

2005

Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement: A Comparative Study of African American Students in a Traditional Public School and a Magnet School

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Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement:
A Comparative Study of African American Students in a
Traditional Public School and a Magnet School

by

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A thesis proposal submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Date of Approval:
April 12, 2005

Keywords: choice schools, cfsei-3, fcst, reading, math

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated whether differences existed in the academic achievement and self-esteem of African American students in a traditional public school and a choice school. The choice school selected was a technology-focused magnet school. All of the participants were in grades 3 – 5 and were administered the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) during the 2003-2004 school year. The FCAT was used to assess academic achievement in reading and math while the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventories – Third Edition (CFSEI-3) was used to assess their self-esteem. Demographic information was also collected to identify factors other than school type that contribute to differences in the academic achievement and self-esteem of African American students.

Administrators at both schools helped identify the participants for this study. Seventy parent questionnaires developed to gather demographic information were returned with letters of consent. Students were administered the CFSEI-3 in small groups. Scores from the reading and math subtests of the FCAT were gathered along with school attendance history and free or reduced lunch (FRL) status for each participant.

The results of this study showed that third grade FCAT reading scores approached significance and there were overall statistically significant differences in their FCAT math scores. In both cases students at the Magnet School obtained higher test scores than the Traditional School students. Parental levels of educational achievement were found to be significantly higher at the Magnet School. When this component of the demographic information was statistically controlled differences between children at the two schools were not significant.

Results of the CFSEI-3 indicated no significant differences in academic, general, parental/home, social, or global self-esteems of the participants. Differences in satisfaction between parents at the two schools with regards to their children's academic instruction, the value the schools placed on their child's culture and the influence the school had on their child's self-esteem were also insignificant.

Overall the results of this study provide valuable information about the influence school type has on the academic achievement and self-esteem of minority students. It also suggests areas for future research on factors that contribute to academic achievement and self-esteem outside of the school environment.

Chapter I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Gaps in the reading and math achievement of African American and Caucasian students have remained fairly constant over the past decade. In 2002, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported the percentage of African American and White students reading below even the basic levels of proficiency. For White 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students, these numbers were 25%, 16%, and 21% respectively, while for African American 4th, 8th, and 12th graders, the numbers were 60%, 45%, and 46% respectively. In the year 2000, the NCES reported similar findings for these three grade levels in the area of math achievement. The percentages of White 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students performing below the basic levels for math were 20%, 23% and 26%, respectively. There was a striking difference for African American 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students. Sixty-one percent of 4th grade, 68% of 8th grade, and 69% of 12th grade of African American students were reported as performing below the basic levels for math performance. These numbers indicate not only gaps in achievement between these racial groups but also highlight possible inequalities in the education African Americans receive through the public school system.

As a result of these outcomes, many minority parents have gone in search of alternatives to the current educational system. School choice programs make charter

school, magnet school, and private school enrollment options available to low-income families who otherwise may not have options other than traditional public schools available to them. Charter schools are predominantly located in urban areas (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 1999). According to Leonard (2002), parents living in urban areas with their children believe that charter schools are a second chance for public education to work. Preliminary research suggests that this may be an accurate perception. For example, a private education management company, Advantage Schools, evaluated the effectiveness of their organizational structure on the academic achievement of students in grades K-7 attending 14 of their 20 charter schools during the 1999-2000 school year (Cross, Rebarber & Wilson, 2002). In spite of the fact that the majority of their students body came from low-income, urban families (with 71% of the students participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) program), Advantage Schools reported significant academic improvements for their students from pre-test to post-test scores on the Stanford Achievement Test – Ninth Edition (SAT-9) and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests – Revised (WRMT-R).

Although Cross et al. (2002) express caution at generalizing the findings of their study to other settings, these results are informative to parents weighing the pros and cons of school choice. While the push for change is heavily focused on academic achievement, the social and emotional ramifications of placement in these alternative settings also needs to be considered as was done in Bergin and Cooks' (2002) qualitative study on the impact peer accusations of “acting white” had on 38 high achieving African American and Mexican American high school students. Bergin and Cooks (2002)

interviewed students participating in a scholarship incentive program entitled EXCEL that granted them enrollment in public and private schools outside of their communities. They found that although the students felt resentment towards those accusing them of “acting white,” they were not intimidated by these accusations. The researchers found that these students continued to excel academically and did not feel as if they had to give up their ethnic identity in order to fit in or do well in school.

Additional research into the academic achievement and social adjustment of African American students in various academic institutions has yielded results similar to those of the aforementioned studies. Archbald (1995) studied the outcomes of African American students enrolled in magnet schools and found that magnet school students scored higher overall on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) than their non-magnet school peers. Higher post-test scores on the Stanford Achievement Test – Eighth Edition (SAT-8) also were reported for black magnet school students when compared to their white peers in a study conducted by Dickson, Pinchback, and Kennedy (2000). Additionally, Recovering the Gifted Child Academy, a public alternative school located in Chicago providing services to a 100% African American student body population, has been noted for its “increased reading scores, [improved ITBS] test scores, ...and higher graduation rates when the students reach high school” (Pool, 1997, p. 33).

Results of these various studies parallel the outcomes of Bergin and Cooks’ (2002) study indicating that academic achievement does not appear to be negatively affected by the social barriers faced by African American students who attend choice schools. This was evidenced in the experiences of six African American girls attending

an elite, predominantly white, all girls, college preparatory school. The girls were interviewed with regard to their feelings about how they fit into the social structure of the school and indicated that although they felt as if they received an excellent education that provided them access and acceptance to some of the nation's top institutions (Georgetown University, Columbia University, Syracuse University, University of California at Los Angeles, Cornell University, and Spellman College), they felt not only "excluded from the dominant [culture] of the school through the exaltation of white culture, the demeaning of [their own culture] and the emphasis on economic privilege, they were physically excluded as well" (p. 333). Cook and Ludwig (1998) concluded that the high achievement of African American students might offset the negative social effects experienced in exclusive settings. Similarly, Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus and Harpalani (2001) found that the high achievement and self-esteem of African American youths correlated with a high sense of Afrocentricity. Sanders (1998) also evaluated the social and academic behaviors of high achieving African American students and found a heightened sense of awareness to racism and racial barriers that students felt increased their levels of motivation to succeed academically.

Overall, when race is factored out of the equation, the National Center of Educational Statistics (2003) reported that enrollment in charter schools and magnet schools has increased from 11% to 14% between 1993 and 1999, private school enrollment has remained stable at a rate of 7 or 8%, while parochial school enrollment has remained stable at a rate of 2%. At the same time, it is important to note that while non-public and choice school enrollment is steadily increasing, public school enrollment

between 1993 and 1999 has decreased from 80% to 76% and remains on the decline. These statistics are important for policy-makers and parents to take into consideration in order to provide support to failing public schools and students transferring to choice schools known for producing notable achievement results but unprepared to meet the needs of ethnically diverse populations.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to determine whether African American students in heterogeneous traditional public schools settings do better academically than their peers in heterogeneous choice public school settings. In order to The two schools were selected based on a variety of characteristics including school grade as indicated by the Florida A+ Plan for Education (see Appendix A), racial composition as determined by the Ethnic Enrollment Report and the per pupil expenditure and FRL enrollment as reported by the most recent 2003 Florida School Indicators Report. All choice schools are not required to utilize the same standardized measures of achievement. As a result the choice school selected for this study was a magnet school, which abides by the same assessment criteria as the traditional public school selected for this study. Factors were controlled in this study to assess whether academic achievement is influenced by characteristics setting these two schools apart including admission criteria and curriculum. Admission criteria for enrollment at the selected choice school was based on an application and lottery selection system while the selected traditional public school enrollment policy is based on school assignment as determined by the geographic location of students' homes. Unlike the traditional public school, which had no specific instructional focus, technology-

enhanced instruction in the academic areas of English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies was offered to the choice school students selected for this study. This study sought to examine the self-esteem of African American students in both settings in order to determine how African American students in traditional public schools compare to their same race peers in choice school settings.

Research Questions

1. How do African American students in a choice school perform on the reading and math subtests of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in comparison to African American students in a traditional public school?

2. Do African American students in choice schools demonstrate a significant difference in self-esteem when compared to African American students in traditional public schools?

3. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ demographically? If so, how important are those demographic differences to academic and/or self-esteem differences that emerge between students at the two schools?

4. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ in their levels of satisfaction with their children's schools?

Hypothesis 1. The researcher predicts that there will be statistically significant differences in the FCAT scores of African American students in a Hillsborough County magnet school when compared to their African American peers in a traditional public school. The researcher predicts that African American students in a magnet school will

obtain overall higher scores on the FCAT than African American students in a traditional public school.

Hypothesis 2. The researcher predicts that there will be statistically significant differences in the FCAT math scores of African American students in a magnet school when compared to African American students in a traditional public school. The researcher predicts that African American students in magnet schools will obtain higher scores on the math subtest of the FCAT than African American students in a traditional public school.

Hypothesis 3. The researcher predicts that African American students in a choice school setting will not demonstrate a significant difference in self-esteem when compared to their African American peers in a traditional public school setting.

Hypothesis 4. The researcher predicts that parents of African American students in a choice and traditional public school settings will differ demographically.

Hypothesis 5. The researcher predicts that African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students will not differ in their levels of satisfaction with their children's schools.

Significance of the Study

This study will add to the literature on choice schools for African American students by examining differences between students at traditional and choice public schools on a standardized measure of reading and math. In the state of Florida, this measure is currently being used to determine if children will matriculate from 3rd to 4th grade or if they will be retained in 3rd grade. As such, scores on this test play an

important role in educational decision-making for students. If students at choice schools are performing better on these tests as has been hypothesized, this clearly has implications for decision-making among African American families.

The study also will explore how self-esteem differs among African American students at traditional and choice public schools. This component of the study is important because often, in order to attend schools of choice, children are sent to schools outside of their neighborhoods with children of socioeconomic and racial statuses different from their own. Feelings of being different and not belonging may arise and negatively influence the self-esteem of African American students being educated outside of their communities. In addition to the academic achievement of children enrolled in choice schools, parents need to be cognizant of the effects school setting plays on the social and emotional development and well-being of their children.

Definition of Terms

Choice Schools. Schools chosen as alternatives to traditional public schools which include magnet schools and charter schools. Non-public schools are also considered choice schools when they are selected via vouchers or educational scholarships. The choice school selected for this study is a magnet school. Although it is a public school funded by the government, it's academic program is supplemented by a district approved and funded technology component. Enrollment is based on applications selected via a lottery system.

Charter Schools. Public schools operated independently of the local school board, often with a curriculum and educational philosophy different from the other schools in the system. (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000)

Magnet Schools. Public schools offering a specialized curriculum, often with high academic standards, to a student body representing a cross section of the community. (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000)

Traditional Public Schools. Florida Statute 228.041 (2002) specifies that “public education should consist of ...publicly supported and controlled schools...public schools shall consist of kindergarten classes; elementary and secondary school grades and special classes.” The traditional public school selected for this study implements a district wide curriculum. Enrollment is based on school zoning policies.

FCAT Reading Score. FCAT reading scores are based on a scale of 100-500 and in terms of achievement levels, with 1 being low and 5 being high, as determined by student responses to multiple choice questions and performance tasks in the areas of (1) Words and Phrases in Context, (2) Main Ideas, Plot, and Purpose, (3) Comparisons and Cause/Effect, and (4) References and Research.

FCAT Math Score. FCAT math scores are based on a scale of 100-500 and in terms of achievement levels, with 1 being low and 5 being high, as determined by student responses to performance tasks and multiple choice and gridded response questions in the areas of (1) Number Sense and Operations, (2) Measurement, (3) Geometry and Spatial Sense, (4) Algebraic Thinking, and (5) Data Analysis and Probability.

