THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ON-GOING FACTORS OF PARENT SATISFACTION IN PRIVATE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IN A SOUTHWESTERN STATE

by

Christopher Don Gann

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

School choice has become more prominent in national discourse as competition for students increases. Parent satisfaction is a complex, yet critical, component for school administrators and board members to understand in order to determine the degree to which parent demographics contribute to overall satisfaction among private Christian school parents. This predictive, correlational study investigated perceptions of school choice in the context of consumerism and customer satisfaction to determine the degree to which predictors, namely parent demographics, contribute to overall parental satisfaction among private Christian school parents. The parents in the study represent those who chose a Christian school environment for their children in the Southwestern United States. Parental satisfaction elements were measured by the Customer Satisfaction Survey. The instrument was administered to parents whose children attend private Christian schools in a United States southwestern state. Satisfaction survey data was collected and analyzed via IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Multiple regression analysis was used to predict the values of parental satisfaction elements based upon parental demographic factors. The analysis indicated that there was not a statistically significant predictive relationship between parent demographic factors and overall parent satisfaction. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis given the analysis results. Further research is needed in the area of parent satisfaction within Christian education to determine the factors that drive parent satisfaction.

Keywords: Christian education, school choice, parent satisfaction, decision factors

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife and children. Unfailing love and support were afforded to me throughout this entire process and I could not have achieved this goal without your support. To Jennifer, I love you and will never be able to repay the patience and encouragement you showed. To Calder, Ainsley, and Malachi, I pray this achievement serves as an example to enthusiastically pursue God's will in all areas of your life.

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The ability to complete a project of tremendous magnitude is impossible without the help of others. The Lord has granted provision and energy that has allowed for the attainment of this milestone. All the glory goes to Him.

I also want to acknowledge all of those who provided insight, recommendations, and encouragement to me during this process. I would like to specifically acknowledge those individuals serving on my committee for their insight and encouragement. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Alsup for continuing with me during the process and providing direction and guidance. To all others that contributed in some way, thank you for your help.

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List of Abbreviations

Association of Christian Schools (ACSI)

Advanced Placement (AP)

Customer Satisfaction Theory (CST)

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Grade-point average (GPA)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Educational Longitudinal Dataset (NELS)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Rational Choice Theory (RCT)

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Enrollment in private Christian education in America is declining during an era of parent choice, providing a stark outlook for the various outcomes provided through Christian education (NCES, 2016). In this chapter, perceptions of school choice and customer satisfaction are discussed, while historical and theoretical underpinnings are developed and attributed to parent satisfaction with private Christian education. The problem involving parent satisfaction within private Christian schools is identified and the purpose of the study is articulated. Additionally, the research questions for the study are stated and the significance of the findings for the private Christian education industry are included.

Background

The perceptions and overall satisfaction of parents who choose private Christian education for their children are of increasing importance to those vested in school viability and longevity (Cheng & Peterson, 2017). School choice, although an option for parents for many years, has become a focus of national discourse as current educational policies allow parents an increasing number of options for choosing a school (Egalite & Wolf, 2016). Race to the Top, a $4.35 billion United Stated Department of Education grant enacted in 2009, incentivized innovative strategies and removed caps on charter school authorization (Saultz, 2015). The increased options for school choice and changes in federal educational philosophy in recent years is causing the United States educational system to mirror a free-market system (Saultz, Fitzpatrick, & Jacobsen, 2015).

Schools of choice are those which are deemed as private, independent, or non-traditional public schools that empower parents to opt-in at their discretion (Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012).

Private schools are those categorized as nonpublic and are extremely diverse in their mission and student bodies (Balossi & Hernandez, 2015). A subset of private schools, called independent schools, are those funded solely by tuition, charitable giving, and income from endowments (Balossi & Hernandez, 2015). The broadest category of independent schools are faith-based schools (Swezey & Finn, 2014). Faith-based schools include Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, 7th Day Adventist, Greek, Episcopal, Calvinist, and Evangelical Christian (Boerema, 2009).

While choice is deemed as a positive attribute by many, the increase of publicly funded alternatives to traditional public schools has created a competitive environment amongst schools of choice as they compete for students. During the shift to school choice many private Christian schools have failed to compete effectively (Lubienski, C. & Lubienski, 2006). The enrollment of students in private education has decreased precipitously from 12 percent in 1995-1996 to 10 percent in 2013-2014, with projections for continued decline through 2025-2026 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The number of students enrolled in Christian schools has declined by 200,000 students during the ten-year period from 2003-2004 through 2013-2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). While overall enrollment in schools of choice continues to increase the enrollment in Christian schools of choice is on the decline.

Historical Context

America's education system was established to ensure a well-informed populace was perpetuated to strengthen the democracy and further the nation's principles (Gutek, 2011). Educational goals, in addition to civic responsibility, have evolved over time and have come to include those of an academic, vocational, and personal nature (Zaich, 2013). The emergence of alternative types of schools, such as magnet schools in the 1960s and the proliferation of charter schools since the mid-1990s, was intended to provide choice to parents, diversify schools, and

allow schools to focus on the specific needs of students (Wohlstetter, Nayfack, & Mora-Flores, 2008). In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education's publication of *A Nation at Risk* marked the beginning of a serious national conversation regarding the quality of education within public schools throughout the United States. The quality of education, however, is a qualitative measure and can include intangibles and amenities that do not directly contribute to student learning (Glazerman, 1998). Due to difficulties with directly observing educational quality, researchers have developed a wide range of criteria for conducting evaluation and comparing schools (Sander & Krautmann, 1995). Regardless of the criteria utilized, results for United States schools have been mixed, especially for those comparing public and private schools (Albert & Garcia-Serrano, 2010).

Christian education, founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ, spread throughout the Greco-Roman world and later in the western hemisphere (Gutek, 2011). As America matured and Christian faith flourished, reformers such as John Calvin began to align ideological principles of Christianity with educational content and pedagogy (Gutek, 2011). Upon establishing a formal education system in America, political leaders deemed religion a hindrance to academic inquiry (Gutek, 2011). In 1884, as a response to American leaders deciding public education should be independent of religious influence, Roman Catholic leaders declared parishioners should seek Catholic education for their children (Archer, 2000). While some Christian schools were established during the first half of the 1900s, the number of schools and students served did not substantially increase until 1962 and 1963 when the United States Supreme Court removed prayer and Bible reading from public schools (Rose,1993; Stern, 2003). After a rise to more than 1,000,000 students during the 1980s, the enrollment in Evangelical Christian schools has steadily declined over the past 30 years (Jeynes, 2016).

Social Context

Parent perceptions of schools must be understood to determine how schools are judged by their constituents. Parent perceptions of education are most appropriately viewed as a manifestation of attitude that was formed through personal experience with one's own education (Raty, 2007). These evaluative school recollections provide the lens through which parents view their children's educational experience (Raty, 2007). The level of parental education, parent gender, and ethnicity offer an additional lens through which the quality of education is perceived (Kaczan, Rycielski, & Wasilewska, 2014). This complicated dynamic forms the basis for which parent satisfaction is founded and perpetually evaluated (Baeck, 2009; Baeck, 2010; Jonsdottir, Bjornsdottir, & Baeck, 2017; Pepe & Addimando, 2014).

Parent attitudes towards schools are also shaped by the parents' own school experiences along with their social standing (Zaich, 2013). Those who believe in the quality of public education feel that economically advantaged parents display elitism when their children are withdrawn from public schools into private schools (Mostafa, 2015). Public school advocates believe that private schools take the best students, leaving the most difficult behind (Doerr, Menendez, & Swomley, 1996), a process that is known as skimming (Alsauidi, 2016). Buchanan (2016) reports that in Milwaukee, however, the proportion of white students in private schools has dropped from 75% in 1994 to 35% at the end of 2008. Proponents of school choice argue that increased spending in public education has not led to better outcomes, as school districts are not able to effectively spend the funds (Cohen-Zada & Justman, 2002; Spalding, 2014). A recent study by Chingos and Blagg (2017) found that public school district progressive funding formulas do not achieve equity amongst students served, thus, leading to spending inefficiencies.

Theoretical Context

The American concept of democracy embraces choice as a basic tenant of citizenship, and families continue to place value on situational sovereignty (Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Hirsch, 1995; Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Families, in conjunction with school professionals, are the best decision-makers for their child's educational choices due to their intimate knowledge of the child's needs (Coons & Sugarman, 1978). When families engage in school choice decision-making, they participate in a complex, evaluative process in which value-laden outcomes, along with those of an academic nature, are sought by parents and bring forth calls for alterations to the existing educational system (Weiss, 1998).

The free-market is described as an economic system in which goods are distributed to consumers in a competitive environment as price is set by demand. In relation to the free-market economic approach, the theoretical foundation of school choice is founded in the Rational Choice Theory (RCT). The Rational Choice Theory began as a neoclassical economic theory by famed economist William Stanley Jevons in his description of utility (Jevons, 1965). RCT posits that individuals "act out of self-interest. . . and are rational in that they methodically order all choices from most to least desired" (Berends, Springer, Ballou, & Walberg, 2009, p. 36). The theory of rational choice began to permeate the philosophy of educational choice through the writing of Milton Friedman in the 1970s and was perpetuated by school choice proponents Chubb and Moe throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Berends et al., 2009). Research regarding parental choice has found that the process of RCT does not always result in what others might perceive as the best school given unique factors present in the family dynamic (Bell, 2005; Holme, 2002; Thomas, 2010). Given the complexities surrounding school choice, the most attractive choice for a family might be based upon factors that are not considered by other

families. Therefore, understanding factors of satisfaction is critical to the on-going success of schools.

The idea of choice leading to competition in the marketplace is intuitive: consumers seek the best product offered at the most attractive price point. Once a decision is made regarding a product, such as education, the individual makes a comparison of the perceived performance in relation to the expectations (Kotler, 2000). An individual's perception of a product or service is known as satisfaction and is defined as the "attitude or emotional reaction to the difference between expectation and actuality" (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004, p. 41).

The Customer Satisfaction Theory (CST) emerged as an area of interest during the 1970s, and the works of Olshavsky and Miller (1972), along with Anderson (1973) and Cardoza (1965), provided the framework for "theory testing and experimental research" (Churchill & Suprenant, 1982, p. 494). Thus CST, which is based upon analyzing individual responses to products or services, provides a framework for understanding how parent satisfaction relates to school choice. Satisfaction is based upon numerous factors and is often associated with varying psychological elements which need to be determined and understood by schools to attract and retain students.

American educational reform has given parents the autonomy and opportunity to choose the educational institution for their children. Parents make choices based upon the rational choice theory, which establishes that individuals make the best decision for their circumstance with the information that is available (Green, 2002). Once a decision is made, parents enter an evaluative process to determine if the expectation for their child's education is being met. The theory of customer satisfaction explains the way that multiple factors are considered by

consumers as they psychologically construct levels of satisfaction across each factor (Green, 2002).

Problem Statement

Systems of choice force schools to compete in a marketplace for students; as such, schools must appeal to parents to recruit and retain their children (Rose & Stein, 2014). Parents should not be viewed as a homogenous group as multiple factors such as gender, income, and ethnicity have a great impact on factors related to satisfaction (Baeck, 2009; Baeck, 2010; Jonsdottir et al., 2017; Pepe & Addimando, 2014). Parents continually adjust and modify their opinions on satisfaction and concerns with educational processes, necessitating continual engagement with parents to understand their expectations and levels of satisfaction (Joshi, 2014). Characteristics of private schools and what makes them successful are available in literature, but there is little known about the characteristics of families related to enrollment and satisfaction with private schools (Davis, 2011). Joshi (2014) and Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017) found an absence in literature regarding parents' on-going decision-making bases upon factors of satisfaction. Although many studies exist regarding parent choice in Catholic and parochial schools (Buttrum, 1994; Esty, 1974; Hunt, 1996; Mainda, 2002), the decision processes that Christian parents make when choosing their children's educational experience is understudied (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). Overall, little is known about the parental predictors of satisfaction at private schools (Barrows, Peterson, & West, 2017; Davis, 2011).

Recruitment and retainment are achieved when schools are keenly aware of the factors of parent satisfaction. Substantial research exists relating to how parents choose and utilize information to make those choices (Chakrabarti & Roy, 2010). Additionally, research abounds regarding reasons for parent dissatisfaction, parent satisfaction in public school settings, and the

comparison between former schools and schools of choice (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001; Bejou, 2013; Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Goldhaber, 1999; Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006; Friedman, Bobrowski, & Markow, 2007; Joshi, 2014; Noack, 1972; Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Roch, 1998). Catt and Rhinesmith (2016) studied factors of parent choice in private schools and schools of choice within Indiana. Employing research within the field, Catt and Rhinesmith (2016) used a survey to determine factors of potential satisfaction which drew parents to a school of choice. Catt & Rhinesmith (2016) and Cheng & Peterson (2017) both concluded that current research which provides details pertaining to predictors of ongoing parent satisfaction at private schools is limited. Joshi (2014) identified factors of parent satisfaction from literature and surveyed both public and private school parents on predictors of satisfaction which included parental involvement, teacher interaction and quality, academic climate, and school climate and safety. Results indicated that further research is needed to understand specific factors of ongoing parent satisfaction in private schools after parents have chosen a school (Joshi, 2014). A recent study by Barrows, Peterson, and West (2017) compared charter, district, and private schools nationwide to determine parental levels of satisfaction across each sector and report that "what parents think of their children's schools…has important implications" for schools in each sector.

Rhinesmith and Wolf (2017) found that Christian parents who choose public school alternatives are more satisfied but "little information is available that explains the satisfaction" (p. 9). Studies regarding ongoing parent satisfaction at private schools, and especially Christian schools, is underrepresented in literature. The body of research pertaining to "parents' motivation for choice and predictors of satisfaction that lead to retention" is limited (Davis, 2011). Additionally, parent satisfaction "is the most important yet often overlooked measure" of a

child's education (Kittredge, 2017). The problem is that specific, ongoing factors of parental satisfaction in private Christian schools and their influence on overall parental satisfaction and student retention are not understood fully (Kelesidou, Chatzikou, Tsiamagka, Abakoumkin, & Tseliou, 2017). Chambers and Michelson (2016) and Toldson and Lemmons (2013) pointed to the need for a greater understanding of the relationship amongst demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and income levels and measures of parental satisfaction.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this predictive, correlational study is to determine on-going factors of parent satisfaction in private Christian schools. Parents continually reformulate opinions on satisfaction and concerns (Barrows et al.; Joshi, 2014). The sample will consist of parents that send their children to K-12, private Christian schools in the Southwestern United States. The criterion variable, parent satisfaction, is a highly individualized and volatile construct with a variety of measurement constructs (Goldring & Rowley, 2006; McNaughton, 1994). Parent satisfaction with school is "multi-dimensional and includes both academic and non-academic factors" (Friedman et al., 2007, p. 279). Cumulatively, individual parent satisfaction is the fulfillment of one's needs or expectations (Kelesidou et al., 2017; Texas Education Agency, 2017). Research has shown, however, that several factors cumulatively reflect parent satisfaction and include school communication, parental involvement, academic achievement, curriculum, school environment, school safety, and transportation (Bond & King, 2003; DeAngelis & Holmes Erickson, 2018; DeVoe et al., 2004; Erickson, 1986; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Griffith, 1997; Ham & Hayduk, 2003; Jonsdottir et al., 2017; Kisida & Wolf, 2015; Maddaus, 1990; McGrew & Gilman, 1991). The criterion variable, parent satisfaction, will be defined as the cumulative input from parents across multiple satisfaction variables, including

school climate, quality of staff, academic programs, social development and extracurricular programs, and parent involvement. School climate is the collective perceptions of all individuals interacting within the school that take place between members and between the structural characteristics of the organizational environment (Becerra, 2016; Becerra, Munoz, & Riquelme, 2015). The quality of staff is defined as the commitment of staff to students and their ability to adapt to meet student needs (Faulkner & Latham, 2016). Academic programming is the quality of educational materials and pedagogical methods employed by the school (Tuck, 1995). Social development and extracurricular activities are the activities that contribute to the overall well-being of a child, especially as it relates to a child's physical and socio-emotional needs (Rikoon, Brenneman, & Petway, 2016). Parent involvement is defined the multifaceted support that occurs at the individual or community level through participation of parents in school activities (Stevens & Patel, 2015). The predictor variables for the study will include gender, ethnicity, and education level of parents. Both parental gender and ethnicity are associated with satisfaction as it relates to their children's schools (Raty, 2004). Experiences and cultural differences related to both gender and ethnicity shape expectation levels and contribute to overall satisfaction (Kelesidou et al., 2017). The income of parents is correlated to the education level of parents: higher level earners generally have higher levels of education (LaForret & Mendez, 2010). Parent education level has been found to be associated with various educational facets, including parental beliefs about their child's education (Kelesidou, 2017).

