

PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES ABOUT
SCHOOL CHOICE AND SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES UNDER
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND IN A LARGE URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE AND SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES UNDER NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND IN A LARGE URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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The current challenges faced by public schools are many. As a manifestation of the society they serve, these challenges may vary according to factors such as the location of the school, size, culture, student population, teacher effectiveness, district and state leadership, and community involvement and support. The challenges faced by an under-funded inner city school, for example, with low parental support and located in a high-poverty and crime-ridden area may be different from those issues affecting a predominantly White, middle class, suburban school. For some parents, the term “low-performing” urban school may evoke a different picture than the one generated by a suburban school that is described as “school of excellence” or “school of distinction.” Subsequently, some schools may be perceived, particularly by parents with school-age children, as being “better” than others.

This study explored the factors affecting parental thinking and decision making processes about school choice and supplemental educational services under No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) in the largest Title I urban elementary school in the largest

school district in a southeastern state, and which is currently identified by NCLB as a persistently “low-performing” school. This study also examined parents’ understanding of the term “low-performing” school. The following questions were used to guide this qualitative case study:

1. What factors influence parents’ perspectives and decision making processes regarding school choice as provided under No Child Left Behind (2002)?
2. What factors influence parents’ perspectives and decision making processes regarding supplemental education services under NCLB (2002)?
3. What are parents’ perspectives of the term low-performing school?

Five themes emerged as the most frequently occurring regarding choice and supplemental education services (SES) under No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002). First, all parents indicated that “belonging” at this school (e.g., feeling welcome, being greeted when they visited the school, not feeling judged because of their race or language, and being able to communicate with teachers and staff regardless of their native language) was their main reason for staying at this school. The second theme emerged as all parents agreed that they had to “do things themselves” if they wanted their child to be successful in school. Parents also held teachers accountable for ensuring that all children learned appropriately and expected teachers to communicate well with them, to be aware of their child’s progress and needs, to solve misunderstandings, and to come to school ready to inspire children. Parents in all focus groups also held other parents responsible for the success of other children as it affected the overall success of the school. The third theme emerged as a “lack of relationship between testing and learning.” Most parents questioned the purpose of standardized testing and wondered about the true value of

classroom grades and the label “low-performing.” Most parents questioned whether learning could be assessed accurately based only on a child’s marks on a bubble sheet at the end of a school year. The fourth theme, “confusing information,” emerged as most parents indicated that both the school and the school district provided difficult to understand information and procedures regarding supplemental education services. Parents also indicated that lack of transportation hindered the ability of many parents to participate in SES, and that limiting tutoring services to two subjects (i.e., reading and math) did not support all students. Parents were most frustrated about the fact that not all children attending a “low-performing” school were eligible to participate in tutoring. The fifth theme emerged as parents in all focus groups “repeatedly offered suggestions” and ideas about how to better the school. Suggestions ranged from teachers visiting other countries to better appreciate the resources available in the United States, to “copying” what other schools or districts not labeled “low-performing” are doing every year. A few parents also offered suggestions about how to better spend educational funds.

Parents unanimously rejected the label “low-performing” school because of testing results. All parents agreed that test results could be influenced by factors such as limited English proficiency. Most parents questioned how schools rated higher than J. E. McCaskill had a lower “academic” level. Most parents said that children at McCaskill Elementary were receiving a higher level of instruction than at “other” schools they knew about. Parents based this assertion based on their own research and conversations with friends and relatives.