Self-Esteem. According to Battles (2002), author of the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory – Third Edition (CFSEI-3), self-esteem is “an attitude of acceptance, approval, and respect towards oneself, manifested by personal recognition of one’s abilities and achievements and an acknowledgment and acceptance of one’s limitations” (Webster’s II New College Dictionary, 1995, p. 1002).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

An Overview

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which warned that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). Tirozzi and Uro (1997) explained that this significant statement drew attention to declining SAT scores, watered down curriculums, and a wide gap in the academic proficiency existing between Caucasian students and African American and Hispanic students. In response to public pressures to show evidence of improved educational outcomes for all students, options for school choice increased, resulting in the expansion of magnet schools, the introduction and growth of charter schools, and the provision of funds via scholarships and vouchers from private and government agencies for parents pursuing educational options in the private sector.

Broadly, school choice serves to override school attendance zoning policies in an effort to “break the geographic constraints of traditional public schooling” (Goldhaber & Eide, 2002, p. 158). These zoning restrictions often restrict low income and minority students to less desirable public schools within their communities. Goldhaber and Eide (2002) noted that school choice offers all students the opportunity to partake in school

systems formerly accessible only to families living in high-income suburban areas. School choice extends to minority students and their families the privilege of attending schools with cultures, missions, expectations, academic programs, and educational practices more specific to their needs. Whether or not choice schools settings are meeting this challenge has sparked the interest of those for and against school choice. The true ability of school choice to elicit change and the capacity to which public schools are able to adequately address these needs in urban schools is the cause of much debate.

This chapter will examine factors that have contributed to school choice practices including gaps in achievement, an overabundance of reforms, and high-stakes testing. The role African American parents play in school choice will be examined. This section will focus on the enrollment of African American children in special programs, student performance on state tests, promotion policies, and the resources available to urban schools based on the disproportionate distribution of per pupil expenditures. Next, this chapter will examine the enrollment options associated with school choice and the utilization of this reform by African American parents. The reasons African American parents choose to send their children to choice schools also will be reviewed in this section. Finally, and most importantly, the effects of school choice on African American children will be examined. This section will review studies focused on the effects various school settings have on the academic, social, and emotional outcomes of African American students taking advantage of their school choice options.

Factors Contributing to School Choice

Gaps in the academic achievement of Caucasian and minority students have been a topic of concern for the public school system for quite some time. Misclassifications in special education programs, placement in lower-track classes, and grade retention of disproportionate numbers of African American students have been examined as contributing factors to the achievement gaps experienced by minority students and their majority counterparts (Patton, 1998). Trent (1998) sought to explain this gap in the public school system of St. Louis. He reviewed the Stanford Achievement Test - (SAT) reading and math scores of 4,096 fifth and eighth grade students. Unfortunately, the percentages of African American and Caucasian students used in this sample are unclear in the write up. To examine the gap in performance, Trent included race, student background (socioeconomic status based on whether students received free or reduced school lunch), prior test scores, and school characteristics (ability grouping, disciplinary practices, and special education placement). He found that African American students consistently performed below their Caucasian peers on the Stanford Achievement Test in the areas of math and reading. His research attributed much of the discrepancy to school characteristics that led to low teacher expectations and less challenging curricula for African American students in the St. Louis public school system. Trent reported the following findings:

I found a consistently negative effect of high poverty concentrations in school on students' educational attainment. Black students are more likely to attend schools with higher concentrations of economically disadvantaged students than are white

students. Thus, they are more likely to experience a quality of educational treatment that reduces their scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, even after factoring out the effects of other possible causes (p. 320).

Trent went on to explain that African American students are exposed to “discriminatory ability grouping, [different] disciplinary practices, and placement in certain special education categories” (p. 324). He pointed out that these practices have harmful effects and result in a reduced quality of educational attainment as they “lead to the exposure of Black students to less challenging curricula and lower teacher expectations [causing them to] fall behind their white classmates” (p. 324)

There has been considerable media coverage of public school policies and the changes states and school districts are making in an attempt to raise their standards. Some of these reforms include increasing math education, instituting statewide testing, recruiting and retaining quality teachers, supporting challenging curriculums, increasing student achievement, decreasing class size, supporting teacher training, and increasing funding for a variety of school wide programs (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). As school districts rush to respond to this overabundance of issues related to improving the public school education our children receive, DeCicco and Allison (1999) pointed out that policy makers and decision makers have compounded their problems by creating “mission clutter.” They defined mission clutter as “a plethora of public policy initiatives [and] the root cause of failure in America’s worst public schools” (p. 273).

School reforms draw public attention to the growing number of problems with which public school systems are dealing. The increased difficulty of school curriculums

and high stakes testing has resulted in school failure and public complaints (“Before the Board”, 2000). DeCicco and Allison (1999) cited Van Der Werf (1998), who pointed out that 80% of our nation’s top educators leave the profession within five years, evidence that the long-term consequences of signing bonuses to attract teachers are ignored. The complexity of educating children in today’s public schools has prompted decision makers to consider merit pay for teachers who are successful with this undertaking. Teachers and teacher unions have met this notion with great opposition. Ballou (2001) researched data from four national surveys of teachers and school administrators and found that 47.7% of public school teachers opposed merit pay bonuses and concluded that it is “not practical to compensate teachers on the basis of [student] performance evaluations because there is too little agreement on the goals of education; the relationship between actions of teachers and the learning of students is too complex and difficult to trace; and the potential for demoralization and breakdown in cooperation among coworkers is too great”(Ballou, p. 60).

African American Parents and School Choice

According to Jones-Wilson, Arnez, and Asbury (1992), African American parents have been strong supporters of the public school system and are becoming increasingly aware of their children’s performance in the public schools they attend. Gertridge (1997) explored the achievement of students in the Oakland school system and found that although African American students made up only 52% of the school district’s student population, they made up 71% of the students in special education classrooms and only 37% of the enrollment in gifted and talented programs. African American students in

Oakland scored 97 points below the national average on the verbal portion of the SAT, 110 points below the national average on the math portion of the SAT, and on average had grade point averages (GPA) of 1.8 (C-) on a 4.0 scale. In contrast, their Caucasian and Asian peers had GPAs of 3.0 (B) or higher on a 4.0 scale.

In 1999, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported their findings on trends in academic achievement among racial and ethnic groups over three decades. Their sample included over 15,000 9-, 13-, and 17-year old students from across the nation. Students who required accommodations for disabilities and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were excluded from the results. As part of their study, the researchers examined the reading, math, and science scores of Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic students. They found that although the gap between these three racial groups had narrowed, Caucasian students continued to have higher average scores in reading, math, and science than their African American and Hispanic peers. When comparing the scores of African American and Hispanic students, Hispanic students consistently scored higher than African American students in reading and math. Both groups of 13-year olds had the same average in science (See Table 1).

Kozol (2000) addressed the impact that new testing and promotion guidelines have had on inner city minority children in his book *Ordinary Resurrections*. He noted that strict testing and promotion policies in New York City public schools have caused the retention of students who were getting good grades all year long but scored below the levels they needed to perform at as specified by the new tests they were administered.

On the other hand, Feldman (1997), president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), pointed out the problems of social promotion after collecting promotion policies from 85 of the 820 school districts across the United States, including the 40 largest districts in the country. In response to the national goal to ensure that all children are able to read by the end of the third grade, Feldman examined why there was a need for a goal such as this in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. She found that teachers are pressured to promote students whom they do not feel are truly prepared. This promotion contributed to their students' academic failure. The students struggled to

Table 1.

Comparison of Hispanic and African American students scores to the scores of Caucasian students based on a scale of 0-500.

1999 Mean NCES Reading Scores

Age	Race		
	Caucasian	Hispanic	African American
9-year olds	221	193	186
13-year olds	267	244	238
17-year olds	295	271	264

1999 Mean NCES Math Scores

Age	Race		
	Caucasian	Hispanic	African American
9-year olds	239	213	211
13-year olds	283	259	251
17-year olds	315	293	283

1999 Mean NCES Science Scores

Age	Race		
	Caucasian	Hispanic	African American
9-year olds	240	206	199
13-year olds	266	227	227
17-year olds	306	276	254

learn the new material once they were advanced because they hadn't acquired the prerequisite skills necessary for later success. Feldman found that 54% of teachers throughout the 85 districts admitted to promoting students they felt were unprepared, 6 of 10 teachers felt that parental pressure was often a problem. In most districts, there were no agreed upon standards on what students should know and be able to do before being promoted. The majority of districts provided little support to at-risk children. Feldman reported the following findings about the support programs offered by some of the districts:

Only about 15 percent mention tutoring; and only about 13 percent mention alternative programs and strategies, such as transitional classes, extended instructional time, customized instructional programs, or other support services. About one-half of the promotion policies mention summer school, but discussions with school officials and union leaders indicate that in many instances funds to support summer school have been cut drastically if not eliminated (p. 7).

In her search for data on retention rates, Feldman stated that "accurate figures are hard to get, but it is estimated that 15 to 19% of U.S. students are held back in the same grade each year" (p. 8). Feldman's data also revealed that in several large urban school districts, fifty percent or more of the students who enter kindergarten are likely to be retained at least once before either graduating or dropping out.

Per pupil expenditure in urban schools also is a problematic area for African American students, who are the primary recipients of urban school education. According to Kozol (2000), New York spent \$5,200 per pupil in general education

elementary classrooms while public schools in upper middle class school districts such as Great Neck and Manhasset, suburbs that border New York City, received \$18,000 and \$20,000 respectively per pupil. New York suburbs similar to these offer experienced veteran teachers with advanced degrees salaries from \$90,000 to \$100,000 while those with equivalent schooling and experience who choose to remain in the disadvantaged urban schools could expect to receive at least \$30,000 to \$40,000 less (Kozol, p.301)

African American Children in Choice Schools

These statistics have painted a poor picture of the nation's ability to successfully address the issues of inequality faced by minority children in the public school system. "Public schools across the nation continue to be plagued by wanton acts of violence, low student academic achievement, teacher apathy, administrative incompetence, and limited fiscal resources" (Alexander-Snow, 1999, p. 106). In response to the evident troubles faced by the public school system, parents have begun to push for school choice in order to provide their children with a quality education. "Families, particularly African American families, who were once deeply committed to public education as a moral issue, are increasingly opting to send their children to independent day and boarding schools" (Alexander-Snow, p. 106). Public school systems have offered families choices in the educational opportunities available to their children through the creation of charter schools, magnet schools, vouchers, and opportunity scholarship programs. As a result of their dissatisfaction with the public school education their children have been receiving, African American parents also have turned to non public schools. Section 229.808 of the Florida Statutes defines a non public school as "an individual, association,

co-partnership, or corporation or a department, division or section of such an organization, which designates itself as an educational center which includes kindergarten or a higher grade...below college level". (Florida Department of Education, 2002). These schools include independent schools or private schools founded and maintained by private groups other than the government as well as parochial schools.

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) offers charter schools and magnet schools as two optional forms of public education available to parents and their children. According to the FDOE (2002), charter schools are free to set their own rules regarding teaching styles and discipline and have specific curriculums that vary from school to school to meet the individual needs of their students. They still are required to comply with state requirements, including administering and passing state exams and are funded by the government. Magnet schools also are public schools receiving government funding. They are theme based (i.e. ROTC, music, language, engineering, or business curriculums) and were "first established in the 1970s to help rectify the inequities caused by racial segregation in school systems...by attracting an integrated student population" (Duax, 1992, p.173).

The term non-public school often is used interchangeably with the terms independent or private schools. What distinguishes non-public schools from public schools is the fact that they receive no government funding. From here forward, two types of non-public schools will be discussed – independent schools, which will refer to schools run by private or independent organizations, and parochial schools, which will refer to schools governed by religious organizations.