Significance of the Study

School choice will continue to be a factor in school reform initiatives as the debate of parent autonomy regarding their children's educational opportunities and overall student achievement continues. Private Christian schools are positioned to increase student enrollment

and stem the decline that has been occurring for the past 20 years if appropriate steps are taken to meet parent expectations. The information can be used by school personnel, including administrators, school board members, and associated churches, to provide a focus for maintaining positive relationships, providing timely interventions, and retaining student enrollment. School administrators, once factors of satisfaction are understood, can "support families in their efforts to make rational, informed, godly school decisions" (Prichard & Swezey, 2016, p. 20). Additionally, research findings will provide insight into the alignment between parent factors of initially choosing a private school and factors of satisfaction once enrolled as there "is an absence of such literature on parental participation and satisfaction" following initial school choice (Joshi, 2014, p. 57). Any school of choice will have the ability to utilize the results to inform their policies as to increase and maintain factors of parent satisfaction. Catt and Rhinesmith (2016) stated that a satisfaction survey presents a unique opportunity for future research findings regarding why parents who choose are satisfied with their schools of choice. There is a distinct need for "Christian schools to deliberately [set] and then [implement] priorities with respect to. . . awareness and engagement with parents" (Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012, p. 60). Finally, the results will provide a connection between the customer satisfaction theory and parents within the context of the educational marketplace (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Research Question

This study is designed to answer the following research question (RQ):

RQ1: Do parental gender, ethnicity, and education level predict parent satisfaction for those with children enrolled in private Christian schools?

Definitions

1. *Customer satisfaction survey* – instrument developed to measure five dimensions of parent satisfaction, including quality of staff, school climate, academic programs, social development and extracurricular activities, and parent involvement (Tuck, 1995)
2. *Academic programming* - the quality of educational materials and pedagogical methods employed by the school (Tuck, 1995)
3. *Parent involvement* - the multifaceted support that occurs at the individual or community level through participation of parents in school activities (Stevens & Patel, 2015)
4. *Parent satisfaction* – a highly individualized and volatile construct with a variety of measurement constructs (Goldring & Rowley, 2006; McNaughton, 1994); individual parent satisfaction is the fulfillment of one's needs or expectations (Kelesidou et al., 2017; Texas Education Agency, 2017).
5. *School climate* - the collective perceptions of all individuals interacting within the school that take place between members and between the structural characteristics of the organizational environment (Becerra, 2016; Becerra et al., 2015)
6. *Skimming* – process in which pro-public advocates believe that private schools take the best students, leaving the most difficult behind (Alsauidi, 2016; Doerr et al., 1996)
7. *Quality of staff* - the commitment of staff toward students and their ability to adapt to meet student needs (Faulkner & Latham, 2016)
8. *Social development and extracurricular activities* - the activities that contribute to the overall well-being of a child, especially as it relates to a child's physical and socio-emotional needs (Rikoon, Brenneman, & Petway, 2016)

9. *Market orientation* – the way organizations generate, disseminate, and respond to market intelligence concerning consumer demands (Harris & Piercy, 1997, p. 33)
10. *Private schools* – non-public schools that are extremely diverse in their mission and student bodies as compared to public schools (Balossi & Hernandez, 2015)
11. *Independent schools* – subset of private schools funded solely by tuition, charitable giving, and income from endowments (Balossi & Hernandez, 2015)
12. *Faith-based schools* – the broadest category of independent schools which are comprised of those institutions which incorporate faith into their overall mission (Swezey & Finn, 2014)
13. *Satisfaction* – an individual's "attitude or emotional reaction to the difference between expectation and actuality" (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004, p. 41)
14. *School choice theory* – independent buyers (families) act as consumers on behalf of their children to choose the product (education) that best aligns with personal values and opinions (Arveseth, 2014; Friedman, 1962; Friedman & Friedman, 1980; Saultz, 2015)
15. *Self- interest standard of rationality* – consumerism based upon the principle that "rational people consider only costs and benefits that accrue directly to themselves" (Frank, 1997, p. 18)
16. *Present-aim standard of rationality* – consumerism based upon the principle that "rational people act efficiently in pursuit of whatever objectives they hold at the moment of choice" (Frank, 1997, p. 18)

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This review of the literature details the manner that economic market theories of choice and satisfaction are related to school choice and parent satisfaction. For private Christian schools, an understanding of the process of school choice along with knowledge of factors that offer the greatest satisfaction to parents is essential to increase or maintain enrollment in a competitive environment that offers many alternatives to parents. This literature review presents findings of studies investigating school choice along with factors of parent satisfaction. Following the discussion of the theoretical framework, the review of the literature highlights findings from previous studies and identifies the research gap that this study intends to close.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based upon Milton Friedman's school choice theory, the rational choice theory (RCT), and the customer satisfaction theory (CST). Milton Friedman (1955) established the school choice theory under the assumption that freedom of individuals should extend to educational pursuits. Freedom within the context of education allows individuals and families to make educational decisions independent of government intervention. Friedman's theory purports the "educational economy" as a system that is comprised of interrelated, economic principles that require proper implementation to produce the intended effect (Arveseth, 2014). Friedman (1962) contended that competition, spurred by parental demand and aided by the deregulation of school systems, would provide quality educational choices for families. The choice by parents to place their students in private Christian education is a representation of the theory in practice.

School Choice Theory

The school choice theory parallels traditional free-market theory given that a product (education) is brought to the marketplace and independent buyers (families) act with autonomy, independent of oversight and regulation. The school choice theory commoditizes education and replaces consumers with parents, whose role is to act as agents or partners with their children in the marketplace. The monopolization of education by public institutions has led to an historically low supply of educational choices, creating inefficiencies and suboptimal performance among public education institutions (Saultz, 2015). The creation and expansion of educational markets serves to break the current monopolies (Davies & Quirke, 2005; Hirsch, 1995). The deregulation of education led to an increase in educational supply due to a reduction of entry barriers and costly oversight (Arveseth, 2014). Friedman, along with other economists and school choice advocates, proposes that government play a minimal role in the development of educational standards and oversight of their implementation (Arveseth, 2014; Friedman, 1962; Friedman & Friedman, 1980; Saultz, 2015).

In the United States, a key indicator of freedom is personal choice (Levin, 1991). The creation of choice on the supply side of education allows purchasing power to be placed in the hands of consumers (Bridges & Jonathan, 2002; Davies & Quirke, 2005). The act of choosing, as defined by Wilkins (2011), is when individuals act as their own agents and work to maximize the utility of their decisions through a calculating framework. Consumers convey their choice through reason, judgements, and evaluations (Wilkins, 2011).

Rational Choice Theory

The rational choice theory provides a perspective of the way in which parents, acting as agents for their children, make educational decisions. An underlying economic assumption is

that individuals are rational and make decisions regarding products that maximize their self-interest (Aydin, 2015). Parents seek to maximize the interests for their child while the school seeks to increase enrollment. Research regarding parental choice has found that the process of rational choice does not always result in what others might perceive as the best school given unique factors present in the family dynamic (Bell, 2005; Holme, 2002; Thomas, 2010). Two approaches to rationality describe the behavior of consumer pursuits: the self-interest standard of rationality and the present-aim standard of rationality (Green, 2002). The self-interest standard of rationality states, "rational people consider only costs and benefits that accrue directly to themselves" while the present-aim standard of rationality states "rational people act efficiently in pursuit of whatever objectives they hold at the moment of choice" (Frank, 1997, p. 18). Consumer preferences are the outcomes of these rational deliberations and are continually shaped based upon experiences and expectations (Aydin, 2015). These preferences are revealed when consumers make product decisions or provide feedback through surveys. Although consumer preference is assumed to be based on rationality and logic, choices are bounded by information availability, prior consumer experiences, cognitive limitations, and time constraints (Aydin, 2015).

Customer Satisfaction Theory

The integration of multiple theories from both business and human psychology form the basis of the Customer Satisfaction Theory (CST). Although a functional understanding of CST is accepted across industries, there are variations in the practical aspect of understanding customer satisfaction based upon the market, service, or product that is offered. Organizations across every market seek to understand determinants and associated levels of satisfaction to remain viable, attract and retain customers, and improve overall performance as perceived by

customers. Satisfaction is defined by Kotler (2000) as “a person’s feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product’s perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations” (p. 36). Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) define satisfaction as “an overall customer attitude or emotional reaction” towards a service provider (p. 41).

Organizational focus on customer needs led to the proliferation of business marketing strategies in the early 1960’s (Ahmad and Buttle, 2002). Strategies were developed from a “service marketing perspective” that focuses on “building and maintaining long-term customer relationships” (Berry, 1983, p. 53). The relational approach to marketing removes emphasis from serving customers or supplying services to focusing on satisfying the needs that drive customer satisfaction (Dominici & Palumbo, 2013). Relationship marketing directs resources toward “strengthening ties to existing customers” with an overall goal of “attracting, maintaining, and building business relationships” (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007, p. 307). Relational marketing that is focused on customer satisfaction is driven from research regarding the net benefits, including profitability and stability, of retaining current customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 1999; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Relational marketing shows there is a direct correlation between customer satisfaction and customer retention. DeSouza (1992) explains retention rates improve when organizations learn from former customers, analyze data and complaints, and increase barriers to customer exit.

Although the determinants of customer satisfaction are dependent upon specific markets, there are generalities that are attributable to customers in all markets. Satisfaction from customers is a “fulfillment response” based upon the judgement of a service and is a feeling, or short-term attitude, that is known only to the customer (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). Customer satisfaction is based upon perceptions of performance and vary by individual and situation, with

associated outcome feelings leading to reuse of service, positive word-of-mouth, or complaints (Hom, 2000). Matzler and Sauerwein (2002) developed a model of customer satisfaction based upon measuring organizational performance factors within a framework of customer needs. Performance factors are "typically connected to customers' explicit needs and desires" and lead to satisfaction if performance is high or dissatisfaction if performance is low (Fuller & Matzler, 2008, p. 117).

Marketing research in customer satisfaction within the field of education has been limited to mostly higher education. Educators have been reluctant to adopt a student/parent-customer paradigm due to the perception of damaging the learning process if students are viewed as having a voice in the quality of service delivery (Albanese, 1999; Bay & Daniel, 2001; Buck, 2002; Cloutier & Richards, 1994; Franz, 1998). Competition for students and increased choice has created a marketplace for education and students seek to obtain the "highest quality education possible at a given cost" (Mark, 2013, p. 3).

Seeking measurements of customer satisfaction assists organizations in meeting the expectations of customers and building the loyalty that is required to maintain organizations as a going-concern. Factors of satisfaction are cumulative measurements from "all of the customer's prior experiences with a…service" (Bolton, 1998, p. 6). Brown and Mazzarol (2009) found that image, perceived value, and customer satisfaction were predictive of customer loyalty. Hoyt & Howell (2011) defined image as the "perception of quality associated with a brand name" (p. 23). In service industries such as private education, "overall satisfaction is similar to overall evaluations of service quality" (Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005, p. 210). Multiple variables related to parent satisfaction will be used to predict overall parent satisfaction in private Christian schools. Overall evaluations are more helpful to organizations as they seek to influence

customer behaviors (Boulding, W., Ajay, K., Staelin, R., & Zeithaml, 1993). The current research will seek to confirm the customer satisfaction theory as it relates to service organizations, specifically Christian schools, and establish foundational information for private Christian organizations related to factors of parent satisfaction.

Related Literature

Educational Marketplace

The marketplace is the location in which producers and consumers come together to seek mutual benefit from the exchange of goods or services for payment. The free-market system, according to Polanyi (1957), is one in which the natural environment is turned into "fictitious commodities" (p. 243). Free-market systems operate within economies that exist as one of two opposing structures: either state-controlled or market-controlled. State-controlled economies are heavily regulated through government intervention and oversight and seek equality and equity in the distribution of goods to citizens, while market-controlled economies are loosely regulated and place greater value on individual rights, competition, and incentivizing innovative practices (Bathala & Korukonda, 2003). The commodity of education, when placed in the marketplace, is acted upon by capitalist forces that draw forth both suppliers and consumers.

According to Milton Friedman (1962), providing choice to parents through privatized education will bring producers into the marketplace. In turn, free-market economics leads to greater efficiencies and more innovation due to the incentives provided. Virtues such as self-reliance, independence, individualism, and enterprise are the result of marketplace conditions and contrast the dependency created in government operated businesses and services (Bridges & Jonathan, 2002, p. 130).

Increased profit and market share, the major incentives for producers, are achieved when commodities are competitively priced and meet the demands of consumers (Bowe, 2010). Consumer satisfaction is a major indicator for producers in a market-controlled economy (Bridges & Jonathan, 2002). The measurement of customer satisfaction is vital to businesses in free-market economies as consumer feedback drives business decisions. Competition for consumers and motivation for profits prompts businesses to operate efficiently by providing quality goods and services that satisfy demands in the most efficient manner. As a result, organizations within market systems achieve greater cost-effectiveness in delivery of products as compared to those organizations under public control (Bridges & Jonathan, 2002). Public education, for example, when studied in terms of cost, offers "poor value" for the tax dollar compared to counterparts under private control (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 525). The average full tuition of all-type private schools for combined elementary and high school levels in 2007-2008 was $9,200 (NCES, 2008). However, the average full tuition of private Christian schools for combined elementary and high school levels in 2007-2008 was $4,900 (NCES, 2008). The average cost per pupil in public schools during the 2007-2008 school year was $10,353 (Howell & West, 2008).

