

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty. There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant

Date

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Kenneth Kilgore, Principle Investigator

Date

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR VIDEOGRAPHER

Oklahoma State University

The purpose of this study is to discover the perceptions of public school administrators relative to the inferences made against them when homeschool parents listed the three most prominent reasons homeschool parents list for choosing to teach their children at home, as reported by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES).

Three focus group sessions will allow public school administrators from the Oklahoma City Community to express their perception of the allegations coming from the survey of parents who homeschool their children. You are asked to use your professional expertise to video and audio record the three focus group sessions. Each session will be held in the evening and will last no more than a two hour time period. All sessions will be held in the Fellowship Hall of St. John Missionary Baptist Church, located at 5700 North Kelley Avenue in Oklahoma City.

The focus group sessions will be recorded using both audio cassette and video camera. You will not be required to be visible on camera or audio recording. We ask that you will protect all information gleaned from the sessions with confidentiality. All recordings of the sessions will be given to the researcher at the conclusion of the sessions. The researcher will determine whether any editing of recordings will be required. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or in your profession. Participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty. There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

For questions about the research and your rights, feel free to contact either member of the research team listed below. If at any time you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you may contact Dr. Sheila Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, 405-744-1676, irb.@okstate.edu.

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Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Kenneth Kilgore, Principle Investigator

Date

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM FOR TRANSCRIPTIONIST

Oklahoma State University

The purpose of this study is to discover the perceptions of public school administrators relative to the inferences made against them when homeschool parents listed the three most prominent reasons homeschool parents list for choosing to teach their children at home, as reported by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES).

Three focus group sessions will allow public school administrators from the Oklahoma City Community to express their perception of the allegations coming from the survey of parents who homeschool their children. You are asked to transcribe the sessions using the audio and video recordings made of the three sessions. Your presence at the sessions will help to assure the accuracy of the transcription process. Each session will last no more than a two hour time period. All sessions will be held in the Fellowship Hall of St. John Missionary Baptist Church, located at 5700 North Kelley Avenue in Oklahoma City.

The focus group sessions will be recorded using both audio cassette and video camera. You will not be required to be visible on camera or audio recording. We ask that you will protect all information gleaned from the sessions with confidentiality. All transcriptions and recordings of the sessions will be returned to the researcher after you have completed your work. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or in your profession. Participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty. There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

For questions about the research and your rights, feel free to contact either member of the research team listed below. If at any time you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you may contact Dr. Sheila Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, 405-744-1676, irb.@okstate.edu.

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Kenneth Kilgore, Principle Investigator

Date

APPENDIX G: FOOD SERVICE CONSENT FORM

Oklahoma State University

The purpose of this study is to discover the perceptions of public school administrators relative to the inferences made against them when homeschool parents listed the three most prominent reasons homeschool parents list for choosing to teach their children at home, as reported by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES).

Three focus group sessions will allow public school administrators from the Oklahoma City Community to express their perception of the allegations coming from the survey of parents who homeschool their children. As Food Service Supervisor for St. John Missionary Baptist Church, you are asked to serve refreshments during the three sessions. Each session will last no more than a two hour time period. All sessions will be held in the Fellowship Hall of St. John Missionary Baptist Church, located at 5700 North Kelley Avenue in Oklahoma City.

The focus group sessions will be recorded using both audio cassette and video camera. Although your professional services will require you to be in the area, you will not be required to be visible on camera during the execution of the focus group sessions. We ask that you protect all information gleaned from the sessions with confidentiality. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or in your profession. Participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty. There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

For questions about the research and your rights, feel free to contact either member of the research team listed below. If at any time you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you may contact Dr. Sheila Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, 405-744-1676, irb.@okstate.edu.

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Signature of Participant

Date

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Kenneth Kilgore, Principle Investigator

Date

APPENDIX H: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

This survey was designed to collect information pertaining to your individual demographics. Data collected from this survey will be used for dissertation research purposes only.

Please review and complete all questions listed on the survey. This survey will take no longer than 2 minutes to fill out. Once you have completed it, please return it to the researcher. Thank you for your help and support!

1. Male Female
2. Your pseudonym for this dissertation project is _____.
3. How long have you been professionally associated with public education? _____
4. How long have you worked in the area of school administration? _____
5. What is your present administrative position? _____.
6. How long have you worked in this position? _____
7. Do you have prior association with any type of homeschool students or parents?
Briefly explain.

APPENDIX I: DISCUSSION PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Preview: Notes for the Facilitator

Create a relaxed environment. Begin by introducing all the personnel in the room connected to the collection of data. Ask each participant to introduce him or herself. A single page form requesting demographic and job/career-related data is to be completed prior to the interview. A predetermined set of 13 questions pertaining to homeschooling will be used, with follow up questions at the discretion of the facilitator. All predetermined questions will be the same for all three focus groups. Follow up questions will be introduced to stimulate richer in-depth information.