Jones-Wilson, Arnez, and Asbury (1992) explored the reasons why African American parents move their children from public schools to independent and parochial schools. These researchers distributed 2,668 self-report questionnaires, 409 of which were returned, to African American parents who had chosen to enroll their children in independent and parochial schools. The incomes of the 409 respondents in this study varied from 29% earning \$50,000 or more annually to 4% of families earning \$10,000 or less annually. A total of 36 non-public schools (24 independent, 12 parochial) were included in this study. The study ranked 27 possible reasons African American parents had for choosing non-public schools over public schools (See Table 2). Thirty-one percent of the respondents affirmed that school board policies and decisions played a role in their decision, indicating that they were concerned about the adequacy of public school curriculums and the lack of control that districts and schools seemed to have over student discipline. Overall, the number one reason African American parents gave as their beliefs for the discipline problems in public schools were a “lack of discipline in the home” followed by a “lack of respect for law and authority throughout society” (Jones-Wilson et al., p. 131). When asked to grade their local schools, the average grade assigned by African American parents was a “C”. This grade was consistent with the “C” grade they assigned to the nation’s public schools as a whole. On items related to school facilities, curriculum and available materials, African American parents typically assigned their public schools grades of “Bs” and “Cs”. Grades dropped to “Ds” and “Fs” on items more directly related to their children (i.e. college preparation, discipline, job preparation, student behavior, and desegregation). Respondents were given the

Table 2.

Reasons for Rejection of Public Schools by African American Parents

Rank	Reasons for Rejection
1	Lack of discipline
2	Poor curriculum/poor standards
3	Large schools/overcrowding
4	Teachers' lack of interest
5	Difficulty getting good teachers
6	Lack of respect for teachers/other students
7	Use of drugs
8	Moral standards
9	Parents' lack of interest/truancy
10	Lack of proper financial support
11	Lack of needed teachers
12	Parental involvement with school activities
13	Drinking/alcoholism
14	Crime/vandalism
15	No problems
16	Lack of proper facilities
17	Communication problems
18	Fighting
19	Teachers' strikes
20	Mismanagement of funds
21	Lack of Afrocentric curriculum
22	Racism from teachers/students/principals
23	Government interference
24	Non-English speaking students
-----	Problems with administration
-----	Don't know/no answer
-----	Miscellaneous

----- = unranked items

opportunity to express any concerns they had that were not addressed in the survey. Some additional reasons African American parents had for choosing independent and parochial schools as an alternative to public school education were, “inappropriate funding for public schools...overly politicized school atmosphere...[and] insufficient emphasis on [the] proper use of English” (Jones-Wilson et al., p.135). Overall, the study revealed that African American parents chose non-public schools because they felt that administrators of public school education were not dedicated to adequately educating their children. They wanted their children in more disciplined environments and they wanted to provide their children with the best quality education to ensure their children’s positions in an increasingly competitive society.

Kleitzi, Weiher, Tedin, and Matland (2000) reported similar findings in their study on charter schools and the recent increase in opportunities African American families now have to choose the schools they would like their children to attend. They evaluated the open enrollment of charter schools in the state of Texas through data they received from 1,100 parent surveys. The surveys assessed the amount of importance parents place on educational quality, class size, safety, school location, and peer interactions. Parents ranked each question as “very important”, “important”, “not important”, and “not important at all”. Ninety-five percent of African American parents said that educational quality is a very important factor to consider in choosing a charter school, 86% said class size was very important, 73% said safety was very important, 70% felt location was very important, and 32% said peers were very important. The researchers noted that higher percentages of African American parents felt safety was important compared to

Caucasian parents because their children are more likely to attend violent, drug-infiltrated, inner-city schools. They concluded that African American parents choose charter schools in order to provide their children with a better education, smaller class sizes, and safer environments.

African American parents also have been given the opportunity to participate in school voucher programs. This has been a controversial subject for policy makers and public school advocates who oppose the idea of taking government money used to fund public schools and putting that money into independent and parochial schools. The belief is that school programs that offer vouchers increase choices for African American parents and decrease racial segregation in urban schools. Saporito and Lareau (1999) studied the effects school vouchers have on the racial make-up of the choice schools to which African American parents move their children. They studied the racial make-up of urban school districts in the northeastern United States and noted that high concentrations of African American families living in the cities (63% African Americans compared to 23% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, and 4% Asian) resulted in highly segregated public schools. They cited Saporito's (1998) findings, which indicated that African American families were no more or less likely to leave their public schools based on racial factors. Saporito and Lareau (1999) used quantitative analysis and in-depth interviews with families partaking in school voucher programs in these urban northeastern school districts. They looked at school records and SAT scores. They also reviewed Uniform Crime Reports (UCR's). UCR's were used to evaluate violence within the communities of the public schools in their study. Of the families who

submitted applications to transfer out of their public schools, 1,726 applicants were African American and 294 applicants were Caucasian. Six non-public schools with an African American student body enrollment of over 90% received no voucher applications from Caucasian families, and one school received 30% of its applications from Caucasian families. They found that, unlike Caucasian families, “African American families place no significance on school racial composition when making their choices...there [was] no correlation between the percent of applications filed by African American students to a school and the percent of African American children attending the school” (Saporito & Lareau, p. 428). Saporito and Lareau found that in an effort to provide African American children with a quality education, parents put little to no emphasis on the racial composition of their chosen non-public schools, support ethnic diversity, seek out safe environments, and choose schools based on their records of high academic achievement and college preparatory curriculums. While voucher programs provide more opportunities and increase choice for African American families, Saporito and Lareau pointed out that vouchers do not lead to a reduction in racial segregation as Caucasian families avoid applying their vouchers to schools with high percentages of African American children.

Effects of Choice School Enrollment on African American Students

As African American parents entrust independent and parochial schools with the education of their children, researchers have gradually begun to take on the task of assessing whether these decisions are in the best interest of the racial identity and academic achievement of African American students enrolled in independent schools

with the help of organizations like A Better Chance, Prep for Prep, Black Student Fund (BSF) and the Baltimore Educational Scholarship Trust (BEST) (Datnow & Cooper, 1998). Datnow and Cooper (1998) used qualitative interview data to study African American students enrolled in independent schools with the help of BEST. BEST recruits “economically disadvantaged, academically talented” (Datnow & Cooper, p.57) African American students living in Baltimore, Maryland, places them in twenty of the areas top independent schools, and funds their education. “Over five hundred African American families seek out BEST’s services each year, applying for independent school admission at all grade levels [and] approximately 70 new BEST students are placed in these schools each year [14% of applicants]” (Datnow & Cooper, p. 57). Datnow and Cooper used this study to reveal whether there was a connection between the peer networks of 10th -12th grade African American students, their racial identity, and their academic success. Forty-two of the students from eight elite independent schools were interviewed in this study. Two of the schools were male day schools, three were female day schools, one was a co-ed day school, one was a co-ed day and boarding school, and one was an all female day and boarding school. The percentage of African American students in the schools ranged from 5-to15%, and the schools ranged in size from 180 to 945 students.

Datnow and Cooper (1998) interviewed the students in their study by asking them open-ended questions about their interests, backgrounds, classes, grades, peer groups, home lives, adjustment to their new schools, and their views of the school and its faculty. Students admitted to having difficulty adjusting to their new environments. They

reported that even though they felt alienated and out of place, they “believed their schooling experience was providing them with the academic training required to be successful...” (Datnow & Cooper, p. 62). These researchers found that even when African American students are placed in a setting with small percentages of African American students, they seek out their same race peers, form strong peer networks, and help one another cope with their placement in predominantly white independent schools. African American students reasoned that they share similar values and experiences, making it easier for them to relate to one another. Datnow and Cooper noted that “more racial clustering was evident in the upper school levels than in the lower grades” (Datnow & Cooper, p. 63). They found that students in their study felt their new setting and peer networks contributed to their academic success. Students throughout the sample reported that their placement in these elite independent schools “allowed them to be smart without feeling as though they were selling out or acting white”(Datnow & Cooper, p.64) – a problem faced by many high achieving African American students in inner-city public schools where “for low-income and minority students, success within the peer culture is defined in terms of resistance to institutional structures [academic achievement] that are characterized by white middle-class domination”(Datnow & Cooper, p.59). African American students in independent schools incorporate the academic success they are able to attain with the support and encouragement of their comparable high achieving peers into their new definitions of what is “cool”.

In investigating racial identity, Datnow and Cooper’s (1998) study revealed that one of the reasons behind students’ successful adaptation in these non-public schools was

their involvement in Black and Cultural Awareness clubs at school. These clubs gave African American students an open forum in which to discuss any racial issues they had as well as discern cultural stereotypes faced by minorities and their Caucasian peer groups.

These researchers found that placement of African American students in elite independent schools also has spurred more cultural awareness programs, which have been incorporated into the curriculums of their new schools (Datnow & Cooper, 1998). This has been done with the help of the Black and Cultural Awareness Clubs the students created in order to reaffirm their racial identity in a predominantly white educational community. Datnow and Cooper suggested that with the growth of the African American student body, independent schools should consider recruiting more minority teachers. They concluded that African American students in independent schools form strong bonds within their peer networks, which help to reaffirm their racial identity and support their social and academic success.

Griffin (1999) also examined academic achievement and socialization of African American children placed in independent schools. She evaluated the effectiveness of A Better Chance, which places high potential African American children in independent schools. One third of A Better Chance recipients are from families living at or below poverty level. A Better Chance has founded 25 independent schools and “during the 1998-1999 school year, 1,218 scholars were enrolled in 200 A Better Chance member schools nationwide” (Griffin, p. 73). Since the founding of A Better Chance in 1963, 9,358 students have graduated from their programs, 99% of the students immediately

entered college, and 88% of A Better Chance's 1990 graduating class (which was randomly selected) "enrolled in colleges classified as 'most competitive,' 'highly competitive,' or 'very competitive' in *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*" (Datnow & Cooper, p. 74). Examples of some of these institutions include the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Columbia, Brown, Wesleyan, and Yale. Like the students in Datnow and Cooper's (1998) study, Griffin's students reported feeling out of place but thought the educational opportunities provided by A Better Chance had a positive effect on their lives and the lives of their families. Evidence of the academic achievement attained by students enrolled in A Better Chance is presented in the anecdotal vignettes of A Better Chance scholars including a young girl who, while enrolled in the public school system, scored poorly on her standardized college placement exams. After being recruited by A Better Chance, she progressed to the top of her class with a G.P.A. of 4.3. Another student, born to a 13-year old mother, had the odds stacked against him. While in attendance at an A Better Chance member school, he was "class president for two years, and class vice president for one, distinguished physics student, National Honor Society vice president, Diversity Society president, basketball team captain, and magna cum laude graduate" (Griffin, p. 97). Griffin reported that at the time of her study, he was enrolled at Columbia University.

As mentioned earlier, 14% of the African American families applying for admission to elite nonpublic schools with the help of organizations like BEST are admitted. As a result, African American parents have sought out alternatives to those rigorous selection procedures and are taking advantage of voucher programs. Howell,

Wolf, Campbell, and Peterson (2002) conducted a study on the effects vouchers had on the academic performance of African American families who took advantage of voucher programs by placing their children in independent and parochial schools. Their sample was drawn from New York, NY, Washington, D.C., and Dayton, OH. The voucher programs in these three states were privately funded and offered to African American students from low-income families. The participants in this study included 1,300 students in New York City, 809 students in Washington, and 515 students in Dayton. All the participants were in grades 1-7 and were provided with partial tuitions to cover the cost of attendance in non-public schools. The majority of voucher recipients enrolled in parochial schools, with high percentages of African American parents in all three states choosing Catholic schools. The researchers reported that 85% of New York's voucher recipients attended Catholic schools, while the remainder of the students in the New York sample were evenly distributed amongst parochial schools of varied denominations. A small number attended independent schools. Seventy-two percent of African American parents in Dayton chose to send their children to Catholic schools. The remaining 28% chose various other parochial schools. The majority of African American families in D.C. (71%) also turned to Catholic schools. As for the remainder of parents in the District of Columbia, 20% chose parochial school while 9% chose independent schools.