Theoretically, pure market models bring buyers and sellers into an unregulated arena and the competition for consumers drives efficiencies in production and a price-point is reached that is mutually beneficial to all parties. Producers strive to meet demands and satisfy customers as they navigate the imperfections that are inherent to the market niche. Understanding and appropriately responding to the needs of consumers eliminates ill-equipped producers, while it elevates and rewards effective producers. In the marketplace, success breeds success, while failure breeds failure (Bridges & Jonathan, 2002). The way organizations generate, disseminate,

and respond to market intelligence concerning consumer demands is referred to as "market orientation" (Harris & Piercy, 1997, p. 33). The process includes collecting and understanding verbalized customer needs along with the analysis of external factors that influence customer needs (Harris & Piercy, 1997).

In educational market systems founded in choice, each school needs a system in place to properly understand the needs of customers and the factors influencing their decisions to choose and maintain enrollment. Successful organizations are those which maintain customer satisfaction and are forward thinking and responsive to market changes. Sustainable competitive advantages are gained and further exploited when organizations understand customer satisfaction and "align organizational behavior with market characteristics" (Harris & Piercy, 1997, p. 33).

Competition and consumerism. In economic terms, consumerism is the ideology which promotes the perpetual aggregation of goods and services, while competition is the action of producers to supply the demand stemming from consumeristic tendencies (Freeman & Thomas, 2005). These concepts work in tandem to establish the foundation of the marketplace. Capitalism promotes consumerism by establishing markets that supply the self-interests of consumers through enterprising organizations that seek to meet those demands (Aydin, 2015). Increasing school choice promotes competition and diversity as schools increase the supply and place information and purchasing power in the hands of consumers (Bridges & Jonathan, 2002; Davies & Quirke, 2005). When a choice of products exists, consumers orient themselves in the marketplace based upon information understood and made available. Consumer orientation in the marketplace can occur through either a push or pull method, where consumers move away from a product in which they are dissatisfied or move toward a product that is desirable (Wilkins, 2011).

From an economic perspective, school choice leads to greater competition for students and leads to improvements in school efficiency with respect to student achievement (Friedman, 1962; Hirsch, 1995; Levin, 1991). Parents and private schools are similarly positioned at the intersection of consumers and producers, which leads to intense competition and consumerism through the pursuit of self-interest (Garn, 2001; Oria et al., 2007; Wilkins, 2011). Market mechanisms associated with school competition allows the public to see how the quality of private education differs from public education (Davies & Quirke, 2005). As schools become more successful, demand continues to increase, and in turn, new schools will open in locations in which demand is the highest (Saultz, 2015). The differentiation that occurs from greater supply improves consumer satisfaction and results in a more cost-effective education (Levin, 1991).

Unleashing the "competitive pressures" of private markets while removing automatic public funding would result in schools relying on customer satisfaction to move tax dollars (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 525). When schools are privately managed, they are prone to be administered as a business which has been shown to boost both productivity and accountability due to the "entrepreneurial ingenuity" that is required to "channel resources efficiently" (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 525). School choice allows the market to regulate supply based upon individual preferences of parents, while the market imperative overlaps with multiple reasons for expanding school choice through consumeristic and competitive measures (Hirsch, 1995; Saultz, 2015).

Educational Choice

America's education system was established to ensure that a well-informed populace perpetuated to strengthen the democracy and further the nation's principles (Gutek, 2011). America's goals for student education have broadened from a civic variety to include

those of an academic, vocational, and personal nature (Zaich, 2013). The Jeffersonian model of education that was utilized in the formation of the formal public education system was based upon decentralization and allowed local communities to have autonomy in meeting the needs of students (DiMento, 2011; Shannon, 2013).

Milton Friedman's 1962 publication of *Capitalism and Freedom* included a vignette on the economic benefits and capitalistic nature of school choice and was among the first pieces on school choice to gain national attention. Friedman became a more vocal proponent of school choice following *Capitalism and Freedom* and openly advocated for the privatization of the nation's school system and the use of school vouchers. The National Commission on Excellence in Education's publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, however, marked the beginning of a serious national conversation regarding the quality of education within public schools throughout the United States. The structure, location, and organizational control of schools has evolved over the years due to population growth and the oversight required to manage local, state, and national systems (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Chubb and Moe (1990) furthered the work of Milton Friedman with the publication of *Politics, Markets, and School Choice*. Chubb and Moe (1990) suggested that public schools are "overly rule-bound and bureaucratic" (p. 150) while Wong (1996) argued that the educational system is permeated by the political machine as decisions regarding curriculum, textbooks, school attendance zones, and assessment measures are directed at the bureaucratic level (as cited in Merrifield, 2000). Advocates of school choice view the monopolization of American education as resistant to the need for reform and systemically require "new actors" in the form of parents advocating for their children and a capitalist response in the form of private enterprise to prompt change (Olson-Beal & Hendry, 2012, p. 523).

Although the quality of education is measured in some quantitative terms, the true measure is comprehensive and includes qualitative data such as the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students along with intangibles and amenities that do not directly contribute to student learning (Glazerman, 1998).

Due to the inability to directly observe educational quality, researchers have developed a wide range of criteria in conducting evaluations and comparing schools (Sander & Krautman, 1995). Regardless of the criteria utilized, results for United States schools have been decidedly mixed, especially when comparing public to private schools (Albert & Garcia-Serrano, 2010). Several studies have found that public schools lack the ability to compensate and properly evaluate teachers, thus reducing educational quality (Ballou, 1996; Hoxby, 1996). Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) found evidence that private schools are more effective than public schools in terms of achievement. Recent studies on the effectiveness of charter schools have shown mixed results as to their effectiveness when compared to public schools (Hill, 2005; Lubienski, S. & Lubienski, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2004) while other researchers state that there is an "apparent failure of charter schools to add value" (Schneider & Buckley, 2006, p. 126). Other studies have found little evidence to support that private schools outperform their public counterparts when utilizing standardized test scores (Figlio & Stone, 2000; Gamoran, 1996; Goldhaber, 1996). More recent studies, though, have shown that students attending private schools academically outperform students in public schools (Jeynes, 2014). Based upon the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, the Department of Education released a report in 2011 that showed the "average reading score for eighth-graders in public school to be 19 points lower than the overall score for students attending private schools, and 20 points lower than for students attending Catholic schools specifically"

(Jeffrey, 2012, p. 2). Additional studies have shown that students in private schools, and specifically those of a religious orientation, exhibit higher levels of achievement and attend college at rates higher than those students that attend public schools (Coleman et al., 1982; Falsev & Heyns, 1984; Jeynes, 2005). Jeynes (2007a) utilized the National Educational Longitudinal Dataset (NELS) in a meta-analysis and found that African American and Latino students performed academically equally to Caucasian counterparts (when adjusted for socio-economic status (SES) and gender) in private schools. A more recent study by Jeynes (2009) found students with the highest levels of Biblical literacy significantly outperformed other students in terms of grade-point average (GPA) and percentile rankings on standardized tests, regardless of their attendance in a public or private school (LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012).

School Choice in Modern Education

Educational options in the United States have increased dramatically since the implementation of standards for change in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Berryman, 2015). The update to *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB*)*, entitled *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), was signed into law during 2015 and allowed for the continuation of some aspects of NCLB, while providing new guidance in other areas. Some aspects of ESSA include serving low-income and high-needs students, preparing all students for college and career readiness, providing all stakeholders with reliable information related to students' academic progression using standardized examinations, and ensuring accountability at the nation's lowest performing schools (US Department of Education, 2017). With a continued focus on student achievement, the provision of public school alternatives for parents remains an important component in the current educational landscape.

The division of public school alternatives is broad and varied as it relates to types, function, students served, and overall purpose (Cooper, 1988). Private schools are a diverse group of schools that are non-public and may include those categorized as non-profit, for-profit, parochial, faith-based, and trade-based (Balossi & Hernandez, 2015). Private schools, depending upon their function, may receive state or governmental assistance through monetary means and may be subject to external oversight (Balossi & Hernandez, 2015).

Independent schools, a subset of private schools, are non-profit and funded solely by tuition, charitable giving, and income from donor endowments (Balossi & Hernandez, 2015). While all independent schools are classified as private institutions, not all private schools are independent in nature. Charter schools, categorized as independent, receive their funding through state and federal sources, but operate with greater flexibility than their public school counterparts. Open enrollment (OE) charter schools, such as those authorized in Texas since 1995, are completely "independent local agencies [and function as] their own school districts" (Gronberg, Jansen, & Taylor, 2017, p. 722). As an example, open enrollment charter schools in Texas operate on an independent basis but are monitored under the state's system of testing and accountability (Gronberg et al., 2017). A recent Texas Education Agency release reported that OE charter schools in Texas numbered 676 and served 272,835 students (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

According to Swezey and Finn (2014), the broadest category is Christian and faith-based schools. The group of private schools included under the faith-based designation include Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, Seventh-Day Adventist, Greek Orthodox, Mennonite, Episcopal, Calvinist, Evangelical Christian, and Assembly of God (Boerema, 2009). The largest group of faith-based schools in the United States are designated as Catholic, with more than 2,000,000

students enrolled in grades Kindergarten through 12. However, according to the National Catholic Educational Association (2012), enrollment has decreased by more than 620,000 since 2000.

Student enrollment in schools of choice. The family unit is the central source for making decisions relating to educational decisions (Goldring & Phillips, 2008). When the complex process of choosing schools brings families to a decision of private school education, parents frequently cite unique aspects related to curriculum and academics, discipline procedures, and overall school safety (Bauch, 1988; Erickson, 1986; Greeley, McCready, & McCourt, 1976; Kraushaar, 1972b). These reasons are strong enough that a substantial portion of parents in the United States forego governmentally funded public education in favor of private education.

A 2009-2010 report published by the Center for American Progress in Education reported that 10% of American PK-12 students were enrolled in private schools (LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012). The percentage of students enrolled in private schools in grades PK-12 remained steady during the 2013-2014 school year, with nearly 5.4 million students (10% of entire student population) attending private schools (NCES, 2016). The sizable portion of American students attending private schools led to the creation of the Office Non-Public Education, a division of the United States Department of Education. The Office of Non-Public Education is responsible for representing private school students and providing assisting in the collection of data as it relates to their constituents (USDOE, 2008). Data collected in conjunction with the Office of Non-Public Education found that those students in enrolled in private schools were distributed as follows: Catholic 41.3%, nonsectarian 21.3%, conservative Christian 13.4%, Jewish 5.1%, and the remainder distributed between a variety of faith-based schools (NCES, 2016).

Those students enrolling in private schools shared several characteristics as found in both historical and current studies. Caucasian students are far more likely to attend private schools than those students classified as African American and Hispanic or Latino (Betts & Fairlie, 2001; Long & Toma, 1988). Private school students are more likely to have parents that have higher levels of education than public school counterparts and have higher family incomes (Betts & Fairlie, 2001; Figlio & Stone, 2001; Lankford & Wyckoff, 1992; Long & Toma, 1988).

Christian school movement. Catholic school attendance represents the largest portion of private school students in the United States. Catholic families continue to choose private education at higher rates than families of other religions, although the rate of students has decreased over time (Lankford & Wyckoff, 1992). The strong rates of participation from families of the Catholic faith has persisted since the Roman Catholic Church decreed that members seek Catholic school education for their children in November 1884 (Archer, 2000).

Conservative and evangelical Christian schools are a relatively new concept in American education history (Swezey & Finn, (2014). Beginning in 1962 and 1963, the number of students enrolled in Christian schools increased rapidly due to the Supreme Court decision to remove prayer and Bible reading from public schools (Rose, 1993; Stern, 2003). The Christian school movement became the first "widespread secession from the public school pattern" (Carper, 1984, p. 111) since the Catholic school expansion at the end of the 19th century The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) was founded in 1978 as a response to the large number of Christian schools in America. The ACSI's major purpose is to assist partnering schools in delivering academic programs within a context of a Christian worldview through the provision of professional development, accreditation, and educator certification (ACSI, n.d.; Headley, 2003). ACSI reports that 46% of all Christian schools began in the last 20 years, with more than half of

those schools beginning within the past 10 years (ACSI, 2009). Although half of the number of current Christian schools opened in the last 20 years, total enrollment as dropped in Evangelical Christian schools in the past 30 years (Jeynes, 2016).

Those parents choosing to enroll their children in private Christian schools base the decision upon a set of criteria that is specific to the education sector. Parents choosing faith-based schools reported as important the inherent spiritual and religious influences, values, and attitudes that are woven throughout the educational process (Ji & Boyatt, 2007). Although parental determinants of choice such as academic quality, tuition rates, and school safety are reported by those choosing a faith-based institution, the most significant are religious and spiritual aspects which correspond to family religious characteristics (Campbell, West, & Peterson, 2005; Cohen-Zada & Justman, 2005; Howell, Peterson, Wolf, & Campbell, 2002; Long & Toma, 1988; Mainda, 2002).

Characteristics of private Christian education. Christian schools are in the educational marketplace and must remain competitive in core areas that are factors of choice for all parents, including academics, school safety, and options for extracurricular activities. For parents considering Christian education, the most distinct characteristics are the provision of education filtered through a Biblical lens and an environment that exudes manifestations of the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). In other words, the school must ensure that the education provided is "distinctively Christian" (Groen, 2017, p. 1). Christian education should approach students holistically and focus on the education of the whole child to ensure physical, mental, and spiritual aspects are enriched daily (Groen, 2017; Kitjaroonchai, 2016). The principles of education should be grounded in Biblical values to ensure that the "integration of [the] Christian

worldview" is clearly revealed and perpetually apparent within the Christian school experience (McMaster, 2013, p. 6).

The mission statements of private schools are important tools that guide the actions of school leadership and employees, while also communicating the heart and purpose of the school to parents, students, and others outside of the organization. In a study of educational mission statements across both public and private schools, Boerema (2006) found that private schools have a "richer and more robust mission relating education to life" (p. 182). LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012) found that the mission statements of faith-based schools include specific references to the school's responsibility in nurturing students and supporting growth in mind, body, and spirit. The inclusion of aspects within the mission statement relating to spirit, in addition to mind and body, are distinguishers of faith-based schools.

The true value of a Christian school is indicated in the character of the students, whether through their actions, academic tendencies, or extracurricular involvement. Character development and moral education are hallmarks of Christian education and are interwoven within the educational process (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2008). Character development is intentional and continually ongoing to "engrave character traits upon [students] that lead to [Christ-like] behavior" (O'Sullivan, 2004, p. 98). Moral education leads to integrity, or the "firm adherence to a code of moral values" (Anderson, 2000, p. 141). The aspects of moral education and character development are unique to faith-based schools and sought by parents. The democracy of the United States is not "values-free" and strong character and integrity is required for freedom to continue (Wagner, 2002, p. 54). The biblical worldview provided in Christian schools is "excellent preparation for leadership" through the "strong background belief system which develops confidence and character" (McMaster, 2013, p. 5). The education received in

Christian schools prepares students to answer ethical questions and dilemmas, challenge mainstream ideas, and address current problems from a biblical perspective (McMaster, 2013).

Christian schools, in the pursuit of Godly excellence, must establish and maintain high standards and offer multiple options regarding academics and extracurricular activities. Kennedy (2016) stated that "solid academics, a variety of athletic programs, and an assortment of extracurricular activities are essential in private schools" (p. 1). The competitive nature of the school choice marketplace requires private Christian schools to not only compete but excel in academic offerings and extracurricular options. The academic experience at Christian schools should provide students with biblically-integrated, rigorous coursework that challenges students and allows them to think critically and develop pertinent questions (McMaster, 2013). The athletics and activities should be wide and varied across interest areas and abilities to ensure that students have the opportunity to grow and develop leadership skills (McMaster, 2013).