Following is a suggested script.

1. Explain the purpose of the interview.

The purpose of this interview is getting a better understanding of why you believe parents choose to homeschool their children. Your association with education offers a unique viewpoint of what is important for educators to understand about why parents choose homeschooling. We would like to get an understanding of your experiences and observations of what you consider important by recalling specific situations.

2. Ask permission to record interview.

With your authorization the researcher would like to videotape our discussion to get an inclusive record of what is said. No one in the outside this room will listen to or see anything you say. Only the researcher will have access to the records and end results that you and others have said. No responses will be ascribed to you by name.

Question: Have you received the introductory correspondence explaining the research and the format that will be used?

Question: Are there any questions?

Ask participants to recall and articulate in detail their thoughts about the discussion questions. Use any of the following leading topics to stimulate discussion: time-table for the situation being described; the educator's thoughts; the educator's perceptions of the involved person's emotions; conversations between the educator and other people; the situation conclusion

The questions that will elicit open discussion from the respondents are as follows:

Discussion Questions that will answer Research Question #1: How do public school administrators perceive the environment of public schools relative to the issues of safety, drugs, and peer pressure?

1. The safety of public schools in America has been the subject of national news stories since the Columbine High School incident, on April 20, 1999. More recent campus incidents of seizure and mass murder have been headlines among the media, as well. The National Center for Educational Statistics released its most recent survey results collected from homeschool parents. Listed among the reasons for homeschooling is parental concern for the environment that exists in public schools. Examples given were safety, drugs, and peer pressure. Can you elaborate?
2. What programs and policies are in place that assures a parent of their child's safety, exposure to drug related problems and protection from negative peer pressure while attending public schools?
3. Are the aforementioned solutions experiencing success? If not, what are your recommendations?

4. What other issues should be addressed in the areas of safety, drugs and peer pressure in public schools?

Discussion Questions that will Answer Research Question #2: How do public school administrators perceive the moral atmosphere within the public schools, including any allowed religious instruction?

5. How far reaching is governmental involvement or intervention when planning programs and policies that develop the moral and spiritual attitude of public school students?
6. What programs and policies are in place that is structured to develop the moral and spiritual attitude of public school students?
7. Are the aforementioned programs and policies experiencing success? If not, what are your recommendations?
8. What other issues should be addressed in the areas of moral atmosphere and religious instruction in public schools?

Discussion Questions that will answer Research Question #3: How do public school administrators perceive the quality of instruction and academic learning in the public schools?

9. Some parents say that public schools are not promoting academic achievement. Therefore, many parents have removed their children from public school systems and have chosen to teach them at home. How would you respond to this perception?
10. The mother of a 13-year-old boy came to school to talk with counselors about her son's failing grades. The counselor mentioned the possibility of expulsion to the

mother. After looking at her options, the mother chose to homeschool.

Homeschool advocates believe that a homeschooled child gets the close attention that a teacher charged with 25 or more students simply cannot give. What are your feelings about this statement?

11. What do most recent test results indicate about public school student's scores on national tests (i.e. SAT, ACT, PSAT)?
12. It seems that public school students are having the greatest amount of difficulty in the subject areas of mathematics and science. What is being done to strengthen the academic achievement in those areas? Are those plans proving to be successful?
13. What other issues should be addressed in the areas of quality of instruction and academic learning in public schools?

The facilitator will summarize the discussion at the end, and the researcher will thank participants for their willingness to discuss the topic.

VITA

Kenneth E. Kilgore

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education Degree

Dissertation: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PUBLIC
SCHOOL EDUCATION ADVANCED BY HOMESCHOOL PARENTS

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born, January 26, 1947; Oklahoma City, OK

Education: Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Urban
Education at Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma in May, 2002.

Experience: Taught school in the Oklahoma City Public School System 1969-
1974; Minister of Fine Arts at St. John Missionary Baptist Church
1969 to present

Professional Memberships: American Association of Ministers of Music

Name: Kenneth E. Kilgore

Date of Degree: July, 2009

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PUBLIC
SCHOOL EDUCATION ADVANCED BY HOMESCHOOL PARENTS

Pages in Study: 162

Candidate for the Doctor of Education Degree: Ed.D.

Major Field: Educational Administration

Scope and Method of Study: Qualitative Research using 15 Public School Administrators representing three public school systems in Oklahoma County. The administrators will divide into 3 Focus Group sessions and discuss 13 open-ended discussion questions about the allegations made against public schools by homeschool parents.

Findings and Conclusions: Public School Administrators must talk more about the positive things that are happening in public schools-things that seldom are mentioned by the media. It is all but impossible to raise children in a world completely surrounded by only homeschoolers and homeschool enthusiasts. The public is all around us and cannot be completely avoided.

Advisor Approval: Edward Harris_____.