Through randomized field trials in all three states, Howell et al. (2002) reported significant results in the academic achievement of African American students after two years based on their Iowa Test of Basic Skills test scores. African American voucher recipients in New York, Dayton, and D.C. respectively scored 4.4, 6.3, and 9.0 national

percentile points higher than their public school peers. In the areas of math and reading, Howell, Wolf, Peterson, and Campbell (2000) reported the following results:

In NY, the year-two impacts for African Americans in math and reading were 4.1 and 4.5 national percentile points respectively; in Dayton, impacts were 5.3 and 7.6 points in math and reading; and in D.C. they were 9.9 and 8.1 (Howell et al., p. 5).

Parent surveys also were used in this study. Responses to these surveys led Howell, Wolf, Campbell, and Peterson (2002) to hypothesize that African American parents attribute their children's academic success in their choice schools to safer, more supportive environments; smaller class sizes; teacher effectiveness; value systems of the religious organizations; and positive peer networks. While the academic improvement of African American children in this study is quite significant, Howell et al. advised against drawing any conclusions about their findings, stating that "[the] results to date cannot speak to the longer term and larger scale effects of vouchers...on the academic performance...of students in private schools" (Howell et al., p. 212).

Irvine and Foster (1996) also studied issues of academic achievement and esteem by reviewing the personal memoirs of African American adults who had attended Catholic schools as children. Their accounts give African American parents considering Catholic school education for their children an alternative perspective. Irvine and Foster began by taking a look at Darlene Elenor York's "reviews of [fourteen] major studies on Catholic schools and the academic achievement of African American pupils in them" (Irvine & Foster, p. 2). These studies were published between 1973 to 1993. Five of

the studies revealed that students in Catholic elementary, middle, and high schools performed better in the areas of math, reading, writing, and science than their public school peers. Six of the studies reported that African American Catholic school students performed better overall than African American public school students, but five of the studies showed the performance of African American Catholic school students to be below that of Caucasian and Hispanic Catholic school students.

Irvine and Foster (1996) also examined a study conducted by the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) in 1986. This particular study included a sample of 106 low-income Catholic high schools. These schools were attended primarily by poor and minority students. This study found the following relationships between school-related variables and academic achievement:

1. In low-income Catholic schools (predominantly minority), the requirements that students attend religious retreats and religious services are significantly more stringent than in middle-income Catholic schools (predominantly non-minority).
2. Low-income Catholic school administrators rate themselves significantly higher than their middle-income school counterparts on sensitivity to racial and ethnic minorities, on recruiting minority students, and on offering meaningful remedial coursework.
3. Low-income Catholic school faculty tend to consider religious instruction and participation as important as academic instruction.

4. Low-income Catholic school faculties tend to have higher expectations for academic excellence and for doing homework than faculties in middle-income Catholic schools. Additionally, faculties in low-income Catholic schools tend to believe that students value learning far more than do faculties in middle-income Catholic schools (p. 43).

Irvine and Foster (1996) reviewed several other variables in these studies including family income, parental educational levels, motivation, and intelligence, but they could draw no significant correlation between any one of these and the academic achievement of African American children in Catholic schools. They did, however, find that a combination of “several school-related variables [as noted in the NCEA study]...seem to contribute significantly to the academic achievement of African American students enrolled in Catholic schools” (Irvine & Foster, p.44).

The personal memoirs included in Irvine and Foster’s (1996) study described struggles with issues related to race and racial identity. In Catholic schools run by Caucasian nuns and priests, African American children received little to no education about their heritage. African American Catholic school personnel appeared to have a “preference for children with European features and light skin as opposed to children who had more African features and darker skin” (Irvine & Foster, p.175). Foster spoke from her own experience as an African American adult who received her education in Catholic schools. Her educators rarely acknowledged her African American decent, and, according to her parents, were not expected to do so. Her ethnic consciousness was

instilled and nurtured through her parents' diligence as well as with the help of her African American community and church.

Irvine and Foster concluded that a Catholic school education contributes greatly to the academic achievement of African American students. They acknowledged that Catholic schools have become increasingly aware of the diverse backgrounds of their student body. Catholic schools have begun to incorporate multicultural components into their curriculum as a result of changing times. Irvine and Foster found that the academic achievement of African American children in Catholic schools is consistent and substantial but that schools must continue to be increasingly aware of their diverse populations "and identify with their students' African American heritage... understanding that African American students are not simply colorful prototypes of white students but students who strongly identify with their culture" (Irvine & Foster, p. 176).

Summary and Conclusions

Policy-makers have become aware of the problems faced by our nation's public school systems. Widespread reform is taking place throughout the country to ensure that "no child is left behind". Reducing class size by 2010 is currently a mission being pursued as a result of the 2002 Florida elections. Strengthening reading programs, increasing school safety, eliminating gaps in academic achievement, and offering students more challenging curriculums are only a few of the school reforms on our nation's agenda. While some are encouraged by the steps decision makers are taking to reassess and make the necessary educational reforms, others are alarmed by the

increasing need for a plethora of changes to be made in order for their children to receive a quality equitable education.

African American parents are becoming increasingly aware of the gaps between their children's education and the education of their majority Caucasian peer groups. Studies reveal that they are beginning to take advantage of school choice programs in an effort to give their children the education they will need to achieve success in a competitive society. Taken together, this research seems to suggest that independent and parochial schools educate African American students differently than public schools. Some research has suggested that freedom from public policies has given non-public choice schools an advantage over public schools. Other aspects of a choice school education including their discipline strategies, parental involvement, and higher expectations seem to contribute significantly to the academic achievement of African American students in choice schools. As a result, enrollment of African American children in independent and parochial schools is on the rise.

Although the grades of some children in non-public schools are up, African American parents should be aware that the book has not been closed on the effectiveness of non-public schools to educate and affirm African American children's identity and achievement. Researchers stress the need for non-public schools to offer more diversity through the use of multicultural curriculums. African American faculty should be hired to provide African American children with role models from their own culture. Transitional programs need to be in place to help students adjust to the change, and the

long-term effects of the gains in academic achievement have yet to be thoroughly researched.

The need for further research into the effects of education delivered in choice school settings is clear, particularly research that can offer further explanations concerning the achievement of African American students enrolled in non-public schools. African Americans in non-public schools are typically the minority submerged in predominantly Caucasian settings when they enroll in these schools. Therefore, studies that focus on African American students in choice schools would provide a means of exploring the unique adaptations they make in order to be successful. This research could help to further explain why non-public schools in the United States seem to create an environment that enhances the academic achievement of African American students. Finally, additional research is needed to uncover the processes and outcomes of non-public school education, particularly the non-public school education of African American children.

Chapter III

Methodology

Participants

The participants for this study were 70 third ($n = 17$), fourth ($n = 26$) and fifth ($n = 27$) grade students out of a potential 135 students who attended schools in a large southwest Florida school district and took part in the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) testing sessions during the Spring of 2004. All of the students were of African American descent and attended either a Traditional School ($n = 37$) or a Magnet School ($n = 33$) during the 2003-2004 school year. Based upon information gathered from the school districts 2003-2004 ethnic report, school size and racial composition were taken into consideration to ensure that the two schools were comparable in these two areas. The Traditional School and Magnet School had 488 and 421 students, respectively. Average enrollment for third grade participants at the Traditional School was two consecutive school years while fourth and fifth grade participants attended for an average of three consecutive school years. At the Magnet School the average enrollment for third, fourth, and fifth grade participants was respectively three, two, and four consecutive school years. The racial composition of the Traditional School was 29.91% White, 27.25% Black, 24.38% Hispanic, and 18.44% "Other." The Magnet School had a racial composition of 28.97% White, 35.62% Black, 27.31% Hispanic, and 8% "Other." The racial category of "Other" encompassed students of Asian, Indian, and Multiracial

decent. According to the Florida School Indicators Report (2003), 75.8% of students at the Traditional School participated in the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) program while 65.8% of students at Magnet School participated in the FRL program. Ninety-two percent of the participants from the Traditional School participated in the FRL program, while 82% of the participants from the Magnet School were identified as being on free or reduced lunch. Per pupil expenditures at the Magnet School and the Traditional School during the 2003-2004 school year were \$4,459 and \$4,676, respectively. While at the Magnet School the percentage of students in grades K-5 absent 21 days or more was 6.5% during the 2002-2003 school year, the percentage of students absent 21 days or more was only 2.1% at the Traditional School.

A difference in population of no more than 10% between White and Black subgroups within schools and between Black students across schools was taken into consideration during the selection process. Schools were selected based on their 2003 school grades under the Florida A+ Plan for Education (see Appendix A). Both schools were “A” schools.

The control group selected for this study was comprised of students from the Traditional School. It is funded by the government and supplied with the district-approved curriculum. In addition to the academic instruction delivered in the classroom, various other supportive services are in place for the students and their families. Character education is mandated by the county. Each month the school focuses on a pillar. The ten pillars are Respect, Fairness, Courage, Honesty, Citizenship, Self-Discipline, Caring, Perseverance, and Responsibility. Students who show good

character are recognized throughout the school. The Traditional School participates in the Big Brothers Big Sisters' Site-Based Mentoring Program and Books and Buddies, which is a reading tutoring program. Student's participating in Books and Buddies receive tutoring 30-minutes per week from Air Force Base volunteers and members of the community.

The Head Start program is available at the Traditional School for children age's three to five in an effort to increase the school readiness of children from low-income families. The Family and School Support Team (F.A.S.S.T) provides a variety of services including, but not limited to, early intervention services, parental support and education activities, home and school-based individual, group, and family counseling, and therapeutic mentoring and medical services. Although after-school care is available until 6 pm, a Mental Health Center offers Phone Friend Services for latchkey kids. The Phone Friend Service is free and offers homework help and social interactions for children who are home alone in the afternoons until their parents get home.

During the holiday season, the Traditional School is adopted by a variety of companies and organizations including the Rotary Club, The Kiwanis Club, a mortgage company, Alex's X-Mas for Kids, Sincerely Santa, and the Steinbrenner family in partnership with the New York Yankees. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at the Traditional School oversees fundraising, school events, and works towards increasing community awareness. Americorp visits the Traditional School and teaches parents how to help their children with reading. Kids on the Block teaches students about body rights and drug and gang awareness. An extended learning program, which provides after

school tutoring, is offered to 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students Mondays and Wednesday's from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm. Teacher's also volunteer their time after school to tutor students and a half day summer reading camp is offered for one month to students in grades K-3 who are below grade level in reading.

The Magnet School was the experimental group. Although it is funded by the government and has access to the same curriculum, its' academic program is supplemented by a district approved and funded technology component not accessible to students at the Traditional School. The technology magnet curriculum offered at the Magnet School is also supplemented by a variety of educational and social supports. Although all students at the Magnet School participate in the technology curriculum, Advanced Placement and Gifted students are enrolled in its Math Academy, which provides specialized instruction in Language Arts and Math. Math Academy is designed to prepare students for placement in Algebra I by the time they enter the 7th grade. The Magnet School was one out of fifteen schools awarded a Science Spectrum Lab. This interactive science lab was purchased with grant money designated to the school districts science department. The technology curriculum is implemented through the use of over 350 computers with wireless internet access, technology monitors, Matherena software, Brainchild handheld units, which can be checked out and brought home, Teacher stations, and Smartboard Interactive Whiteboards.