Christian school administrators and educators operate from a different perspective than public school educators as many view their work as "redemptive" by laboring as faithful stewards in the "spheres of influence which God has called and placed them" (Beckman, Drexler, & Eames, 2013, p. 107). Although some question Christian teachers' professionalism and credibility due to the number of uncertified teachers (Quirk, 2009; Watson, 2006), they are deemed by administrators to be the most valuable asset in Christian schools (Keenan, 1988). Christian educators possess what some researchers have identified as a "faithful presence," or a theology of commitment that manifests itself in all personal and professional relationships (Hunter, 2010, p. 261). Through the concept of faithful presence, Christian teachers view their role as "unfolding the unrealized potentialities of the created order" (Beckman et al., 2012, p. 107). Christian educators must demonstrate both professional competency and godly character

(Swezey & Finn, 2014). In a practical sense, Christian educators should build trust, communicate effectively, resolve conflict, impact perceptions, and effect positive change in the lives of their students and their students' families (McMaster, 2013).

The influence of the unique characteristics of faith-based schools has been identified through research for many years. In addition to the immediate returns on academic performance and standardized test achievement, students attending faith-based schools are more engaged in school, have more positive relationships with teachers and peers, and are less truant (Erickson & Phillips, 2012; Muller & Ellison, 2001; Regnerus, 2003). Students with higher levels of Biblical literacy performed better than peers with lower levels of Biblical literacy and had impacts on achievement gaps that was both broad and significant (Dunham & Wilson, 2007; Porfeli, Wang, Audette, McColl, & Alogozzine, 2009; Rippeyoung, 2009). The closure of achievement gaps in Christian schools has led the call for the utilization of faith-based schools in reaching those students that are unsuccessful in the public sector (Jeynes, 1999; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2010).

Parent Choice Process

Criticism of the American public education system has bolstered vocalization of parents' right to choose as both private research and governmental reports detail the failure within the system (Moe, 2011; Reese, 2013). The achievement gaps for groups of students are well-known and the standardized measures aimed at improving performance have been ineffective. A major criticism of the American public education system is its over-standardized rigid nature (Beck, Olson, & Lowell, 2014; Shannon, 2013). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was legislated to increase school accountability and assessment, but also increased state and local school districts' freedom to establish and operate charter and independent schools in hopes of giving parents more choice for their children's education (Boerema, 2009; Goldring & Phillips, 2008).

Many believe that school choice legislation provides alternatives within and outside of the traditional public education system and offers a more balanced approach to meeting the needs of students and improving overall student achievement in the United States (Jeynes, 2016). Open enrollment charter schools and private schools, due to their flexibility and narrower operational purpose, are better able to respond to parental desires and student needs while reflecting local values which engage families (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Drake, 2000; Nathan, 1996).

Parents have exercised choice at greater rates in the previous decade than in prior educational periods, given the increasing availability and specializations of schools of choice (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1994; Goldring, 2006). Private schools continue to remain stable in student attendance with a rate of 24% of American elementary students and 10 - 11% of American students (Office of Non-Public Education, 2006). Charter schools, however, are the fastest growing school-type in the independent sector, with more than one-million students currently on waitlists according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (Barrows et al., 2017). The charter school movement is attractive to many parents as these schools are provided through public funding but have lesser degrees of standardization and more flexibility in school mission and course offerings than their true public counterparts (Rose & Stein, 2014). Although demand is growing for charter schools, they remain the smallest type within the sector serving K-12, with only 6% of American students attending, roughly the same number of home-schooled students in the United States (Barrows et al., 2017).

Factors impacting parents who choose. The amount of schools and the number of students served in the non-public educational marketplace remains relatively low, as almost 80% of American students attend public schools. Available research is even more limited within specific sectors of private education, such as faith-based schools. Research has shown, however,

that parents are the major decision makers regarding school-type and have the greatest degree of influence on school decisions (Bukhari & Randall, 2009; Zimmer & Buddin, 2007). Parents that identify as educational consumers (Chubb & Moe; 1990; Henig, 1996; Moe, 2001; Schneider et al., 2000; Smith & Meier, 1995) have different parental characteristics than those that do not engage in choice. Some of these characteristics include aspects related to the level of parental involvement and overall satisfaction with their child's education prior to entering the school choice marketplace (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005; Buckley & Fisler, 2003; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000). Parents choosing schools are typically dissatisfied with the quality of their assigned public school (Brasington & Hite, 2012; Brunner, Imazeki, & Ross, 2010; Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2005; Sandy, 1992; Stoddard & Corcoran, 2007) and may be "choosing away" from their current educational situation (Goldring & Phillips, 2008, p. 212). A 2007 survey found that private school options appealed to low income students and those parents of low-performing students (Moe, 2011). Additionally, minority parents classified as low socioeconomic also preferred the perceived academic aspects of private education (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Actual choice behavior, though, yields results that are much more complicated as "stated preferences differ from revealed preferences" (Schneider & Buckley, 2002, p. 136). The role of both ethnicity and socioeconomic class do factor into actively choosing a nonpublic school option. Those parents that choose private education aspire for their students to obtain a higher quality academic education (Davies, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2011; Goldring & Phillips, 2008). The set of criteria across all parents that chose alternatives to traditional public school has been stable and includes the school's reputation, academic performance data, proximity to home, educational values communicated by the school, school safety, and philosophy of discipline (Gorard, 1999; Henig, 1990; Schneider and Buckley, 2002). Research from Buddin, Cordes, and

Kirby (1998) also revealed that as family income rises, so does the inclination to choose a private school.

Although actively choosing an alternative to public school is not an innate benefit of itself, the mechanism can result in a better educational situation for a student and their family (Deming, Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2014). Private schools may capitalize on this mechanism by establishing favorable recruitment policies and creating unique organizational structures and processes that lead to greater parent satisfaction (Lopez, Wells, & Holme, 2002; Tedin & Weiher, 2011). The processes established by schools of choice have been received favorably by parents as research indicates "parents are overwhelmingly more satisfied with their new school than their previous school on a range of measures" (Vassallo, 2000, p. 3). Greene, Howell, and Peterson (1997) found that parents' initial satisfaction with their child's switch from public to private schools were "large, clear, and positive" (p. 15). The explanation for this initial satisfaction, though, remains largely unknown with some contending high satisfaction levels are the "ex-post rationalization" of the choice made after the parental effort to enroll their child in a private school (Rhinesmith & Wolf, 2016, p. 5).

The reasons for leaving a public school have been studied and several determinants have consistently been reported. According to several researchers (Bauch, 1988; Erickson, 1986; Greeley et al., 1976; Kraushaar, 1972a), parents leave schools due to concerns over academic quality, curricular emphasis, discipline, and school safety. Additional research has found parents also leave public schools due to the lack of religious and moral values integrated into the curriculum, overall quality of instruction, class size, and school climate (Bukhari & Randall, 2009). The most significant factor for those leaving public schools in favor of faith-based schools, however, was the lack of spiritual environment and atmosphere of the public school

(Hunt, 1996). Private schools can capitalize on the disappointment of parents within the public sector and address specific needs and reflect the values desired by parents (Hamlin, 2017; Hess, 2001).

Parent Satisfaction in Christian Schools

Parent satisfaction is a "highly individualized and volatile construct with a variety of measurement constructs" (Goldring & Rowley, 2006; McNaughton, 1994) which include both academic and non-academic factors (Friedman et al., 2007; Hausman & Goldring, 2000) and indicates the fulfillment of one's needs or expectations (Kelesidou et al., 2017; Texas Education Agency, 2017). Research has developed a group of determinants which have been utilized to moderately explain parent satisfaction when a school choice has been made (Friedman et al., 2006). The most succinct, yet representative, tool was developed by Tuck (1995) and was utilized to determine predictors of parent satisfaction in the District of Columbia Public School system. Parent satisfaction can be measured by several factors to accurately reflect parent satisfaction and may include (a) school communication, (b) parental involvement, (c) academic achievement, (d) curriculum, (e) school environment, (f) school safety, and (g) transportation (Bond & King, 2003; DeVoe et al., 2004; Erickson, 1996; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Griffith, 1997; Ham & Hayduk, 2003; Maddaus, 1990; McGrew & Gilman, 1991). Validity and reliability of these determinants have been proven by researchers that have utilized these variables in multiple educational sectors and found the factors to be representative of parent satisfaction (Hausman & Goldring, 2000). Other recent studies found that overall parent satisfaction was dependent upon school and teacher communication with families, availability and standard of school resources, and effectiveness of school leadership (Friedman et al., 2007; Friedman et al., 2006). Ji and Boyatt (2007) reported that teacher quality, rigor of academic

programs, technology, teacher attention to parent and student requests, and class sizes influenced overall parent satisfaction. Other influential factors included the location of the school in relation to home, extracurricular options, social status of the school, management style, and facilities (Beabout & Cambre, 2013; Bosetti, 2004; Checchi & Jappelli, 2004; Eckes, 2005; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Green, Howell, & Peterson, 1997). Although the results are varied, several key characteristics shape parent satisfaction with their chosen schools. Cooper and Letts (2002) found that parental satisfaction was "best predicted by parental perceptions of a safe school and positive climate" (p. 16). Additionally, the "idea that private education is a partnership between parent, child, and school" is a common theme in parent satisfaction and drives organizational approaches in meeting the needs of families (Kennedy, 2008, p. 3). Factors impacting parent satisfaction include parental gender, parental ethnicity, and parental level of income (Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006). Parent satisfaction levels are influenced by several factors, most notably, poverty and education (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Parents' education levels, along with levels of income, were inversely correlated to overall levels of parent satisfaction (Gibbons & Silva, 2009). The income of parents is correlated to the education level of parents: higher level earners generally have higher levels of education (LaForret & Mendez, 2010). Parental income has been found to be associated with various educational facets, including parental beliefs about their child's education (Kelesidou et al., 2017). Several studies show that parental gender and ethnicity are associated with satisfaction as it relates to their children's schools (Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006; Raty, 2004). Parental experiences related to their own education and differences in culture related to both gender and ethnicity shape the expectation levels and contribute to overall satisfaction (Kelesidou et al., 2017).

School climate. School climate is often described as an intangible element, or a feel, that pervades all components of a school. School climate is the collective perceptions of all individuals interacting within the school that take place between members and between the structural characteristics of the organizational environment (Becerra, 2016; Becerra, Munoz, & Riquelme, 2015). Climate is intertwined with school leadership style, the sense of community a school exhibits, expectations for students, a sense of caring from faculty and staff, and student outcomes and overall achievement (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; National Research Council, 2003; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). School climate is directly impacted by the mission statement as it relates to "beliefs about life, humans' role, and the role education plays with the human's role in life" (Boerema, 2006, p. 182).

A school's culture is the "distinct identity of the school" as found in ideas, values, and beliefs (Alston, 2017, p. 27). School climate, however, is how the school is "internalized or perceived by the community" and includes overall attitudes along with the "tone or atmosphere" that is perceived when on campus (Sherblom et al., 2006, p. 21). Since the climate, or tone, of the school pervades all areas, including the physical, academic, and social atmospheres, it is an important influencer on teachers, students, and families (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Epstein, 1991; Epstein, Coates, Clark-Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). The climate is derived from four salient aspects: safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and the physical environment (Cohen et al., 2009; Emmons, Comer, & Haynes, 1996; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Safety is associated with the physical safety of the school building along with the social and emotional support received by students and teachers while teaching and learning includes the quality of instruction, or excellent teaching (Mowen, 2015; Parker, Greenville, & Fless, 2011),

and ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Relationships are defined by the amount of diversity present in communication and the school's effort at collaborating with students and families to create a "sense of community" (Parker et al., 2011, p. 130). The physical environment includes provision of a clean building and adequate space (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017).

The climate, as described by Parker et al. (2011), is the "heart of the school" and must be established and moved forward through "high-quality leadership" (p. 130). Leadership is "essential to the culture and mission of the school" through the indirect context of their actions (Beckman et al., 2012, p. 105). In Christian schools, the principal or school head is crucial to the school climate (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Fullan 1991; Partlow, 2007). In faith-based schools, the school leaders are the principle demonstrator of character and utilize their convictions in shaping school climate (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2008). Ensuring that education occurs from a biblical worldview assists in shaping school climate and provides educators with the direction needed to teach character and impact the spiritual domain of students. School climate, when integrated with components of character, positively impacts student decision-making (Anderson, 2000; Guiness, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2004; Wynne & Ryan, 1993).

Quality of staff. The quality of school staff, most notably teachers, is a pertinent factor and predictor of parent satisfaction with their child's school (Xu & Gulosino, 2006). Unlike a tangible product, though, the benefits a student receives in the classroom are difficult to ascribe to the quality of the teacher. The quality of staff is defined as the commitment of staff to students and their ability to adapt to meet student needs (Faulkner & Latham, 2016). Strong (2011) synthesized the qualities of an excellent teacher to specifically define a highly-qualified teacher. Strong (2011) found highly-qualified teachers to possess the following traits: (a)

personal attributes including honesty and compassion, (b) state or local teacher qualifications which speak to the teacher's expertise, (c) research-based instructional practices and pedagogical skills including classroom management, (d) and effectiveness as demonstrated by student performance. Those teachers described as low-quality are assumed to have fewer degrees, less experience in education, and lack certifications or teaching credentials (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2005; Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002).

Regardless of the "mixed bag of results" related to teacher attributes as an indicator of quality (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2001, p. 16), high quality instruction is deemed as the most important factor in American education leading to student achievement (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Marzano, 2003). The perception of potential impact of teacher quality on student achievement is shared by children, parents, administrators, and policymakers (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012). Student achievement and academic growth is a central part of modern education and the quality of classroom teachers has been studied as an important variable (Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, & Rivkin, 2005; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kane, 2005; Strong, 2011). Teachers have a primary role in student achievement due to the amount of time spent with students daily (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007). Some researchers believe that teachers are the most influential factor in predicting student success (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004). However, research has found that most indicators of teacher quality are not related to achievement gain, leading some to ask if quality even really matters (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). Additional research by Hanushek & Rivkin (2012) found that observed teacher characteristics have not been reliable in predicting student outcomes. Hattie (2003) found that students account for at least 50% of the variance in achievement while teachers

account for 30%. The most powerful factor in the learning equation is what teachers "know, do and care about" (Hattie, 2003, p. 2).

In Christian schools, several teacher attributes are linked to perceived or valued-added quality. Some of these traits include: (a) appearance, (b) punctuality, (c) proper grammar, (d) collegiality, (e) organizational skills, (f) instructional coherence, and (g) student progress monitoring (Hurst & Reding, 2000). Additionally, teacher affect (caring, enthusiasm, dedication) impacts overall teacher effectiveness (Hattie, 2003; Watson, Miller, Davis, & Carter, 2010). Furthermore, Christian educators can improve their perceived quality by promoting a positive and collaborative family-school partnership (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012). Christian educators also exhibit character and demonstrate their "moral imperative by taking responsibility for student learning" (Swezey & Finn, 2014, p. 9).