Like students at the Traditional School, the Magnet School students also participate in Character Education and receive recognition for exemplifying the monthly pillar. The Peace Foundation sponsors the Magnet Schools Conflict Resolution program

where students are trained as peer mediators. Kiwanis supports the Magnet Schools Terrific Kids program. Homeroom teachers select one Terrific Kid each month that has shown improvements in some area (i.e., attendance, effort, attitude, academics, etc.). A law firm donated their time twice per month to read to first grade students. Motivational speakers, including Dr. Fairest Hill, are also brought in to work with the Magnet School students. Dr. Hill donated his time one day each month for five months to work with approximately 60 students in small groups. Extracurricular activities at the Magnet School include chorus, violin and cello lessons, patrols, media helpers, and morning show reporters. Supervision, homework help, snacks and free time is available for all students until 5:30 pm through the Magnet Schools after-care program. In addition to these supports, like the Traditional School, the Magnet Schools' PTA organizes fundraisers and social events for the school.

Presentation of Ethical Considerations

Permission from the University of South Florida (USF) and the School Districts Instructional Review Boards was obtained prior to proceeding with this study. Identifiable features including names or student numbers were obscured following data collection. In the assessment of the quantitative components of this study the researcher took the role of a neutral, non-participant observer. The researcher proceeded from the Transformative-Emancipatory approach (Mertens, 2003); she is of African American descent, a former student of the traditional public school system, and attended non-public schools as well. These traits and experiences enhanced her sensitivity to the participants selected for this study.

Instrumentation

FCAT. FCAT scores of the students participating in this study were gathered from the School District's database by each school and given to the researcher following receipt of permission from parents. According to the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) (2003b), the FCAT is used to measure student achievement in the areas of Reading, Math, Writing, and Science. The criterion portion of the FCAT assesses higher-order cognitive skills designated in the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) of Florida's curriculum. Norm-referenced testing in the areas of Reading and Math is conducted to compare the performance of Florida students to students across the nation. The test is administered every spring to students in Grades 3-10.

For the criterion-referenced portions, the FDOE (2003b) explains that mean scores on the Reading and Mathematics portions of the FCAT are reported on a scale of 100-500. These scaled mean scores were used to assess academic achievement in the areas of math and reading. Five achievement levels are reported, with a score of 1 being the lowest and a score of 5 being the highest. The Reading subtests consist of two types of questions: multiple-choice questions and performance tasks (Grades 4, 8, and 10 only). The Mathematics subtests consist of three types of questions: multiple-choice questions, gridded-response questions (Grades 5-10 only), and performance tasks (Grades 5, 8, and 10 only). Multiple-choice and gridded-response questions are machine scored. Answers to performance tasks are scored holistically by at least two trained readers.

Students in Grades 3-10 took the Norm-Referenced Test (NRT) section of the FCAT and received scale scores that range from 424-863 across all grades. In addition,

National Percentile Ranks (NPR), stanines, and content subscores are reported. The NRT section of the FCAT contains only multiple-choice questions (Florida Department of Education, 2003b). School personnel administered the criterion-referenced test and NRT over the course of one week. The examiner collected the test scores received from the FDOE by each of the schools.

According to the FDOE (2001), the reliability indices for the FCAT are measured on a scale of 0.00 to 1.00. For grades 4, 5, 8, and 10, the FDOE (2001) reports that the reliability indices are above .90, indicating that the test scores are highly reliable. Content-related validity of the FCAT is justified by the FDOE through their collaboration with commercial test developers and committees of curriculum specialists and classroom teachers practicing in the state of Florida (FDOE, 2001). Correlations were drawn between the Stanford Achievement Test Version Nine (SAT-9) to account for the concurrent validity of the FCAT. Correlations between these two tests ranged from .70 to .81 for grades 4, 5, 8, and 10 and were considered to be strong given that they assess slightly different material (FDOE, 2001).

Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory Third Edition. The Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory Third Edition (CFSEI-3) is a norm-referenced self-report measure. One purpose for the development of the CFSEI-3 was to facilitate research in the area of self-esteem (Battles, 2002). According to Battles (2002), the “results can be used to measure the relationship of certain characteristics and abilities to self-esteem and to determine the effectiveness of various intervention programs on reported self-esteem”(p. 5). The racial composition of the normative sample (N=547) consisted of 448 (82%) White students, 82

(15%) Black students, and 16 (3%) students characterized as Other. The CFSEI-3 was normed on children ages 6-18 in four geographical regions (Northwest, Midwest, South, West) from five ethnic backgrounds (Native American – 1%, Hispanic American – 16%, Asian American – 1%, African American – 14%, and Other – 68%) (Battle, 2002).

The intermediate form, which was used in this study, is designed for children ages 9 through 12. This form consists of 64 statements addressing self-esteem in four areas: Academic, General, Parental/Home, and Social. Students supply “yes” or “no” answers to each statement. The scoring rubric translates these answers to scores of one or zero and result in raw scores, which are then converted into standard scores and percentiles. Standard scores on the CFSEI-3 range from 1 indicating Very Low Self-Esteem to 20 indicating Very High Self-Esteem (Battle, 2002). The sum of the standard scores obtained from the four subscales yields a Global Self-Esteem Quotient. Global Self-Esteem Quotients ranging from 90 to 110 are considered normal. The standard scores in the four areas assessed by the CFSEI-3 as well as the Global Self-Esteem Quotient, were analyzed in this study.

Battle (2002) indicated that the reliability of this test was assessed using content sampling and time sampling. Content sampling indicated that the reliability of the Global Self-Esteem Quotient (GSEQ) obtained from this inventory was .80. These findings were consistent when compared with a Canadian sample (N = 492). Test-retest reliability resulted in coefficients ranging from .72 to .98 (Battle, 2002).

MacEachron’s (1982) criteria was use to assess the criterion-prediction validity (criterion-related validity) of the CFSEI-3. Convergent validity ranged from moderate to

high and was demonstrated through correlational comparisons with the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1984) (median coefficient = .66), and the Multidimensional Self Concept Scale (MSCS) (Bracken, 1992) (median coefficient = .72). Intercorrelation of the CFSEI-3 scores was statistically significant beyond the .0001 level, representing moderate to high degrees of relationships (Battle, 2002).

Construct-related validity was assessed using three goodness-of-fit indexes: "Tucker and Lewis's (1973) index of fit (TLI), Bentler and Bonnett's (1980) normed fit index (BBNFI), and Browne and Cudeck's (1993) root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)" (Battle, 2002). Satisfactory model fits for the TLI and BBNFI should be at or above .90 and were .992 and .998 respectively. Criterion for goodness-of-fit using the RMSEA should be at or above .10 and was .092. Content-related validity was determined based on Ebel (1972) and Pyrczak's (1973) suggested discrimination indexes of .35 or higher as acceptable (Battle, 2002). Battle (2002) reported that mean item discrimination coefficients for all ages and CFSEI-3 scores met or exceeded .35. Item bias was also assessed with regard to gender (male or female), and race (African American/Non-African American and Hispanic American/Non-Hispanic American). Battles (2002) reported that of the 392 comparisons that were made of the 131 items (items on all three forms), 32 were found to be statistically significant at the .001 level. Further analysis indicated that of these 32 comparisons, none had large effect sizes and only two had moderate effect sizes (Battle, 2002). These results imply that the CFSEI-3 is nonbiased with regard to race, gender, and ethnicity, correlates well with other

presumed measures of self-esteem, and that the subscales of the CFSEI-3 are significantly intercorrelated.

Parental Questionnaire. The parental questionnaire (see Appendix C) was developed by the researcher to ascertain demographic differences that may exist between students at the two schools. Parents were asked to indicate their zip code, their relationship to the child, the primary care giver, family type, and their level of educational attainment. In addition to this descriptive information parents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a 5-point scale of satisfaction with regards to their child's reading, math, and writing instruction. They were also asked to indicate how much they felt their child's culture was valued at the school they attended, whether they felt the school had an influence on their child's self-esteem and whether they would consider reenrolling at their respective schools during the 2004-2005 school year. Parents were asked to indicate their reason for or against reenrollment as well.

The parental questionnaire was field tested twice to ensure reliability. Initially 28 parents of children enrolled in traditional public (n = 11), magnet (n = 6), parochial (n = 6), charter (n = 3), and home schools (n = 2) responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was re-administered two months later in order to establish reliability of the items. Twenty of the original 28 parents completed the questionnaire a second time. Test-retest reliability indicated that 17 out of the 20 respondents (85%) were consistent in their responses to all items on the questionnaire. Inconsistency from administration one to administration two were evident in the responses of three parents with regards to items assessing their levels of satisfaction. Two of the three respondents indicated higher

levels of satisfaction in the academic areas assessed on the questionnaire. The other respondent indicated lower levels of satisfaction in the reading achievement of their child and a change in their intent to reenroll their child during the 2004-2005 school year.

Procedure

Following permission to proceed with the study, the researcher had each school identify all the African American students who took the FCAT during the 2003-2004 school year who were still enrolled at their respective schools. Letters of consent (see Appendix B) were printed on colored paper and delivered to the schools by the researcher. The schools sent home the letters of consent with the identified students. Upon receipt of the returned consent forms, the researcher reviewed student schedules with the administrators and scheduled the most appropriate times to pull the students out of class in order to administer the CFSEI-3.

The CFSEI-3 took 15-20 minutes to administer and was administered in small group settings by the researcher. The researcher picked up the students from their classrooms and took them to a location predetermined by administrators. The directions were read aloud to the group, and students were provided an opportunity to ask questions about what to do. The examiner individually read aloud stimulus items to students with below Grade 3 reading skills or other disabilities preventing them from responding to the stimulus items without assistance (Battle, 2002). The classroom teachers identified these students.

Following administration of the CFSEI-3, the researcher turned in the participants' names to administrators. The administrators generated a list of the FCAT

scores of the students who were assessed with the CFSEI-3 from the FCAT data distributed to each school. In addition to the FCAT scores, the administrators also provided the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) status of the participants as well as their school attendance history. The researcher scored the CFSEI-3, matched the students' scores with their FCAT scores, and conducted a data analysis on the results.

Research Design

A multi-site case study was selected to provide comparisons between the academic achievement and self-esteem of African American students in traditional public elementary schools and magnet elementary schools. The independent variable in this study was school type, more specifically, magnet schools and traditional public schools. Dependent variables for the quantitative portion of this study included demographic information obtained from the parent questionnaire, FCAT scores, and the CFSEI-3 scores of students.

The verification procedure used checked for the representativeness of the sources of data. Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, and Bostick (2004) suggest that a minimum acceptable sample size for research is 30 participants. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) recommend that large samples be studied in order to obtain low sampling error. In this study, 37 students were identified from the Traditional School and 33 students were identified from the Magnet School as potential participants to be included in data collection and interpretation; therefore, the data source was verified to be representative of the population intended in the study.

Data Analysis

Research Questions and Analysis.

1. How do African American students in a choice school perform on the reading and math subtests of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in comparison to African American students in a traditional public school?

2. Do African American students in a choice school demonstrate a significant difference in self-esteem when compared to African American students in a traditional public school?

These two research questions were analyzed using an independent sample t-test to determine if parents differ demographically and with regards to their levels of satisfaction with their children's schools. The alpha level was set at .05. A follow-up test using a modified Bonferroni was conducted to control for the Type I error rate. Effect sizes were also calculated. SPSS was the software system used to analyze statistical data (SPSS, 2003). Follow-up t-tests using a modified Bonferroni were conducted in order to determine areas of significance.

3. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ demographically? If so, how important are those demographic differences to academic and/or self-esteem differences that emerge between students at the two schools?

This research question was analyzed using an independent sample t-test to determine if parents differ demographically. The alpha level was set at .05. A follow-up test using a modified Bonferroni was conducted to control for the Type I error rate. Chi-square tests were conducted to identify relationships between the variables. Analyses of

covariance were also conducted to control for influential demographic factors. SPSS was the software system used to analyze statistical data (SPSS, 2003).

4. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ in their levels of satisfaction with their children's schools?

These two research questions were analyzed using an independent sample t-test to determine if parents differ demographically and with regards to their levels of satisfaction with their children's schools. The alpha level was set at .05. A follow-up test using a modified Bonferroni was conducted to control for the Type I error rate. Effect sizes were also calculated. SPSS was the software system used to analyze statistical data (SPSS, 2003).

Chapter IV

Results

The present study was designed to determine whether African American students in a heterogeneous traditional public school setting do better academically than their peers in a heterogeneous choice school setting. This study also examined whether differences existed in the academic, general, parental/home, social, and global self-esteems of the students included in this study. Additionally, the study addressed parental demographics and levels of satisfaction with the performance of their children in these two settings. The purpose of this chapter is to address and answer the following specific research questions:

1. How do African American students in a choice school perform on the reading and math subtests of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in comparison to African American students in a traditional public school?
2. Do African American students in choice schools demonstrate a significant difference in self-esteem when compared to African American students in traditional public schools?
3. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ demographically? If so, how important are those demographic differences to academic and/or self-esteem differences that emerge between students at the two schools?

4. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ in their levels of satisfaction with their children's schools?

Treatment of the Data

Accuracy of the following results was ensured through various methods of crosschecking the collected data and data entry. The reading and math FCAT scores were collected by the two schools. The scores were then verified by the primary investigator by reviewing the FCAT summary reports of each student maintained in the logs at the schools. Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventories – Third Edition (CFSEI-3) were scored by the primary investigator. Each student's response form was reviewed before it was scored to ensure that no items were left unanswered and that all items were answered with a definitive "yes" or "no". Their response forms were scored twice, and the results were entered on the Profile/Scoring forms. The CFSEI-3 Profile/Scoring forms were double checked by a graduate student utilizing the CFSEI-3 for her own independent research to make sure the raw scores, standard scores, and percentiles fell within the possible range of scores for the CFSEI-3.

Data for the FCAT, CFSEI-3, and parent questionnaires were entered into SPSS by the primary investigator and reviewed by two graduate students. Descriptive statistics were run for both categorical and continuous variables. The primary investigator and both graduate students checked the minimum and maximum values of all data entered. These values were found to be within the possible range of scores for the variables being assessed. Normality of the distribution of scores also was assessed. Histograms, normal probability plots, detrended normal probability plots, stem-and-leaf plots, and box plots

were evaluated. Scores appeared to be reasonably normally distributed for the variables assessed. Descriptive statistics also were run on the data to check for outliers. None were identified by the primary investigator or by either graduate student.

Effect sizes were calculated to determine the magnitude of differences between the two schools on variables being assessed. Effect sizes were calculated twice by the primary investigator. Two graduate students also calculated the effect sizes. The results for the four analyses were compared and found to be accurate.

Research Question #1. How do African American children in a choice school perform on the reading and math subtests of the FCAT in comparison to African American students in a traditional public school?

The first research question was developed to determine how students in a choice school setting performed on the Reading and Math subtests of the FCAT in comparison to their peers in a traditional public school. To answer this question, an independent sample t-test was used to compare students in the two schools with respect to their mean scaled scores on the Reading and Math subtests of the FCAT. The alpha level was set at .05 and equal variance was assumed. Levene's test for equality of variance was utilized and indicated no violations of this assumption. There was no significant difference in reading scores for the Traditional School ($M=273.18$, $SD=58.19$) and the Magnet School [$M=299.45$, $SD=60.91$; $t(70)=-1.84$, $p=.070$]. However, there was a significant difference between the math scores for the Traditional School ($M=277.51$, $SD=70.84$) and the Magnet School [$M=313.81$, $SD=57.21$; $t(70)=-2.34$, $p=.022$]. These results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

School Differences for Scaled Scores of the FCAT Reading and Math Subtests for African American Students at the Traditional School and the Magnet School

FCAT Subtest	<u>Traditional School</u>		<u>Magnet School</u>		<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	N = 37		N = 33			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Reading	273.18	58.19	299.45	60.91	.070	-.4416
Math	277.51	70.84	313.81	57.21	.022	-.2091

Research Question #2. Do African American students in a choice school demonstrate a significant difference in self-esteem when compared to African American students in a traditional public school?

This research question was developed to determine whether differences exist between students in two different school settings with regard to their academic, general, parental/home, social and global self-esteem. To answer this question, the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories – Third Edition (CFSEI-3) was administered to the students. The Intermediate Form for children ages 9-12 was administered and scored based on the guidelines set forth by the test publisher. After administration and scoring was completed, an independent sample t-test was used to compare students in the two schools with respect to their mean standard scores on the Academic, General, Parental/Home and Social subscales of the CFSEI-3. Assessment of the student’s mean Global Self-Esteem Quotient also was assessed using an independent sample t-test. The alpha level was set at .05, and equal variance was assumed. Levene’s test for equality of variance was utilized

and indicated no violations of this assumption. No significant differences were noted on the four subscales of the CFSEI-3 or with regard to the students' mean Global Self-Esteem Quotients. Scores for students at both schools fell within the average range.

These results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

School Differences on the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory – Third Edition Subscales and Global Quotient Standard Scores of African American Students at the Traditional School and the Magnet School

Subscales	<u>Traditional School</u>		<u>Magnet School</u>		<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	N = 37		N = 33			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Academic	9.43	2.57	9.93	2.17	.380	-.2091
General	8.02	2.91	7.72	2.63	.655	.1078
Parental/Home	8.78	2.32	9.09	1.70	.534	-.1510
Social	9.10	2.23	9.60	1.98	.330	-.2362
Global Quotient	92.54	12.28	95.18	10.39	.338	-.2309

Research Question #3A. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ demographically?

This research question was developed to examine the demographic makeup of the parents who elected to partake in the study along with their children. To answer this question, parent questionnaires were attached to the letters of informed consent and sent home with the students. While seventy participants returned signed consent forms, sixty-eight out of the seventy parents, or 97%, completed the questionnaire. Parents were asked to answer demographic questions about their relationship to the child, the child's

primary care giver, their family type, and their educational level. Frequencies of responses were examined for both schools. The results are presented in Table 5. As shown below, the demographic differences between parents at the traditional and choice schools that emerged from the survey were with regards to parental educational level. Parents whose children attended the choice school had a significantly higher level of education than parents of children who attended the traditional school.

Table 5.

Demographic Characteristics the Traditional School (N=36) and Magnet School (N=32) Parents

Characteristic	Traditional School		Magnet School		χ^2	p
	n	%	n	%		
Relationship to Child					1.834	.400
Mother	33	92	31	97		
Father	2	5	0	0		
Grandparent	1	3	1	3		
Primary Caregiver					14.65	.558
No Response	4	11	1	3		
Mother	29	81	20	63		
Both Parents	2	6	10	31		
Grandparent	1	2	1	3		
Family Type					2.987	.225
Two Parent	21	58	12	38		
Single Parent	14	39	19	59		

(Table 5 continues)

(Table 5 continued)

Characteristic	Traditional School		Magnet School		χ^2	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Other	1	3	1	3		
Educational Level					20.420	.001
No Response	2	5	0	0		
< High School	7	19	4	12		
High School Graduate/GED	19	53	5	16		
Some College/AA Degree	5	14	15	47		
Bachelors Degree	2	6	8	8		
Postgraduate Degree	1	3	0	0		

Research Question #3B. If any significant demographic differences are observed between parents at the two schools, how important are those demographic differences to academic and/or self-esteem differences between students at the two schools?

The purpose of this question was to determine if demographic differences between families at the two schools might have influenced any of the academic or self-esteem results. Because parental educational level has been associated in previous research with student academic outcomes, a one-way between groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare the influence school type and parental educational level had on FCAT reading and math scores. The independent variable was school type (traditional public school, magnet school) and the dependent variables were reading and math FCAT scaled scores. Parental educational level was used as a covariate in these

analyses. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate. After adjusting for parental educational level, there was no significant difference between the two types of schools on FCAT reading and math scaled scores [reading - $F(1,64) = .01$, $p = .92$, eta squared = .00; math - $F(1,63) = .51$, $p = .48$, eta squared = .01]. There was a weak relationship between FCAT reading and math scaled scores and parental educational level, as indicated by eta squared values of .21 for FCAT reading scaled scores and .20 for FCAT math scaled scores. The results are presented in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6.

Analysis of Covariance of School Type as a Function of FCAT Reading Scaled Scores with Parental Educational Level as Covariate

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Parental Educational Level (PEL)	1	48508.080	16.677	.000
School Type (ST)	1	649.333	.223	.638
ST * PEL	1	883.255	.304	.584
Error	63	2908.662		

Table 7.

Analysis of Covariance of School Type as a Function of FCAT Math Scaled Scores with Parental Educational Level as Covariate

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Parental Educational Level (PEL)	1	49150.121	15.892	.000
School Type (ST)	1	561.874	.182	.671
ST * PEL	1	1577.118	.510	.478
Error	63	3092.819		

Research Question #4. Do African American parents of traditional public school and choice school students differ in their levels of satisfaction with their children’s schools?

This research question was developed to examine parent perceptions in three domains. First, parents were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction with regard to the reading, math, and writing instruction their children were receiving in the two different schools. Next, they were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction with regard to the how much value they felt the school placed on their child’s culture, and finally, they were asked what type of influence they felt the school had on their child’s self-esteem. On the parent questionnaire which was sent home with each child, parents were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction in the academic domain on a 5-point scale of satisfaction ranging from 1 indicating that they were not satisfied at all to 5 indicating that they were very satisfied. The same scale was used to indicate whether they felt their family’s culture was Highly Valued (5) to Not Valued at all (1) and whether they felt the school had a Very Positive Influence (5) on their child’s self-esteem to a Very Negative

Influence (1). Initially, an independent sample t-test was run to determine whether there was a significant difference in the mean levels of satisfaction for both schools. The alpha level was set at .05, and equal variance was assumed. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated a violation of this assumption with regard to parents' level of satisfaction with their children's math instruction ($F=4.484$, $p=.038$). No significant differences between the two schools were noted. Frequencies were then run on both schools, and the results are presented in Table 8. As can be seen in the table below, no significant differences emerged between groups.

Table 8.

Levels of Satisfaction of Traditional School (N=36) and Magnet School (N=32) Parents

Domain	Traditional School		Magnet School		<i>t</i> (64)	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Reading Instruction	3.88	1.14	3.90	.9955	-0.066	-0.0186
Math Instruction	3.69	1.21	3.96	.8224	-1.076	-0.2581
Writing Instruction	3.97	1.25	4.06	.9817	-0.328	-0.0795
Culture Valued	3.25	1.29	3.5	1.24	-0.809	-0.1973
Schools Influence on Self-Esteem	4.05	.9840	4.09	1.08	-0.152	-0.0388

In addition to indicating their levels of satisfaction with regard to the academic instruction their children received, the amount of value the school placed on their child's

culture and the influence they felt the school had on their child's self-esteem, parents were also asked whether they would consider reenrolling their children for the 2004-2005 school year. They were then asked to indicate why they would or would not reenroll their children during the 2004-2005 school year. A frequency of their intent to reenroll the children was taken. Of the 36 respondents at Lanier, 22 (61%) indicated that they would like their child to stay at the school for the 2004-2005 school year while 14 (39%) indicated that they would not be reenrolling their child for the 2004-2005 school year. Eight of the 14 parents (57%) who answered that their child would not be returning to the Traditional School indicated in the follow-up question regarding their reenrollment reason that their decision was based on the fact that their child would be going on to middle school for the upcoming school year. Of the 32 respondents at Lee, 19 (59.4%) indicated that they would like their child to stay at the school for the 2004-2005 school year, 11 (34.4%) indicated that they would not be reenrolling their child for the 2004-2005 school year, and 2 respondents (6.3%) indicated that they were unsure. All eleven parents at the Magnet School who answered that their child would not be returning indicated in the follow-up question regarding their reenrollment reason that their decision was based on the fact that their child would be going on to middle school for the upcoming school year. Reenrollment reasons were further analyzed using qualitative measures, which generated themes for their responses. Themes representing the most responses are reported in Tables 9A - 9D.