Academic programs. Another predictor of parent satisfaction is the quality of academic programs (Froiland, 2014; Peterson, 2006). Academic programming is the quality of educational materials and pedagogical methods employed by the school (Tuck, 1995). Parents expect schools to prepare students for future educational pursuits and allow them to grow intellectually, while also meeting needs associated with individual gifts and talents (Boerma, 2009). Given student achievement is a central mission of all schools, the available programs must be established, maintained, and updated with integrity to reflect current practices and societal and higher education needs (Boerma, 2009). Academic programs are a key indicator of parent satisfaction in all schools, but especially private schools, as parents are paying tuition with the expectation that their children will receive an excellent academic experience (Freidman et al., 2007).

Academic achievement occurs in an intentionally created environment where teachers consider the physical learning environment and individual student characteristics (Coleman et al., 1982). Additional factors that influence academic performance include promoting a positive academic climate and maintaining "awareness and dexterity" with new academic standards (Alston, 2017, p. 14). Schools that are perceived to be high-quality have students who earn higher math scores and complete more college-readiness requirements (Deming et al., 2014).

Academic returns at private schools are especially important in attracting parents and maintaining enrollment. Jeynes (2014) indicated that the "achievement gap in faith-based schools is 25% narrower than ones in public school" and is maintained when comparing both racial and socio-economic status of students (p. 167). Gamoran (1996) stated that private schools have "more intensive academic climates." Coleman et al. (1982) suggested that academic performance differences between public and private schools could be based upon differences in the rigor of coursework, amount and quality of homework assigned, disciplinary climate within classrooms, and overall student behavior. Some findings show that academic achievement is relatively the same when controlling for demographic variables (Braun, Jenkin, & Grigg, 2006; Lubienski, S. & Lubienski, 2006). Additionally, Jepsen (2003) also reported that private school competition does not have any "positive significant impact on achievement."

The academic climate created in Christian schools can be distinctively different as expectations are not relative to individual teachers and school philosophies but rather founded upon absolutes in the Bible. This known and measurable expectation provides a competitive advantage to Christian schools among a distinct set of parents in the school choice market. Christian school principals provide an essential role in student academic achievement through directing the instructional environment (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 1999;

Partlow, 2007). An understanding of teaching staff's strengths and weaknesses can be used to "leverage teacher expertise" so that all students are served (Moore-Johnson, 2015, p. 117).

Social development and extracurricular activities. In the pursuit of educating the whole child, schools must focus on involving students in situations that promote social development. In many cases, schools offer many extracurricular activities centered on student interest, competition, and building upon student strengths and talents. These activities operate with an endorsement from the school and are usually initiated in response to parent or student desires (Stearns & Glennie, 2010). Social development and extracurricular activities are the activities that contribute to the overall well-being of a child, especially as it relates to a child's physical and socio-emotional needs (Rikoon, Brenneman, & Petway, 2016). Extracurricular activities are similarly defined as those "external to the core curriculum" (Shulruf, 2010, p. 594). These activities can be categorized as "sports-, academic-, or personal-related activities" (Groen, 2017) and may include "interscholastic, intramural, service and government clubs, music, art, drama organizations, and academic or vocational clubs" (Ranjit, 2016, p. 194).

Many benefits have been identified as a result of students' participation in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities have been shown to promote cognitive skills that assist students educationally and professionally (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Lareau, 2002). Physical activity and involvement in competitive athletics has been found to stimulate brain activity and increase students' classroom abilities (Coe, Pivarnik, Womack, Reeves, & Molina, 2006; Reys & Reys, 2011). Renfrow, Caputo, Otto, Farley, and Eveland-Sayers (2011) found that classroom achievement and standardized test score means were higher for those students participating in at least one athletic activity while Powell, Peet, and Peet (2002) found students that participated in at least one extracurricular activity earned higher

grades through modest participation in extracurricular activities. Participation in extracurricular activities has also been shown to have positive developmental effects, including greater maturity (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), better decision-making (DeMoulin, 2002), and educational resiliency (Carnegie Foundation, 1992; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Granger & Kane, 2004; Kane, 2004; Larson et al., 2004; Lauer et al., 2006), and higher rates of school completion (Davolos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1990; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995; Melnick, Sabo, & Vanfossen, 1992; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005).

Whether physical or nonphysical, extracurricular activities promote the social development of students. Many inherent features of extracurricular activities promote friendship, including an activity that includes regular contact (Feld, 1981; Schaefer, Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011). Schools schedule time for extracurricular activities to promote positive peer interactions, while developing friendships that encourage social development (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012; Simpkins, Vest, Delgado, & Price, 2012. When grouping students with similar interests, the experiential framework builds relationships and promotes teamwork and emotion regulation (Larson, 2000). Schools provide oversight of activities to ensure the affective climate is conducive to building student self-esteem, providing a healthy social environment, and contributing to the academic pursuits within the school (Brackett, Reyes, & Rivers, 2011). Peguero, Ovink, and Li (2016) showed the manner which extracurricular activities also "nourish relationships across racial and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 3).

Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1999) found Christian school students were more involved in service-related activities than those students in nonreligious schools. As Christian school administrators promote the practice of "faithful presence," students should be encouraged

to engage in social and civic activities that allow students to extend "love, grace, mercy, and justice" (Hunter, 2010, p. 1). Service learning allows students to become acquainted with the realities of life outside of a Christian environment and to begin answering questions related to social, political, and moral issues (Youniss et al., 1999). Christian schools are well served to promote physical activities not just for the immediate impacts on physical, social, and academic domains, but for the opportunity to teach Christian standards throughout participation and interactions with peers. The involvement in extracurricular activities allows students the ability to develop the "Fruit of the Spirit, Christian values, Christian character, and a deeper level of faith" (Groen, 2017, p. 13). Groen (2017) also showed that a positive relationship exists between student involvement in extracurricular activities and their faith development.

Parent involvement. Parent involvement throughout the educational process is needed by educators and desired by parents. *The No Child Left Behind Act,* along with its reinstatement, the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, includes parent involvement as a major component of the successful education of students (Park & Holloway, 2012). Given the focus of parent involvement in federal legislation, schools have focused on involving parents in more aspects of education (Schneider & Buckley, 2006; Shanker, 1988). The student, family, school, and community are to be closely tied so students feel cared for, which enhances the chance of student success (Epstein, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Fan, William, & Wolters, 2012; Karbach, Gottshling, Spengler, Hegewald, & Spinath, 2012; Wei-Bing & Gregory (2012); Williams & Wolters, 2012). Ever aware of the importance of their involvement, parents have consistently cited their involvement as one of the most critical aspects of parenthood (Addington, 2009; Coleman, 1998). Although parents are aware of the difference that can be made for their child's success as a result of their involvement, there are often communication barriers and impediments that

disrupt home-school communication (Lake, Jochim, & DeArmond, 2015). Parent involvement is a choice, though, and is often an indicator of the "family norms and values associated with schooling" (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003, p. 190).

Parent involvement is defined the multifaceted support that occurs at the individual or community level through participation of parents in school activities (Stevens & Patel, 2015). Higher student achievement levels have been found to be associated with increased levels of parental involvement (Darling, Kleiman, & Larocque, 2011; Mowen, 2015). In addition to student achievement, parental involvement has also been shown to positively impact engagement in schoolwork and school dropout rates (Jeynes, 2007b; Yan & Lin, 2005). Six categories of parental involvement have been defined by Epstein (1987) and include: (a) parenting, (b) communicating with school personnel, (c) facilitating learning at home, (d) participating in decision-making at school on behalf of their child, (e) volunteering at school functions, and (f) collaborating in the community in efforts to improve the local educational system. According to Muller (1998), the involvement can be formal (direct engagement with student as it pertains to schoolwork) or it may be informal (indirect engagement through volunteering or chaperoning). Parents feel greater comfort and more empowerment to engage in collaborative efforts with schools if they feel their opinions are valued and if schools are reaching out to actively involve them in school functions (Eccles & Harold, 1993).

Schools understand the importance of parental involvement given the practical and theoretical importance of family engagement (Abd-El-Fattah, 2006; Barnard, 2004; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Hampden-Thomas, Guzman, & Lippman, 2013; Hango, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Jeynes, 2007b; Spera, 2005). All parties, including the child, the school, and the parent, benefit from a school-family relationship (Comer, 2005;

Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Epstein et al. (1997) found family-school partnership programs yielded gains in student achievement in math, reading, and writing. Parents and family members can be tremendous difference-makers in their students' academic success (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2003).

Teacher practice is the strongest direct indicator of family involvement in the educational environment (Epstein, 2001). Educators whom only view the children in their classes as students also view families separate from the school (Epstein, 1995). Teachers are highly influential in building and maintaining the school-parent relationship (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Simon, 2004). The ability to truly partner with a family allows the teacher to shape decisions with a more intimate knowledge of the student to increase student success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). The parent-teacher partnership has also shown to impact teachers as they raise expectations for those students whose parents regularly collaborate with the school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Studies have also shown that parents' values and attitudes toward education transfer to their children, leading to the need for schools and families to establish meaningful relationships that allow students to be more engaged and motivated (Carpenter et al., 2016).

Summary

Through educational reforms driven by unsatisfied parents because of failing public schools and the overly bureaucratic nature of the educational system, school choice has become a more prevalent option for many families (Brasington & Hite, 2012; Prichard & Swezey, 2016). Students and families are placed at the center of the marketplace and schools compete for the right to educate children. Through economic machinations related to product choice in a market, families utilize available information regarding schooling options and make a decision that is of

the greatest perceived benefit. Once families make a choice concerning education, schools must frequently ascertain parental satisfaction to maintain a positive relationship.

Although many studies exist regarding parent choice in Catholic and parochial schools (Buttrum, 1994; Esty, 1974; Hunt, 1996; Mainda, 2002), the decision processes that Christian parents make when choosing has not been adequately studied (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). The body of research pertaining to "parents' motivation for choice and predictors of satisfaction that lead to retention" is also limited (Davis, 2011). Characteristics of private schools and what make them successful are also available in literature, but the characteristics of families related to enrollment and satisfaction with private schools is few (Davis, 2011). Rhinesmith and Wolf (2017) reported that research indicates that Christian parents who actively shop and choose their children's school are more satisfied with the school they have chosen than their previous school, but little information is available that explains the satisfaction. More research is needed, especially in the Christian sector, as parents' ability to make school choices increases (McCully & Malin, 2003). Friedman et al. (2006) reported there are few research studies available regarding the school satisfaction of minority group parents in schools of choice.

Parent satisfaction is of great importance to schools in the private and independent sectors. Given the large number of faith-based schools that have closed in recent years and the increased competition from charter schools, parent satisfaction must be understood to provide parents with the service that is desired. For many Christian schools, the ability to retain families holds high economic value. Joshi (2014) developed a conceptual model of parent school satisfaction from literature (Elacqua, Schneider, & Buckley, 2006; Hirschman, 1970; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall. 2000; Srivastava, 2007). The model indicates that parents are in a continual choice loop and reevaluate their educational goals and family values compared to the school's

service each school year. In other words, families determine if their satisfaction is at an acceptable level. Friedman et al. (2006) reported that parent satisfaction means "parents are more likely to keep their child at the school of choice, send their other children to the school, and share their positive experiences with others" (p. 473). Research on parents' motivations for choice, and predictors of satisfaction that lead to retention, are limited (Davis, 2011). Chambers and Michelson (2016) and Toldson and Lemmons (2013) pointed to the need for a greater understanding of the relationship amongst demographic characteristics such as parental gender and ethnicity and measures of parental satisfaction. This study will determine the predictors of parent satisfaction in multiple Christian schools and utilize family demographic information across multiple categories to explain satisfaction. It will also provide information regarding parental expectations to guide student retention efforts. Christian schools must remain aware of how parental demographic factors contribute to overall parent satisfaction.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of the study is to determine the degree to which parental demographic factors predict values of parental satisfaction among private Christian schools. This chapter will explain the research design and restate the research questions and accompanying null hypotheses. Along with instrumentation, study participants and setting will be discussed before concluding with a description of the procedures and data analysis.

Design

A correlational research design will be used for this study due to the usefulness in discovering relationships between variables that are not controlled by the researcher (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Multiple regression is the optimal choice for analysis when working with two or more predictor variables and one criterion variable (Gall et al., 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Warner, 2013). The criterion variable, overall parent satisfaction, was calculated as the mean score from all survey responses within the CSS while the predictor variables are the mean scores derived from each category within the survey. Studies pertaining to parent satisfaction and school choice commonly utilize a correlational study design (Alsauidi, 2016; Friedman et al., 2007; Kuo, Walker, Belland, & Schroder, 2013) suggesting that a correlational design is most appropriate for the current study.

The predictor and criterion variables were retrieved by utilizing private Christian school parent input from the CSS. The predictor variables for the study are parent gender, parent ethnicity, and parent education level. Gender, ethnicity, and education level were found to be determinants of parent satisfaction as they are closely associated with varying beliefs about their

child's education (Kelesidou et al., 2017). The predictor variables were identified by each respondent and were utilized to predict the criterion variable, parent satisfaction.

Research Question

The research question for this study is:

RQ1: Do parental gender, ethnicity, and education level predict parent satisfaction for those with children enrolled in private Christian schools?

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for this study is:

$H_0$1: There will be no statistically significant predictive correlation between parental gender, ethnicity, and education level and parent satisfaction for those with children enrolled in private Christian schools.

Participants and Setting

The participants for this study were drawn from a convenience sample of private Christian school parents from a state in the Southwestern United States during the 2018-2019 school year. The selected population of private Christian school parents is appropriate within the geographic region due to the large number of private Christian schools in the traditionally evangelical portion of the United States (Smith, 2015). The number of participants sampled was 109 and was derived from parents that elect to send their child(ren) to one of the three private Christian schools in the research setting. Schools within the sample have an annual tuition cost that ranges from $8,815 per school year to $9,985 per school year. Each school offers some form of need-based financial aid that is determined on a case-by-case basis. The schools are directly associated with a partnering church and are governed by an elected school board. The average student enrollment from the sample schools was 150 students. According to the

National Center for Educational Statistics (2008), the average private school enrolls 174.4 students with most students classified as middle income and of White, non-Hispanic origin.

Each school's mission statement revolves around delivering educational content through a Christian lens and are self-described as college preparatory. The curriculum at each campus meets the needs for student growth so that all students are provided coursework during secondary school that meets requirements for high school graduation and college or university entrance. Students in elementary school receive instruction in math, science, social studies, English, and the Bible along with regular enrichment classes such as physical education, art, music, computer science, foreign language, and library science. The schools have acceleration and remediation options in place for students that are above or below grade level expectations. Advanced courses such has honors, pre-Advanced Placement (AP), Advanced Placement, dual-credit, or concurrent enrollment classes are also offered for students. Additionally, students take the PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT in preparation for college. These examinations are used extensively to compare student preparedness to other private schools and public schools across the area. Many schools have a variety of extracurricular options in place for students that mirror those offered at other private schools and public schools. The extracurricular options available for students begin in elementary school and include academic clubs, civic organizations, community service programs, fine arts options such as band, choir, drama, and visual art, as well as athletic events that include tennis, baseball, basketball, softball, soccer, football, volleyball, golf, cross country, track and field, and swimming. The discipline systems at each school are based upon restorative practices that align with the Christian value of forgiveness. The discipline systems are rooted in a character development program that are integrated throughout the school day in both academic courses and extracurricular activities. As a part of the system, parents and students are made

aware of the discipline system and sign contracts of understanding. Most teachers at each campus hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree in either education or within their teaching content area. Each school is accredited by ASCI. Each school requires their teachers to be properly credentialed to prove expertise in both content and biblical knowledge. Teachers range in experience from first-year teachers to those with more than three decades of teaching experience. Many teachers have taught in the public education system and transitioned to Christian education at a later point in their professional careers. The campus has a head of school and divisional principals that are responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the school. Each school also has administrators and administrative assistants that oversee curriculum, instruction, parent outreach, professional development, marketing, finance, and student recruitment and retention efforts.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized in this study is the *Customer Satisfaction Survey* developed by Tuck (1995) for the Research Center at the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). The purpose of the CSS is to retrieve data regarding factors of parent satisfaction with children enrolled in grades K-12 within the DCPS (Tuck, 1995). The survey measures levels of satisfaction across five primary areas including: (a) quality of staff, (b) school climate, (c) academic programs, (d) social development and extracurricular activities, and (e) parent involvement. The instrument is appropriate to the current study given that multiple factors of parent satisfaction are included from a customer satisfaction standpoint and will allow for correlational analysis for each factor to the overall parent satisfaction score.