Table 9A.

Traditional School Parent Responses to Open-Ended Reenrollment Question – Yes

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Good school and educational environment	6	16.7
Staff is dedicated, caring, and helpful	2	5.6

Table 9B.

Traditional School Parent Responses to Open-Ended Reenrollment Question – No

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Child will be going to the 6th grade	10	27.8
Unsure or no response	13	36.1

Table 9C.

Magnet School Parent Responses to Open-Ended Reenrollment Question – Yes

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Good school and educational environment	7	21.9
Staff is dedicated, caring, and helpful	3	9.4

Table 9D.

Magnet School Parent Responses to Open-Ended Reenrollment Question – No

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Child will be going to the 6th grade	11	34.4
Unsure or no response	10	31.3

Miscellaneous responses accounted for 5 (13.9%) of the “yes” and “no” responses given by Traditional School parents and 1 (3.1%) of the “yes” responses given by the

Magnet School parents to the open-ended reenrollment question. Miscellaneous “no” responses given by Traditional School parents included “We are moving”, “We prefer a private school with smaller classes” and “I would prefer for my child to have a downsized classroom for better learning”. Miscellaneous “yes” responses given by Traditional School parents included “It works for me as far as after school care is concerned” and “[My daughter] is familiar with the school and teachers and the school is close to my home.” The one miscellaneous “yes” response given by a Magnet School parent indicated that they planned to reenroll their child at a magnet school because “It’s close to home [and we] don’t have to worry about after school care”.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether difference exists in the academic achievement and self-esteem of African American students enrolled in a magnet school and their same-age peers in a traditional public school. The two schools that participated in this study were selected based on their similarities with regard to school size and racial composition. The scaled reading and math subtest scores of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) were used to assess academic achievement. Self-esteem was measured using the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory – Third Edition (CFSEI-3). Parental demographics and levels of satisfaction also were assessed through a questionnaire that parents were asked to complete along with their consent.

This chapter will address the findings of this study in four sections. First, the results for each research question will be discussed. Next, limitations of the study will be addressed. Third, practical implications of the findings will be noted. Finally, suggestions for future research as it applies to the education and self-esteem of African American students will be presented.

Parental Demographics

Demographic information was obtained from the parents who elected to allow their children to take part in this study. Respondents were asked to identify their five-

digit zip code, relationship to the child, the child's primary caregiver, the family composition (single parent, dual parent), and their educational level of attainment. Socioeconomic status (SES) also was evaluated with permission to access the free or reduced lunch (FRL) status of the participants. SES data revealed that 92% of the traditional public school students and 82% of the magnet school students who took part in this study participated in the FRL program. It was apparent that most of the African American magnet school students who participated in this study came from two parent households with parents who had attended some college or had earned at least a two-year college degree. On the other hand, the majority of participants from the traditional school came from single parent family households in which their parent had graduated from high school or earned a GED. These findings are similar to Diamond and Gomez's (2004) research, which found that middle class African American parents were more likely to select their children's schools than working class African American parents.

The above findings also are significant in evaluating the various factors, outside of school type, that influence the academic achievement of African American students. More specifically, single parent household status and parental levels of educational attainment have been implicated as risk factors for poor academic achievement in minority students. Studies have shown that discrepancies in levels of achievement often are linked to environmental factors (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Research conducted by Huttenlocher and Dabholker (1997) found lower levels of achievement from children raised in impoverished environments when compared to their peers in more enriching environments. The educational levels of students' parents, particularly the mother, have

also proven influential in the academic achievement of minority students (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002).

While Traditional School participants lived within two zip codes, parents of the Magnet School participants lived within 14 different zip codes. These results were not surprising considering the foundation of choice options upon which magnet schools were built. This data is supportive of previous research, which found geographical differences between students who attend traditional public schools and those who attend choice schools. Meeks, Meeks, and Warren (2000) pointed out that magnet schools were designed as an alternative to forced busing in an effort to desegregate schools by attracting middle-class families to inner-city schools.

Academic Achievement of African American Students - Reading

Standardized tests are used as a method of measuring the academic achievement of students in public schools. The state of Florida administers the FCAT to all students in grades 3-10 to measure achievement in the areas of reading, math, writing, and science. Reading and math achievement were assessed in this study. The results of the data analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in the reading achievement of 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade African American magnet school and traditional public school students [$t(70) = -1.84, p = .070$].

Further analysis indicated that no significant differences existed when grade level comparisons were made between students at the two schools, although differences between third grade students at the two schools did approach significance ($F=.601, p=.064$). While the mean scores for the students at the traditional public school ($M =$

273) and the magnet school ($M = 299$) give little indication as to grade level performance, the mean scores for each grade level were more telling. The average reading scores of third, fourth, and fifth grade students at the Traditional School (233, 300, and 269 respectively) are suggestive of below grade level reading performance. African American students attending the Magnet School performed better on the reading subtests of the FCAT, with third, fourth, and fifth grade students earning mean grade level performance scores of 299, 310, and 291 respectively.

The overall mean scores for each grade level, while not significantly different, are consistent with the research that suggests below grade level performance of African American students in today's public schools. Gertridge (1997) and Trent (1998) researched the academic achievement of African American students in Oakland and St. Louis, respectively, and found that public school students in these two school districts performed less well on tests of achievement than their White peers. Magnet school enrollment has been linked to improved academic achievement for students as indicated in this study. Similarly, Gamoram's (1996) research into student achievement found that magnet schools had a positive impact on academic achievement.

The below grade level performance of participants from the traditional public school may be a result of environmental risk factors unrelated to the type of school they attend. In addition to the curriculum exposure, lower levels of academic achievement may be linked back to the demographic characteristics of the families from which these students come. According to Bainbridge and Lasley (2002), students who have well educated parents and stimulating home environments perform better than those who do

not. Studies conducted by Fischer and Rose (2001) imply that students living in environments with multiple risk factors, in this case single parent households, lower levels of parental educational attainment and low socioeconomic status as determined by their free and reduced lunch status, receive lower levels of support for academic achievement, preventing them from reaching optimal levels of performance.

While this study was able to control for demographic differences often attributed to below grade level performance of minority students (i.e., racial composition, class size, per pupil expenditure, school grade, etc.), control could not be exhibited over the curriculum or the pace of instruction. As a result, it is difficult to assess whether students received comparable exposure to the material necessary for them to meet state standards for grade level performance. Another explanation for these results may be related to the technology component of the magnet school, which may encourage higher order thinking skills and contribute to the higher grade level performance of magnet school students in the area of reading.

Academic Achievement of African American Students – Math

Math performance also was assessed using the FCAT scaled scores and was found to be significantly different [$t(n) = 70, p = .022$] when the three grade groups in each school were compared as a whole. The Magnet School participants had overall higher scores on the math subtest of the FCAT. Significant differences were not found when the students were compared across grade levels. On the other hand, while third, fourth, and fifth grade participants at the Traditional School were found to be performing below grade level in math with mean scores of 279, 284, and 294 respectively, third and fourth

grade African American participants at the Magnet School were found to be performing on grade level with mean scores of 311 and 307 respectively. A mean score of 321 for fifth grade participants at the Magnet School is indicative of below grade level performance in the area of math. Notably, the differences in math performance on the FCAT between the two schools were not significant when parent level of education was controlled. This suggests that demographic differences between the types of students who attend each school—rather than differences between schools—account for the differences in math performance.

It is unknown whether the academic performance of these students is above, below, or equivalent to other traditional public school and magnet school students with similar demographic characteristics. In addition to the school-related influences over academic achievement, it is important to take into consideration the environmental conditions of the participants' lives. Aforementioned studies indicate that risk factors including single parent family status, low levels of parental educational attainment, and low SES are linked to lower levels of academic achievement for minority students. These findings imply that a variety of factors may be related to the below grade level reading and math achievement of students who took part in this study.

Self-Esteem of African American Students

Self-esteem is an often-overlooked construct when consideration is being made to enroll African American students in non-traditional academic settings such as private schools, magnet schools, or charter schools. This study sought to assess whether differences existed in the self-esteem of African American students in a magnet school

and their peers in a traditional public school. Assessment via the CFSEI-3 revealed that no significant differences existed between the two groups with regard to their academic [$t(70) = -.883, p = .380$], general [$t(70) = .449, p = .655$], parental/home [$t(70) = -.624, p = .534$], social [$t(70) = -.981, p = .330$] or global [$t(70) = -.964, p = .338$] self-esteem.

Overall, students at both schools exhibited subtest score means ranging from 7.72 to 9.60 in the four domains. The mean global self-esteem quotients for Traditional School and The magnet school were 92.54 and 95.18 respectively. These scores are all within the average range. This indicates that the type of school that students attended was not related to the self-esteem of African American students who participated in this study.

One reason for these results may be that racial composition of students' schools was controlled in this study. Both schools had comparable percentages of African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and students classified as 'Other.' Research conducted on the social adjustment of African American students in nontraditional school settings has focused on schools that have disproportionate numbers of African American and Caucasian students with African American students being in the minority (i.e., Bergins & Cooks, 2002; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001; Cook & Ludwig, 1998). Another potential reason for these findings could point to the sense of community and security Traditional School students experience from attending a multicultural traditional public school with restrictions on busing. Goldring, Ellen, Smrekar, and Claire (2000) pointed out that "when school systems transport children far away from their neighborhoods the social distance between schools and families grows to reflect the geographic space that separates them"(p.13).

As indicated by the CFSEI-3 administered to the participants in this study, there are several components of self-esteem including academic, general, parental/home, and social self-esteem. These titles indicate that various factors contribute to one's sense of self. Previous research suggests that depressed levels of self-esteem are more likely evidenced in students who are the minority amongst the population of students within the school they attend. Swanson, Spencer, Dell'Angelo, Harpalani, and Spencer (2002) noted that minority status within the school environment influences the low academic achievement and self-worth of minority students. In spite of the high quality education African American students in Horvat and Antonio's (1999) study noted receiving, the social distance and "psychological trauma" (p. 334) they experienced by attending a school that was 93% white caused them to question their self-worth and "leave a part of their identity behind" (p. 334). Similarly, Bergin and Cooks (2002) interviewed students who discussed the need to give up their racial identity in order to fit into their upscale predominantly white suburban schools and neighborhoods. These studies imply that problems related to self-esteem are more apparent in students who live in neighborhoods and attend schools that are not representative of the racial group from which they come. The participants in this study experienced racial continuity between home and school. This potentially decreased the likelihood that either group would exhibit depressed levels of self-esteem when compared to their peers in predominantly white settings.

Parental Levels of Satisfaction

The final question addressed in this study was with regard to parental levels of satisfaction. No significant differences were found between the Traditional School and

Magnet School parents when they were asked to reflect upon the reading, math, and writing instruction their children were receiving at school. Parents also were asked whether they felt their family's culture was valued by their child's school and the type of influence they felt the school's had on their child's self-esteem. No significant differences were found in these areas either. On average, on a scale of 1-5 with one indicating that they were not satisfied at all and five indicating that they were very satisfied, parents rated their levels of satisfaction in academic areas as a 3. They also gave a 3 rating on average to indicate that they felt their families culture was 'Somewhat Valued' at school. With regard to the influence their child's school had on the children's self-esteem, on average parents from both schools gave a rating of 4 on the 1-5 scale with 5 indicating that the respective schools had a very positive influence on their child's self-esteem.

Overall, this study did not replicate the findings of previous research into school choice and parental satisfaction. Witte (1996) studied voucher programs in Milwaukee and found that choice school parents were more satisfied with their selected schools than public school parents who had not exercised their right to choose. Martinez, Godwin, and Kemerer (1996) also did some comparative research into school choice and parental satisfaction. The results of their study into San Antonio's school choice program indicated that choice school parents were also significantly more satisfied with their children's schools than parents of children who remained at their assigned schools.