The Washington DC Public School System along with the Office of Educational Accountability, Assessment and Information sought to obtain "an index of customer satisfaction" from DC

public school parents through the development of the *Customer Satisfaction Survey* (Tuck, 1995). Kathy Tuck was tasked with developing a survey that was entitled *Customer Satisfaction* Survey. The study established parents as customers and gauged their level of satisfaction with their children's education to understand what factors contributed to overall parent satisfaction and use the information to build effective relationships between local schools and the community (Tuck, 1995). The survey was utilized in a large U.S. public school system to understand the level of parent satisfaction across the five focus areas. Participation from 3,948 parents was achieved in the original study of parent satisfaction for which the instrument was developed (Tuck, 1995). The development of the factors utilized in determining parental satisfaction, the survey methodology, and the development of questions related to each factor have been utilized and referenced in several studies pertaining to parent satisfaction (Badri, Mason, and Mourad, 2009; Barrett, 2003; Bond & King, 2003; Chambers and Michelson, 2016; Friedman et al., 2006; Friedman et al., 2007; Griffith, 2000; Parkes and Ruth, 2011; Toldson and Lemmons, 2013). Chambers and Michelson (2016) sought to analyze predictors of parent satisfaction for low-income parents in urban areas and utilized a similar methodology with findings that mirrored Tucks findings in 1995. Badri et al. (2009) conducted research aimed at finding determinants of parents' satisfaction across subject areas and the effects of school factors, parent's demographics and school's characteristics. Badri et al. (2009) utilized Tuck's survey criterion variables as a basis for development of their survey and report similar findings as they conducted research in public schools during the 2009-2010 school year. Friedman et al. (2007) conducted research that sought to determine predictors of parent satisfaction for minority groups for parents across the country. The researchers utilized a survey and reported similar findings with the use of a similar methodology and data analysis procedures.

There were 12 demographic questions followed by questions for each of the five focus areas in the study. The number of questions for each subcategory was as follows: (a) Quality of Staff – five questions, (b) School Climate – five questions, (c) Academic Programs – nine questions, (d) Social Development and Extracurricular – five questions, and (e) Parent Involvement – five questions. The questions included in each section were developed to find levels of satisfaction and are appropriate to the purpose. All survey questions include answer choices based upon a five-point Likert scale, with each possible choice representing a level of satisfaction. (See Appendix D for detailed survey administration procedures.) The answer choices are as follows: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, No Opinion = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5. Overall scores for the Customer Satisfaction Survey range from a minimum of 29 points to a maximum of 145 points, with a score of 29 indicating strong overall parent dissatisfaction and a score of 145 indicating strong overall parent satisfaction. Four of the survey subscales, Quality of Staff, School Climate, Social Development and Extracurricular, and Parental Involvement, each include five items. For these subscales, a score range of 5 points to 25 points is possible from survey completion, with a score of 5 indicating strong parent dissatisfaction and a score of 25 indicating strong parent satisfaction. The fifth subscale, Academic Programs, has a score range of 9 points to 45 points, with a score of 9 indicating strong parent dissatisfaction and a score of 45 indicating strong parent satisfaction. Tuck (1995) described quality of staff as those factors contributing to teacher commitment to their profession and their students: (a) school climate pertained to student and school safety, (b) building maintenance and overall friendliness, (c) social development and extracurricular activities are described as opportunities for students to develop talents and become involved in community and extracurricular activities, (d) parental involvement pertains to the opportunity and attitude of

the school in allowing parents to interact with school personnel, (e) and academic programs involve academic content and teaching methodologies employed by the school.

The survey instrument was refined by other offices within the DCPS system and input was provided by both the Washington Parent Group Fund and Parents United for the DC Public Schools parent advocacy groups (Tuck, 1995). The instrument was found to be both valid and reliable through pilot testing (Tuck, 1995). Pilot testing was conducted by Kathy Tuck and the Research Center for District of Columbia Public Schools. The pilot study included 30 parents from the Washington Parent Group Fund that had students in the DCPS system. Reliability testing was conducted using a test-retest procedure over a 4-week period. The reliability coefficient for the overall survey was 0.937. Each subscale operationalizes the criterion studied as determined by tests of internal reliability, with each section yielding Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.69 to 0.90 (Tuck, 1995). While there is no standard for acceptable measurement reliability, measurement reliability of (about 0.70) may be sufficient (Warner, 2013, p. 906). Strong content validity was found in follow-up procedures as scores provided information about the underlying constructs of each subsection (Tuck, 1995). The follow-up procedures included qualitative measures such as discussions and comments from surveyed parents that further proved content validity, clarity in presentation of survey questions, and homogeneity of verbal response and survey response (Tuck, 1995). Express permission to utilize the survey instrument was received from the D. C. Public Schools research department (see Appendix E).

Procedures

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to proceeding with the research process. Once approved, a formal request for participation in the current study

was submitted to the lead administrator at each targeted private Christian school in the research area (see Appendix F). Along with the request, the researcher sent a permission request letter that detailed the implications of the study, along with logistical explanations and the protection in place to ensure anonymity of participants (see Appendix G). Permission to utilize each school's parent outreach system was granted by school administration to facilitate the distribution of the survey (see Appendix H). The survey was included in an email link provided through the parent outreach system, Renweb, and hosted via Surveygizmo software. Information regarding the purpose of the study and the option to complete the survey in a voluntary manner were included in the email contents (see Appendix A and Appendix C). Agreement to participant in the study was voluntary and participants were provided with consent information prior to answering survey questions (see Appendix B). The survey was sent to each active user that is identified as a parent or guardian through every participating school's parent outreach system. A follow-up email was sent after one week after initial contact to serve as a reminder (see Appendix C). The email link to the survey remained active for 21 days from the date of release. Respondents were allowed one response per unique email address. Following the 21-day period, surveys were closed and the raw data was compiled for analysis. All survey submissions were anonymous as submissions were returned to the researcher with a unique number for each respondent that is not associated with an email address, student and parent name, school name, or geographic location. The survey software was set to only accept one survey response per email address to ensure individual parents do not submit multiple responses. Approximately 650 surveys were distributed via each schools' parent outreach system and a parent response rate of 17% was achieved for the study.

Data Analysis

The IBM Statistical Package for the Social Science software (SPSS Version 24.0) was used to perform data analysis and included analysis of statistical significance among all variables identified in this study. Multiple regression is the optimal choice for analysis when working with two or more predictor variables and one criterion variable (Gall et al., 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Warner, 2013). The average parent satisfaction was used as the criterion variable while parent gender, ethnicity, and educational level provided the input for each categorical predictor variable. The predictor variables were reclassified to continuous variables by utilizing appropriate and recommended methods for dummy coding categorical variables (Field, 2013).

Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) recommend that predictive studies require the ratio of N to k to be "substantial" for regression analysis to have believable results. The recommendation of Green (1991) is a minimum of $N > 104 + k$, with N representing the total size and k representing the number of individual predictor variables thus requiring a sample size of $N = 106$ for the current study. For this study, the number of participants sampled was 109 which meets the minimum number of participants required in a study to achieve a medium effect size with statistical power of 0.7 at the 0.5 alpha level (Gall et al., 2007, Warner, 2013). The generated model included the coefficient of determination (R^2) which provides an explanation of how well the model explains overall parent satisfaction. The overall regression test statistic, F, which includes the three predictor variables, was tested for significance at the $p < .05$ level by indexing the effect size for the overall regression model by R, R^2, and adjusted R^2. The level of significance used to test the hypothesis will be $p < 0.05$ as it is the accepted threshold for significance in educational research (Cohen, 1988; Warner, 2013).

Assumption testing for multiple regression analysis included the assumption of linearity and homogeneity of variance (homeoscedasticity), normality of residuals, assumption of independent residuals, test of non-multicollinearity among predictor variables, and the assumption of multivariate normal distribution (Gall et al., 2007; Warner, 2013). Scatterplots and boxplots were used to test for linearity and homogeneity of variance. The normality of residuals was visually assessed through the creation of a normal probability plot. The assumption of independent residuals was tested through the use of the Durbin-Watson statistic. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was assessed to determine if multicollinearity exists among predictor variables (Warner, 2013). Finally, an inspection of scatter plots was used to check for linear conformation to visually confirm normal multivariate distribution in the cumulative sample of variables (Lind, Marchal, & Wathen, 2012).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this correlational study was to determine if factors of parent satisfaction are predicted by parent demographic variables. There was a single research question that directed this correlational study. An examination of the research question, hypothesis, descriptive statistics, and results are included in this section.

Research Question

RQ1: Do parental gender, ethnicity, and education level predict parent satisfaction for those with children enrolled in private Christian schools?

Null Hypothesis

$H_0$1: There will be no statistically significant predictive correlation between parental gender, ethnicity, and education level and parent satisfaction for those with children enrolled in private Christian schools.

Descriptive Statistics

The study consisted of responses from 109 parents surveyed from Christian schools in the southwestern United States. The sample consisted of 33 males and 76 females and cumulatively represented the following ethnicity rates: 73% White, 06% Hispanic, 09% African American, 03% Asian, and 10% other. Table 1 details additional demographic information from the sample. Overall and subscale scores for parent satisfaction are found in Table 2.

Table 1

Parent Respondent Demographic Statistics

Characteristic	Mother (n = 76)	Father (n = 33)
Number of children		
One child	50	15
Two children	24	11
Three or more	02	07
Child's school level		
Elementary	43	24
Middle school	21	05
High school	15	05
Multiple levels	25	23
Parent overall opinion of school		
Excellent	28	16
Good	32	09
Fair	15	08
Poor	01	00
No opinion		
Status for next school year		
Seeking different school	26	09
Remain at same school	44	21
Unsure	06	03
Education (highest level)		
High school	02	00
Associates	15	03
Bachelors	32	13
Graduate level	27	17
Yearly income		
Less than 20,000	00	00
20,000-34,999	01	00
35,000-49,999	02	01
50,000-74,999	06	00
75,000-99,999	15	09
100,000-149,999	28	10
Greater than 150,000	24	13

Table 2

Customer Satisfaction Survey Respondent Scores for Criterion Variable

Categories	Mean	SD	Count
Quality of Staff	1.99	0.69	109
School Climate	1.66	0.58	109
Academic Programs	2.33	0.72	109
Social Development	2.36	0.64	109
Parent Involvement	1.98	0.56	109
Overall Parent Satisfaction	2.06	0.48	109

Results

A multiple regression analysis was used to assess the predictive reliability of parent demographic factors to overall parent satisfaction utilizing the Customer Satisfaction Survey. The criterion variable was overall parent satisfaction and the predictor variables were parent gender, parent education level, and parent ethnicity. The criterion variable for the study, Average Parent Satisfaction, was continuous and measured on a 5-point Likert scale from the Customer Satisfaction Survey. The predictor variables for the study were parent education level, parent gender, and parent ethnicity. These three categorical variables were transformed to dummy variables to ensure continuous variables were utilized in the multiple regression (Lund, 2018). Parent-education level included five levels, parent gender two levels, and parent ethnicity six levels. This section contains the presentation of the results and analysis of the hypothesis.

Assumption Tests

Data screening was conducted on the criterion and predictor variables to check for inconsistencies, bivariate outliers, independence of observations, linearity, homeoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and multivariate normal distribution as recommended by Field (2013), Lund (2018), and Warner (2013). The assumption of bivariate outliers was met as there were no inconsistences of outliers present in the data. The assumption of independence of observations was tested by the Durbin-Watson statistic to ensure adjacent observations were not related (Lund, 2018). Durbin-Watson statistic values range from 0-4 with approximate values of 2 dictating acceptable independence of observations (Lund, 2018). The assumption for the model was met with a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.769.

The assumption of linearity was tested to determine if a linear relationship existed between the criterion variable and the combination of predictor variables through the visual inspection of a scatterplot. The researcher determined that a random distribution of responses occurred between the criterion and predictor variables with no apparent pattern (Lind et al., 2012). The assumption of homoscedasticity was tested to ensure the variances among the combined predictor variables are similar along the predicted criterion variable (Lund, 2018). The assumption is tested through the inspection of the scatterplot for studentized residuals and unstandardized predicted values. There was homeoscedasticity as assessed by visual inspection of the plot. The scatterplot for linearity and homoscedasticity is shown below as Figure 1.

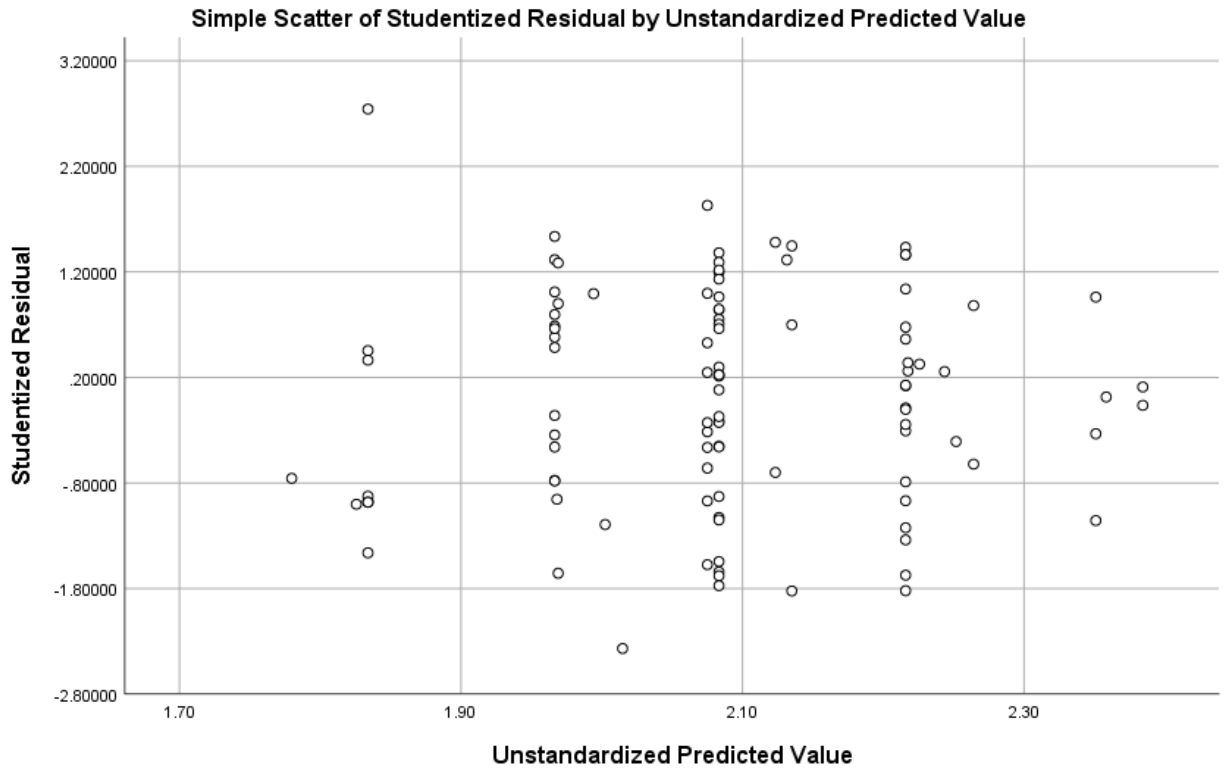

Figure 1. Scatterplot of Average Parent Satisfaction and Sum of Predictor Variables

Multicollinearity was measured by assessing the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to ensure the predictor variables are not highly correlated (Lund, 2018). VIF scores that are greater than 10 indicate a collinearity problem (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). VIF scores for each predictor variable ranged from 1.07 to 3.29, all within normal range. Residuals of the predictor variables were checked for normal distribution. Normality of residuals was checked through a visual inspection of a histogram comprised of standardized residuals and a normal probability plot showing observed to expected residuals. Both charts confirmed normality of residuals and are shown below in Figure 2 and Figure 3. The assumption of multivariate was met through an inspection of a matrix scatterplot of the criterion and predictor variables (Figure 4).

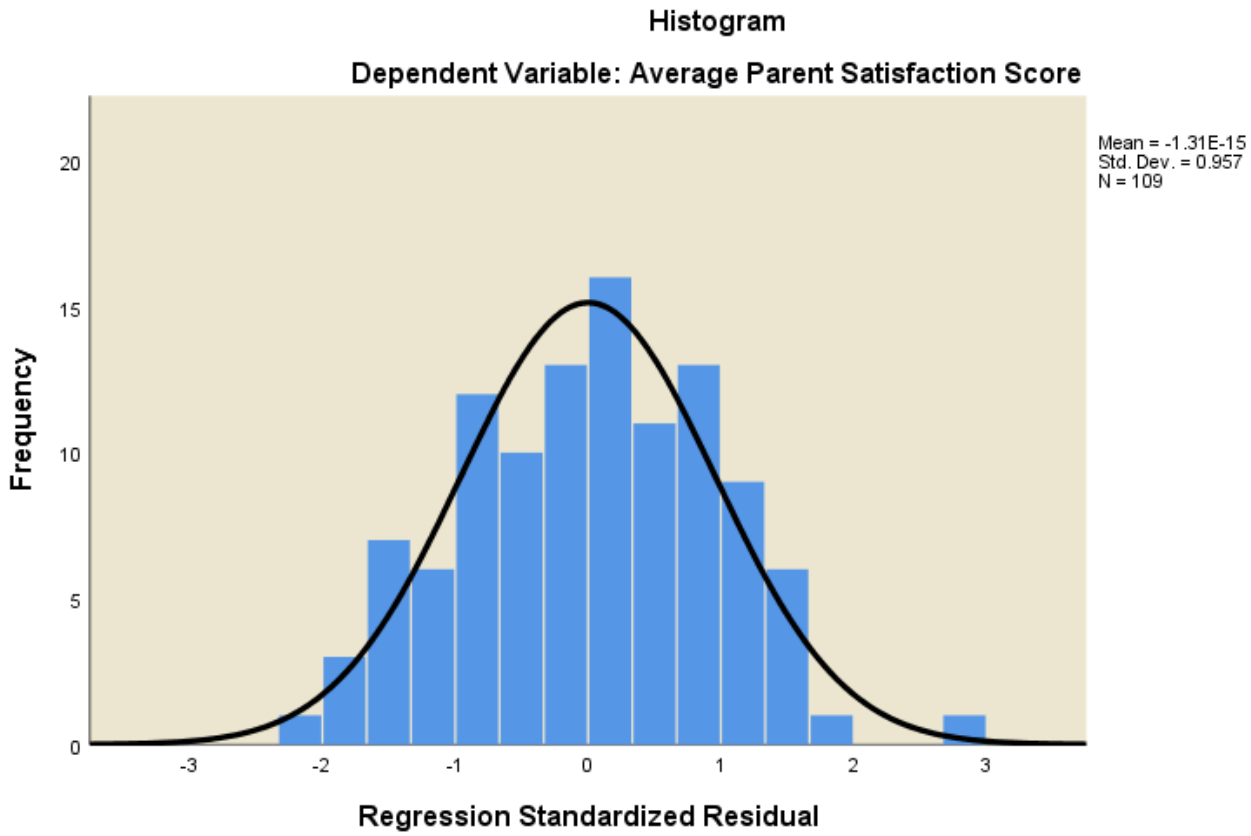

Figure 2. Histogram of Standardized Residuals for Overall Parent Satisfaction

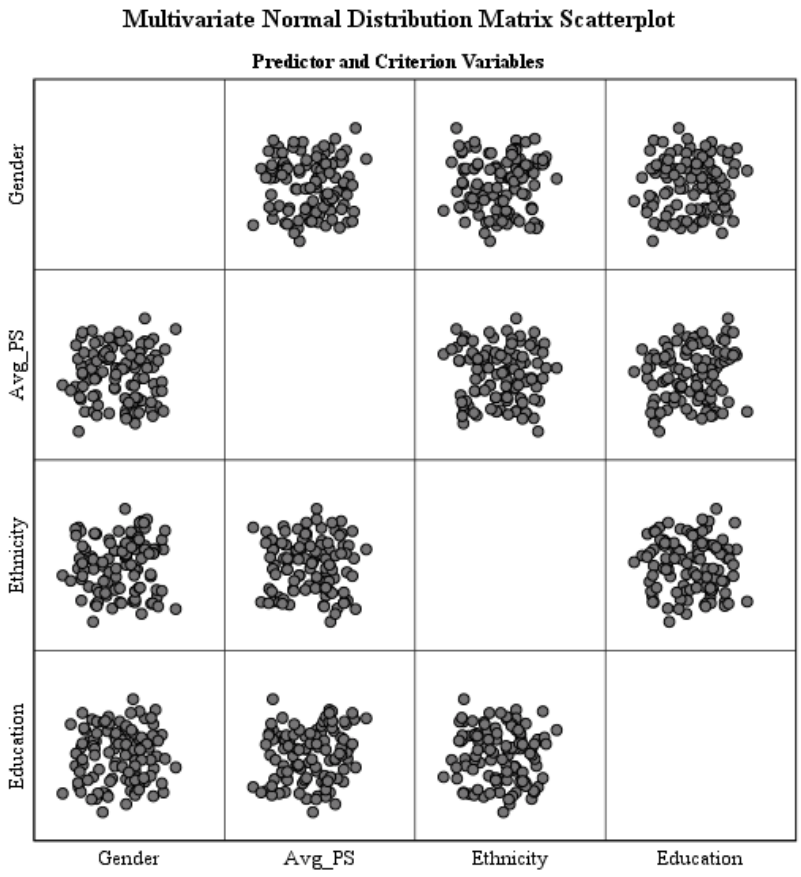

Figure 3. Multivariate Normal Distribution Matrix Scatterplot

Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis states "There will be no statistically significant predictive correlation between parental gender, ethnicity, and education level and parent satisfaction for those with children enrolled in private Christian schools." A linear regression analysis tested the correlation between parent satisfaction and parent gender, ethnicity, and education level. The generated model included the coefficient of determination (R^2) which measures the proportion of variation within the criterion variable, average parent satisfaction, that is explained by the predictor variables (Lund, 2018; Pearson, 2010). The coefficient of determination (R^2 = .116) explains the amount of variance that is shared between the predictor variables. The statistic describes that

11.6% of the variance in parent satisfaction scores is explained by variability found within the combination of parent gender, parent ethnicity, and parent education level. R^2 for the overall model was 11.6%, a small-medium effect size according to Cohen (1988). The model summary is shown below in Table 3.

Table 3

Model Summary of Multiple Regression

R	***R2***	***F***	***P***	**Durbin Watson**
.340	.116	1.438	.182	1.769

The ANOVA table, shown below in Table 4, reports the statistical significance for the overall model. The overall regression test statistic, *F*, which includes the three predictor variables, was tested for significance at the $p < .05$ level as it is the accepted threshold for significance in educational research (Cohen, 1988; Warner, 2013). The model showed that parent gender, parent ethnicity, and parent education level did not statistically significantly predict overall parent satisfaction, $F(9, 99) = 1.438$, $p = .182$. Based upon these findings, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 4

ANOVA Table

Model	***Sum of Squares***	**df**	***Mean Square***	***F***	**Sig.**
Regression	2.995	9	.333	1.438	.182
Residual	22.912	99	.231		
Total	25.908	108			

When coefficients were individually analyzed, a significant relationship between parent gender and parent satisfaction was indicated ($p < .024$), while the overall model was not predictive of a relationship between parent demographic variables and overall parent satisfaction. All other levels of predictor variables did not show a significant relationship as the *p*-values were greater than .05. The coefficient values for the predictors are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Regression Model for Gender, Ethnicity, and Education

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.245	0.060	0.033	14.47

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1. Regression	1398	3	465.9	2.226	0.089
Residual	21978	105	209.3		
Total	23375	108			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.

Model	B	St. Error	Beta		
1. (Constant)	39.420	10.974		3.592	<.001
Parent Gender	7.155	3.123	0.224	2.291	0.024
Parent Ethnicity	-0.568	1.107	-0.049	-0.513	0.609
Parent Education	2.871	1.820	0.152	1.577	0.118

Additional Analysis

Pearson Correlation testing indicated a statistical relationship between parent gender and social development ($p = 0.034$) and parent gender and parental involvement ($p = 0.021$). Additionally, a statistical relationship was indicated between parent education level and parent involvement ($p = 0.045$).

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This chapter contains a discussion of the purpose of the study, the data analysis, and implications for the profession. The chapter also contains discussion pertaining to limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if a predictive relationship exists between parent satisfaction in private Christian schools and the combination of parent demographic factors. Catt & Rhinesmith (2016) and Cheng & Peterson (2017) provide research concluding that factors of ongoing parent satisfaction at private schools is limited. The research question stated, "Do parental gender, ethnicity, and education level predict parent satisfaction for those with children enrolled in private Christian schools"? A multiple regression analysis was utilized to determine if a predictive relationship exists between the criterion variable and each predictor variables. As a result of the analysis, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that parental gender, ethnicity, and education levels do not predict overall parent satisfaction in private Christian schools.

The current study incorporated 109 participants from three private Christian schools in the southwestern United States. The participants for the study included 76 females and 33 males. Chambers and Michelson (2016) and Toldson and Lemmons (2013) pointed to the need for a greater understanding of the relationship amongst demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, income levels and measures of parental satisfaction. The proportion of mothers to fathers corresponds to research reporting that females are more involved in the education of their children than females (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008; Han & Jun, 2013; Yeung et al., 2001).

Recent studies by Dozz and Cavrini (2012) and Kaczan et al. (2014) attempted to compare male to female satisfaction with their children's education but the comparison was abandoned due to the disparity between female and male participants (82% to 18%). However, in studies that compared male versus female satisfaction with their child's education, males participated at a lower rate and were generally more dissatisfied with all areas of their child's education (OECD, 2006). In the current study, males also reported lower overall satisfaction than females with overall satisfaction scores of 1.93 and 2.13 respectively. There was a statistically significant relationship between parental gender and overall parent satisfaction.

In addition to parent gender, both parent education level and ethnicity were isolated as predictors for parent satisfaction based upon available literature. Most parent participants in the current study were middle/upper class and well educated with 91.7% of participants earning $75,000 or more per year and 54.1% having earned at least a bachelor's degree. A large amount of research exists showing that parents' personal educational experiences strongly influence their levels of satisfaction with their children's education (Kaczan et al., 2014; Raty, Jaukka, and Kasanen, 2004; Raty, 2007). Prior research also indicates that the level of education is inversely to overall satisfaction: as parent educational attainment increases so does parent satisfaction with their child's school (Kaczan et al., 2014; Raty, 2007). Research from Gibbons & Silva (2010), however, indicates an inverse relationship between parent satisfaction and educational attainment. In the current study the highest level of parent satisfaction was among those parents with advanced degrees. Those with advanced degrees had a mean satisfaction of 2.15 compared to 1.60 for those with a high school only education.

Parent ethnicity did not have a significant predictive relationship in the current study. This is aligned with public school research indicating that parental satisfaction with their child's

education is not significantly predicted by a parent's ethnic origin (Grolnick, Friendly, & Bellows, 2009; Kaczan et al., 2014; Lee & Bowen, 2006;). These results align with current research showing the reasons for parent satisfaction are misunderstood and fleeting.

The overall model constructed in the study did not predict a statistically significant relationship between parent satisfaction and parent gender, parent ethnicity, and parent education level. Research shows that parents are not a homogenous group of individuals and multiple factors influence not only school choice but satisfaction therein (Baeck, 2009; Baeck, 2010; Jonsdottir et al., 2017; Pepe & Addimando, 2014). Additionally, parental opinions related to educational processes which dictate levels of satisfaction are continually changing (Joshi, 2014). Kelesidou et al. (2017) stated "the problem is that specific, ongoing factors of parental satisfaction in private Christian schools and their influence on overall parental satisfaction and student retention are not understood fully (771).

While the specific reasons for parent satisfaction are not clearly understood, parents are generally quite satisfied when asked to rate their school. In the current study parents had the option of choosing Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor and 78% of respondents chose Excellent or Good. Rhinesmith and Wolf (2017) found that Christian parents who choose public school alternatives are more satisfied than parents with children attending public school but "little information is available that explains the satisfaction" (p. 9). A recent poll of K-12 parents that have children attending public schools found that 71% of parents are completely or somewhat satisfied (Brenan, 2018). The current study confirms that Christian parents are more satisfied, overall, than their counterparts who send their children to public schools, albeit marginally so.

The criterion variable for the study was derived from five areas of education which inform parent satisfaction, including academic programs, parental involvement, extracurricular

activities, school climate, and teacher quality (Tuck, 1995). Joshi (2014) identified factors of parent satisfaction from literature and surveyed both public and private school parents on predictors of satisfaction, which included parental involvement, quality of staff, academic programming, school climate, and social development and extracurricular activities. The lowest sub-score reported in the current study was school culture with an overall average of 1.66 (compared to the parent satisfaction average of 2.06). The highest average was in the area of social development and extracurricular activities with an average of 2.36. These scores only represent the areas of greatest satisfaction for the subset of Christian school parents surveyed and are within a standard deviation of the overall mean for parent satisfaction.