The fact that this study's findings differ from those of previous studies into parental satisfaction may be due to some unique aspects of the schools that were included

in this study. Aside from the specialized curriculum available to the students at the Magnet School, the Traditional School students and parents are able to access many of the social benefits attributed to magnet schools. These include racial integration, the opportunity to learn from and about different cultures, and participation in school and home communities that are racially similar. The need to sacrifice a sense of community in order to satisfy integration policies from the Brown era are unnecessary at either school. Goldring, Ellen, and Smrekar (2000) proposed that the ideal situation would be to not only integrate schools but neighborhoods as well. Based on research conducted by Hausman and Goldring (2000), higher levels of satisfaction felt by magnet school parents are often attributed to the sense of community felt among families within the school. This same sense of community and comparable levels of satisfaction may be experienced and maintained by the Magnet School and Traditional School parents because their children's school community replicates the multicultural environment of their neighborhoods and homes.

Limitations of the Study

A threat to the external validity of this study is the ability to generalize the findings to other choice schools and public schools. The two schools selected to participate in this study likely are not representative of all choice schools and public school environments available to parents and students. The findings cannot be generalized to other races or alternate choice school settings including charter schools, parochial schools, and or private schools.

Other threats to external validity include population validity, ecological validity, and temporal validity. Replication of the locations and racial compositions of these two schools may pose a threat to population validity and ecological validity. Variations in curriculum and state requirements from year to year pose a threat to temporal validity as additional resources, curriculum exposure, and varied rates of learning result in fluctuations in academic achievement from year to year.

Practical Implications of Findings

This study found few statistically significant differences between African American students in a traditional public school and a magnet school other than overall differences between schools in FCAT math achievement and differences in FCAT third grade reading that approached significance. Notably, differences between children at the two schools were not significant when parent levels of education (which were significantly higher at the magnet school) were statistically controlled. Florida's reading initiative may have had some influence on the overall comparable reading achievement of the students at both schools. This implies that curriculum and interventions may be more influential at producing significant differences than actual school placement.

The fact that significant differences were not found among African American students' self-esteem and their parents' levels of satisfaction may be attributed to the multicultural home, school, and community environments in which they are members. This suggests that integrated schools may be more effective at positively influencing the self-esteem of students who can take comfort in being members of diverse communities. These findings also imply that multicultural awareness programs that emphasize diversity

could have a positive impact on the overall self-esteem of African American children in choice schools as well as influence the levels of satisfaction their parents experience by their child's school enrollment. Further research that investigates differences in self-esteem between African American children at integrated vs. segregated schools (either magnet or traditional) is needed to further explore these issues.

Future Directions of Research

Magnet schools evolved as a means of desegregating public schools without having to subject students and their families to forced busing. As a result, much of the research conducted on magnet schools has revolved around their effectiveness at integrating inner-city public schools. When evaluating achievement gains for magnet schools, research has yielded mixed results. This leaves considerable room for further research by those interested in investigating the academic achievement of African American students enrolled in magnet schools. There has also been limited research conducted on the social implications of choice school enrollment. The public could benefit from comparative quantitative and qualitative studies that focus on the influence these schools have on the development of a positive self-concept in African American students.

Studies conducted on programs that have proven successful at increasing academic achievement and positively impacting the self-esteem of African American students also could be informative for schools seeking to replicate similar results. It may also be beneficial for studies to move away from the ability of magnet schools to desegregate inner-city schools and begin focusing on the effects school placement has on

transfer students. More specifically, studies are needed to examine outcomes for students who transfer from public schools to choice schools, with longitudinal studies comparing their social adjustment and achievement before and after enrollment in a choice school as well as post-graduation outcomes.

Factors influencing achievement and self-esteem also should be researched further. This study looked at demographic characteristics as indicated by the parents' responses. The ability to assess resiliency in spite of risk factors by comparing students with similar demographic characteristics could prove influential to the growing research being conducted in an effort to close the achievement gap. Research in this area should include larger samplings of students and school types. Further investigation into factors such as curriculum, supplementary programs, teacher traits and parental involvement that contribute to improved achievement and self-esteem in African American students is also needed.

Conclusions

Disparities in the academic achievement of minority students and their White peers have paved the way for educational reforms and an array of school choice alternatives. This study did not find significant differences between traditional public school African American students and their same race magnet school peers in any area other than that which the magnet school provided an emphasis, math. Even then, when differences in parent education level were statistically controlled, these differences were not significant. This study provided valuable information about the possible effects integration had on the comparable levels of student self-esteem and parental satisfaction

between the participants at both schools. These results suggest that multicultural curriculums that emphasize diversity may be beneficial in supporting the self-concepts of African American students. The results of this study also provide researchers with an opportunity to further investigate successful academic curricula and interventions in order to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Florida's A+ Plan: Grading Florida Public Schools

GRADING FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2002-2003
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, JIM HORNE, COMMISSIONER,
www.fldoe.org

School grades for 2002-2003 utilize a point system. Schools are awarded one point for each percent of students who score *high* on the FCAT and/or make annual learning gains.

Scoring High on the FCAT

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is the primary measure of student's achievement on the Sunshine State Standards. Student scores are classified into five achievement levels, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

- Schools earn one point for each percent of students who score in achievement levels 3, 4, or 5 in **reading** and one point for each percent of students who score 3, 4, or 5 in **math**.
- The **writing** exam is scored by at least two readers on a scale of 1 to 6. The percent of students scoring "3" and above is averaged with the percent scoring "3.5" and above to yield the percent meeting minimum and higher standards. Schools earn one point for each percent of students on the combined measure.

Making Annual Learning Gains

Since FCAT **reading and math** exams are given in grades 3-10, it is now possible to monitor how much students learn from one year to the next.

- Schools earn one point for each percent of students who make learning gains in reading and one point for each percent of students who make learning gains in math. Students can demonstrate learning gains in any one of three ways:
 - (1) Improve achievement levels from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, or 4-5; **or**
 - (2) Maintain within the relatively high levels of 3, 4, or 5; **or**
 - (3) Demonstrate more than one year's growth within achievement levels 1 or 2.
- Special attention is given to the reading gains of students in the lowest 25% in levels 1, 2, or 3 in each school. Schools earn one point for each percent of the lowest performing readers who make learning gains from the previous year. It takes at least 50% to make "adequate progress" for this group

GRADING FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2002-2003 CONTINUED
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, JIM HORNE, COMMISSIONER,
www.fldoe.org

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADING SCALE

A	B	C	D	F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 410 points or more * Meet adequate progress of lowest 25% in reading * Gains for lowest 25% are within 10 points of gains for all students * Test at least 95% of eligible students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 380 points or more * Meet adequate progress of lowest 25% in reading within two years * Test at least 90% of eligible students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 320 points or more * Meet adequate progress of lowest 25% in reading within two years * Test at least 90% of eligible students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 280 points or more * Test at least 90% of eligible students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fewer than 280 points <li style="text-align: center;">or * Less than 90% of eligible students tested

Which students are included in school grade calculations? As in previous years, only standard curriculum students who are enrolled in the same school in both October and February are included. Speech impaired, gifted, hospital/homebound, and Limited English Proficient students with more than two years in an ESOL program are also included.

What happens if the lowest 25% of students in the school do not make “adequate progress” in reading? Schools that aspire to be graded “C” or above, but do not make adequate progress with their lowest 25% in reading, must develop a School Improvement Plan component that addresses this need. If a school, otherwise graded “C” or “B”, does not demonstrate adequate progress for two years in a row, the final grade will be reduced by one letter grade.

Appendix B

Letter of Informed Consent

Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Sheresa Fairclough and I am a graduate student in the School Psychology Program at the University of South Florida. I am working on my thesis, which is focused on the experiences of African American students in grades 3 through 5 in traditional public schools and magnet schools. I am writing to ask your permission for your family to participate in the research for my thesis. Your participation in this study will contribute to the growing research in the area of school choice and will help to inform the decisions of African American parents seeking the best educational opportunities available to their children.

In order to proceed with my study, I will need your permission to access the following from your child's school records:

- Your child's 2004 FCAT scores
- Your child's lunch status (free, reduced, paid)

I will also need your permission to conduct a one-time brief self-esteem assessment entitled the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory Third Edition (CFSEI-3). This assessment will be conducted at your child's school and will take approximately 30 minutes. The CFSEI-3 will be used to obtain an overview of how your child feels about him or herself. This measure will be conducted with children in small groups.

Minimal risk is associated with your child for their participation in this study. Although the CFSEI-3 will be administered during the school day, increased efforts will be made to ensure that they miss little to no instructional time. A treat will also be given to your child to counter the possible effects of being singled out. Confidentiality of all identifying information (i.e., names, student numbers, etc.) will be strictly maintained. Your child's name will not appear in any of the written products from this research project. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, the USF Institutional Review Board and its staff, and other individuals, acting on behalf of USF, may inspect the records from this research project. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your child from the study at any time without any negative consequences for you or your child. A random drawing will be held and four money orders in the amount of **\$25.00** will be mailed home to compensate volunteers for their time and participation.

If you would like more information before you make your decision or if you have any questions please feel free to contact my University Supervisor, Dr. Linda Raffaele Mendez at (813) 974-1255 or me at (813) 910-1056

If you agree to have your child participate in this study, please complete the following questionnaire and sign the consent form on the back of it indicating that you give permission for me to access your child's 2003 FCAT scores and lunch status from school records as well as your permission for me to administer the CFSEI-3 to your child. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my research and I look forward to the possibility of working with your child soon.

Sincerely,

Sheresa Fairclough, M.A.

Appendix C

Parent Questionnaire

Parent Questionnaire

Directions: Please complete the 8 questions on the front and backsides of this form and sign on the back to indicate your consent for participation. Please return this form to your child's teacher by **May 7, 2004**. Thank you!!

1. What is your home zip code? Enter your 5-digit zip code _ _ _ _ _

2. What is your relationship to the child who brought this home to you?

- A. Mother
- B. Father
- C. Grandparent
- D. Foster Parent
- E. Other (Please Describe) _____

3. Which of the following best describes your family?

- A. Two parent family
- B. Single parent family
- C. Other (Please describe) _____

4. What is the highest level of school you completed? (Please circle one)

- A. Less than high school
- B. High school graduate or GED
- C. Some college but no degree or Associates Degree (2 year degree)
- D. Bachelor's degree (4 year degree)
- E. Postgraduate degree

5. How satisfied are you with your child's instruction this year in each of the following subjects? (Circle one number for each subject below)

A. Reading?

5	4	3	2	1
Very Satisfied		Neutral		Not Satisfied at All

B. Math?

5	4	3	2	1
Very Satisfied		Neutral		Not Satisfied at All

C. Writing?

5	4	3	2	1
Very Satisfied		Neutral		Not Satisfied at All

6. How much is your family's culture valued at your child's school?

5 4 3 2 1
Highly Valued Somewhat Valued Not Valued at all

7. How would you describe this school's influence on your child's self-esteem?

5 4 3 2 1
Very Positive No Influence Very Negative

8. Would you like your child to stay at this school in the upcoming 2004-2005 school year? (Please circle yes or no) YES NO

Why or why not?

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

I, _____ do hereby give permission for my child
Parent/Guardian Name

_____ to be administered the Culture Free Self-Esteem
Child's Name

Inventory Third Edition. I also grant Sheresa Fairclough access to the 2004 FCAT scores and lunch status of my child school records. I am also consenting to the above parental survey that I have completed. I understand that my consent is being given on a voluntary basis and that I may withdraw consent at any time prior to the completion of this study without any penalties being assessed to my child or me. I also understand that any identifying information obtained during data collection will remain confidential and will not be included in the final product of this study.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____