Additional testing within the current study show that significant relationships exist between three factors: parent gender and extracurricular and athletic activities, parent gender and parental involvement, and parent education level and parental involvement. Social development within a Christian school includes activities that develop the "Fruit of the Spirit, Christian values, Christian character, and a deeper level of faith" (Groen, 2017, p. 13). The inclusion of these values within the social development domain may indicate the reason for a significant relationship in this area. Parental involvement continues to be a focus area for schools as both *No Child Left Behind* and *Every Student Succeeds Act* places importance on this factor (Park & Holloway, 2012). All schools, including private schools, have spent time, effort, and resources to involve parents (Schneider & Buckley, 2006). The involvement of parents in their children's education is cited by parents as a critical aspect of parenthood (Addington, 2009; Coleman, 1998). This focus may provide a reason for the significant relationship between parent gender and parental involvement as well as parent education level and parental involvement.

Parent satisfaction "is the most important yet often overlooked measure" of a child's

education (Kittredge, 2017, 27). The results from this study indicate that more research is needed in the area of parent satisfaction within private Christian education. The significant difference in overall satisfaction between male and female respondents does align with research but requires a deeper look within the private Christian school context. Strong statistical relationships between parent gender and social development and parent gender and parental involvement were shown in the current study. Additionally, a relationship between parent education and parental involvement were shown. These findings indicate a strong connection between parent involvement and parent satisfaction.

The results from this study align with other studies which report further research is needed to understand specific factors of ongoing parent satisfaction in private schools after parents have chosen a school (Joshi, 2014; Rhinesmith and Wolf, 2017).

Implications

The current study examined the predictive relationship between parent demographic factors and overall parent satisfaction in private Christian schools. Barrows et al. (2017, n.p.) compared charter, district, and private schools nationwide to determine parental levels of satisfaction across each sector and report that "what parents think of their children's schools has important implications" for schools in each sector. Factors in parent satisfaction may even be more important to Christian school leaders because they continue to wrestle with dwindling student numbers. Private Christian schools have difficulty competing in the school choice era as enrollment has declined by 200,000 from the 2003-2004 through 2013-2014 school years (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As such, crafting the narrative of a school's mission and programs to a specific parent audience is a necessary task to both attract and retain families.

Although this study reiterates that parent groups (and their corresponding opinions and reasons for those opinions) are not homogenous, interesting findings can be drawn from the data. The results support previous findings that females continue to remain more engaged in their children's education than males. (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008; Han & Jun, 2013; Yeung et al., 2001). This greater level of engagement is indicated by the number of females that participated in the study and correlates to female parents being significantly more satisfied than their male counterparts. Perhaps this reveals a need for school leaders to target parent engagement, and specifically male parents, as a means to increase parent satisfaction through targeted involvement opportunities.

The current study found parents with higher levels of education were more involved in their child's school activities. Schools could utilize formal or informal educational opportunities to compensate for the lack of involvement in the school (Kaczan et al, 2014). Additionally, the parents in the study were generally more satisfied with their children's education than their public-school counterparts. This finding also supports previous research regarding parent satisfaction levels at different types of schools. A possible conclusion is that parents who are engaged enough in their children's education to both choose an alternative to public education and to invest financially in that education are likely to be more satisfied. Leaders in private Christian schools can capitalize on this by clearly and regularly communicating with parents about what specifically interests and concerns them. Schools must seek information from their constituency and surrounding communities to determine what factors are most important to parents. Retention rates improve when organizations learn from customers, analyze data and complaints, and increase barriers to customer exit (DeSouza, 1992). The process must be on-

going and schools must constantly adapt their model for assessing parent satisfaction to ensure the results are accurate.

Limitations

Simon and Goes (2018) find limitations to be potential weaknesses within a study that are beyond the control of the researcher. Limitations of this study include survey reach and respondent type. Additionally, demographic questions within the questionnaire limit potential findings.

The survey was deployed to parents who send their children to private Christian schools in the southwestern United States. The school response rate to allow the survey to be distributed was extremely low (<10%). Because of how those results may appear to a school board or other stakeholders, many schools were concerned about the potential implications of a survey that addressed issues of parent satisfaction. As a result of this concern, most schools declined the opportunity to participate. A wider reach of respondents could have changed the demographic population within the survey. Likewise, the respondents were similarly classified as white females with a high level of education. However, as research shows, many of the parents that choose private education for their children are both white and have a higher level of education than the general public. Given the significant difference between males and females in overall parent satisfaction, a greater population of male respondents could have provided more clarity into this result.

Several of the demographic questions within the survey were limited due to lack of choice. Changes in the American population have led to different mixes of ethnic groups. Several subpopulations within the southwestern United States (specifically Mexican immigrants) hold a larger contingency within the Hispanic/Latino racial group. These differences in culture

could provide a new lens into the views of specific ethnic groups as a subset within the total population. Additionally, the rate of divorce and non-traditional couples require the need for differentiated questions within the context of "parent."

Recommendations for Future Research

Decision processes that Christian parents make when choosing their children's educational experience is understudied (Prichard & Swezey, 2016). Current research that provides details pertaining to predictors of ongoing parent satisfaction at private Christian schools is limited (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016; Chen & Peterson, 2017). Based on the current study's outcomes, recommendations for future research are found below.

1. Further research into the relationship between parent gender and overall parent satisfaction within all types of education is needed. The number of male respondents in surveys is historically low and comparisons become difficult. Considering males take part in the educational decision-making process, an understanding of male parent satisfaction is of importance to stakeholders.
2. Implications for male parent engagement could be investigated.
3. Further research into the specific demographic factors that contribute to differences in parent satisfaction in private Christian schools is needed. These factors continue to be difficult to assess within the private Christian school context. Research is required so practitioners are better able to meet the expectations of parents.
4. Further research is needed to better understand overall parent satisfaction in private Christian schools. A dichotomy exists as parents report higher levels of satisfaction with their children's schools while the overall enrollment of private Christian schools

is declining. Research aimed at understanding retention in private Christian schools could ameliorate the ongoing drop in enrollment in private Christian schools.

Summary

Chapter five presented the research question and a discussion of the results. A multiple regression analysis was completed the results indicated that a linear combination of parent gender, education level, and income did not predict parent satisfaction. The chapter concluded with implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate in the Online Survey – Initial Email

Dear Parent or Guardian,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral Degree. The purpose of my research is to determine the relationship of on-going predictors of parent satisfaction and student retention at private Christian schools. Your opinion about different aspects of your child's school and school experience, along with some basic demographic information, will be utilized for the study. Your response will provide valuable information that may contribute to improving parental satisfaction in private Christian schools. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older and have a child(ren) attending [BLANK] Christian School and agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a few demographic questions and the online Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) survey provided through SurveyGizmo. The CSS should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate in the study, please go to https://www...com to complete the survey.

A consent document is provided as the first page you will see after you click on the survey link. The consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign it. Please click on the survey link at the end of the consent information to indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact the researcher, Christopher Gann. You may contact him at (809) 757-7007 or email address: cgann1@liberty.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your input is very important and will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Christopher Gann
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The Relationship Between On-going Factors of Parent Satisfaction and Student Retention Among Private Christian Schools in a Southwestern State

Christopher Gann
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of on-going predictors of parent satisfaction and student retention at private Christian schools. The study will provide information related to associated factors of parent satisfaction relative to general demographic information at private Christian schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older, and you are a parent or guardian of a currently enrolled student in a private Christian school in the Southwest United States. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Christopher Gann, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to determine factors of parent satisfaction in private Christian schools.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Complete an anonymous survey consisting of demographic information and the Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS). The CSS is an online survey with various questions pertaining to various factors and levels of parent satisfaction within your current school. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include clarifying factors of parent satisfaction for school administration and boards within the private Christian school setting.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
All survey submissions will be anonymous and unidentifiable for each participant.
Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your child's school. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time, prior to submitting the survey, without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Christopher Gann. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at cgann1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Philip Alsup, at palsup@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate in the Online Survey – Follow-up Email

Dear Parent of Guardian,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral Degree. The purpose of my research is to determine the relationship of on-going predictors of parent satisfaction and student retention at private Christian schools. Your opinion about different aspects of your child's school and school experience, along with some basic demographic information, will be utilized for the study. Your response will provide valuable information that may contribute to improving parental satisfaction in private Christian schools. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older and have a child(ren) attending [BLANK] Christian School and agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a few demographic questions and the online Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) survey provided through SurveyGizmo. The CSS should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate in the study, please go to https://www...com to complete the survey.

A consent document is provided as the first page you will see after you click on the survey link. The consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign it. Please click on the survey link at the end of the consent information to indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact the researcher, Christopher Gann. You may contact him at (809) 757-7007 or email address: cgann1@liberty.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your input is very important and will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Christopher Gann
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) – Online
Administration Procedures

The information below details the administrative procedures utilized in the dissemination and collection of the CSS instrument to parents in the sample. Participation is voluntary.

- Schools that meet the study criteria (private Christian K-12 schools in the Southwest United States) will be asked permission to distribute the survey to parents (See Appendix F for invitation).
- The CSS, an online tool, will be accessed electronically by parents. Schools will have the option to make the survey available to individual parents through their school's email distribution/contact system or have the initial parent letter (see Appendix A) available on their school's website or online management system.
- Parents will access the online CSS through a link provided in the initial parent letter.
- Parents that choose to access the survey will begin by reading the Consent to Participate form (see Appendix B).
- Parents will begin by completing six demographic questions related to the child(ren) attending the school and two related to their personal demographics.
- Parents will progress to survey questions related to the five criterion variables established in the survey. Respondents will be asked to choose which number most accurately describes their feelings regarding their child's school. The numbering and associated description is as follows: 1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3=No Opinion, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree. There are 29 total questions that correspond to each criterion variable
- Parents will complete the survey by responding to six questions that relate to parent demographics and general opinions related to their child's school.
- Parents will submit the CSS and all results will be returned anonymously to the researcher.

APPENDIX E

Permission to use CSS instrument

Requests, Research (DCPS) <researchrequests@dc.gov>
Wed 4/5/2017, 8:22 AM
Thank you for following up. I confirmed with our legal policy team and you are welcome to use the survey developed by Ms. Tuck. Please give DCPS proper attribution in your use, but we have no other stipulations or concerns.

Thank you,
[Name]

[Name]
Specialist, Research & Evaluation
Office of the Chief of Staff

Address
Address
Address
Desk: 202-000-0000
|
Tue 4/4/2017, 2:45 PM
Ms. [Name],

I am following up regarding my request pertaining to the utilization of the Customer Satisfaction Survey authored by Ms. Tuck in 1995 which I intend to use in a doctoral dissertation. I appreciate your time.

Thanks,

Christopher Gann

Requests, Research (DCPS) <researchrequests@dc.gov>
Mon 3/20/2017, 11:19 AM
Gann, Christopher <cgann1@liberty.edu>;
+1 more
Inbox
Good Afternoon,

We are reviewing this request and will get back to you shortly.

Thank you,
[Name]

[Name]
Specialist, Research & Evaluation
Office of the Chief of Staff

Address
Address
Address

Desk: 202-000-0000

Thu 3/16/2017, 10:58 AM

Ms. [Name],

My name is Christopher Gann and I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am conducting a study on parent satisfaction and have been reviewing available surveys and found an instrument authored by a former employee of D.C. Public schools that closely aligns with my research questions. The instrument is titled "A Customer Satisfaction Survey" and was authored by Kathy Tuck and published in March 1995. I am requesting permission to utilize the instrument in my study of parent satisfaction within schools in north central Texas.

Thank you for your time and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Christopher Gann, M.Ed.

APPENDIX F

Request to school administration to use school in study

Dear [School Administrator],

I am writing to inquire about your interest in allowing me to utilize parents in your school for a survey that I am conducting as part of the requirements for my dissertation at Liberty University.

The study is specific to Christian education in the Southwestern United States and is meant to provide information to school administration and schoolboards related to the ongoing factors of satisfaction amongst parents in private Christian schools. The information will provide feedback related to quality of staff, school climate, academic programs, social development and extracurricular activities, and parental involvement. The feedback will be aggregated by parental demographics (ethnicity, education level, and income level). The data that is collected is completely anonymous, will be in a survey form, and should only take about 10 minutes to complete.

I am also including a permission letter which indicates your approval and provides the means in which access to parent email information can be given (emails provided directly to me or the survey letter and link provided through your school's parent notification system on my behalf). There is also a location to mark if you would like the results of the survey information.

I truly appreciate the opportunity to gather information from [SCHOOL] to assist Christian schools in both maintaining and growing enrollment. I anticipate delivering the survey in the next 2-3 weeks. I am more than happy to answer any other questions that you may have regarding this survey.

Blessings,

Christopher Gann

APPENDIX G

Meeting topics and agenda for initial meeting with school administration

DATE

[NAME]
[TITLE]
[SCHOOL NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[ADDRESS]

Dear [MR/MRS/DR],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is "The Relationship Between On-going Factors of Parent Satisfaction and Student Retention Among Private Christian Schools in a Southwestern State" and the purpose of my research is to determine the relationship of on-going predictors of parent satisfaction and student retention at private Christian schools.

I am writing to request your permission to utilize your membership list to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to click on a link provided and complete the attached survey. The survey is completely anonymous and participants will be presented with consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond to this email or to cgann1@liberty.edu. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Christopher Gann
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX H

Permission to utilize school communication system for survey distribution to parents

[Insert Date]

[SCHOOL NAME]
[SCHOOL ADDRESS]
[SCHOOL ADDRESS]

Dear Christopher Gann:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled The Relationship Between On-going Factors of Parent Satisfaction and Student Retention Among Private Christian Schools in a Southwestern State, I have decided to grant you permission to access our membership list/contact our faculty/staff and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- ☐ The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.
- ☐ The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.
- ☐ The survey will be sent on behalf of the researcher through the organization's email/distribution mechanism.
- ☐ I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[Your Name] [Your Title]
[Your Company/Organization]

APPENDIX I

Permission Responses from School Administrators at Target Schools

4/28/2019 Mail - Christopher Gann – Outlook

Parent survey questions
[Name]
Thu 4/18/2019 12:57 PM
To: Christopher Gann <cgann1@liberty.edu> Cc: [Name]

Christopher,

Mrs. Chadwick forwarded me the information you provided. We will do whatever is needed to assist with your survey. A few thoughts came to mind as I was thinking about the survey's execution:

It makes no difference to us whether you send the survey directly to parents or we do on your behalf. However, in the interest of receiving the highest level of participation, it might be a good idea for the school to send out the survey link for you. This would have two advantages:

- Parents would receive email communication from a recognized sender
- We would avoid any parent concerns about their emails being used by a sender outside of BCS. To reiterate, we are not concerned about this issue, but if there are any negative perceptions, they might hurt survey participation. ·

In the scenario above, am I correct in assuming that we'd be sending out a link to an online survey you've built? If so, I like that approach since you would have full control of the response data.

Please let me know what you think—we are here to help!

Thank you,

DAVID ISGITT | Technology Specialist Bethesda Christian School 4700 N Beach St | Ft Worth, TX 76137 817.281.6446 | disgitt@bcsfw.org www.bethesdachristianschool.org

APPENDIX J

From: [Name]
Sent: Thursday, April 18, 2019 3:04 PM
To: Christopher Gann <cgann1@liberty.edu>
Subject: Re: Greetings from Santiago
Christopher,
I am happy to allow your research and help you in the process. I will get you the necessary documentation.

Blessings,

[Name] Headmaster
Address
Address