Parent/Guardian Empowerment and School Choice

DISSERTATION

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Annahita Ball, M.S.W.
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Dissertation Committee:
Dawn Anderson-Butcher, Advisor
Audrey Begun
Amber Moodie-Dyer
Abstract

Social workers are increasingly concerned with disparities in academic performance across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. This significant social justice issue requires a better understanding of various methods to reduce inequity. School choice is one policy initiative that allows parents/guardians to choose schools other than their neighborhood schools, potentially increasing competition among schools and placing parents/guardians in the roles of “consumers.” Despite discussions of parent/guardian authority in school choice, few studies examine parent/guardian empowerment in a school choice context. This study seeks to address this gap in the research.

As school social workers focus on school-home connections, they also play a key role within school choice policy implementation. They may assist parents/guardians in their decision-making, providing information and potentially empowering families to engage in their children’s education further. Empowerment is one specific component of a social work perspective that is integral in school choice settings. In addition, it may provide insight into parents/guardians’ school choice decisions, ultimately improving understanding of school choice as a mechanism to reduce educational disparities.

The current study utilized cross-sectional survey research with parents/guardians to examine the following research questions: (1) Is Parent/Guardian Empowerment and Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors related to Parent/Guardian
Satisfaction with School Quality; and, (2) Is Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors a moderator of the relationship between Parent/Guardian Empowerment and Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality? The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase of this study developed and tested a measure of parent/guardian empowerment using data collected from a cross-sectional online survey with parents/guardians throughout the United States (N = 226). The second phase specifically addressed the study’s research questions using cross-sectional survey research from 110 parents/guardians living in high poverty areas of a large, urban Midwestern city.

Exploratory Factor Analysis indicated that the Parent/Guardian Empowerment Scale (P/GES) is a psychometrically sound measure of two domains of parent/guardian empowerment: parent/guardian knowledge and parent/guardian perceived competence. In addition, canonical correlation analysis and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to examine the predictors of the quality of parents/guardians school choices. The canonical correlation analysis supported elements of multiple decision-making theories, as both parent/guardian prioritization of academic factors and prioritization of nonacademic factors were relevant variables in the predictor set. Additionally, the regression analyses allowed for tests of moderation, indicating that only parent/guardian prioritization of academic factors was a significant moderator in the relationship between parent/guardian knowledge and satisfaction with school quality. The findings in this study can guide future efforts to engage parents/guardians in school choice, specifically via school choice policies and school social work practice. Ultimately, academic
outcomes for all students may be improved as social work research, practice, and policy better understand parent/guardian decision-making in relation to school choice.
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Vita

2005............................................. B.A. Psychology, The Ohio State University
2005............................................. B.A. English, The Ohio State University
2005-2006 ..................................... School Social Work Intern, Communities In
                                             Schools of Detroit
2007-2008 ..................................... School Social Work Intern, Reynoldsburg
                                             City Schools
2006-Present .................................. Graduate Research Assistant, College of
                                             Social Work, The Ohio State University
2008............................................. M.S.W., The Ohio State University
2010-Present .................................. Graduate Teaching Associate, College of
                                             Social Work, The Ohio State University

Publications

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public education is one of the largest social welfare systems in the country, and national expenditures on education are growing every year (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2005). Moreover, the American education system is integral to children’s health and well-being. Yet, the equitable distribution of quality education is a social problem that is of increasing concern. Students from racial and ethnic minority groups generally score lower in all areas of standardized proficiency tests. For instance, studies of the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that White public school students’ scores on math and reading proficiency tests are significantly higher than the scores for their Black and Hispanic peers (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009). Gaps for low-income and racial and ethnic minorities also exist for the nationally-administered Scholastic Aptitude Test and student grade point averages (Adams, 2011).

In addition, low income and racial and ethnic minority students experience other curricular gaps that inhibit their academic potential. For instance, they are less likely to enroll in a rigorous high school curriculum (Nord, Roey, Perkins, Lyons, Lemanski, Brown, et al., 2011), graduate from high school on schedule (Greene, 2003), and complete higher education at four-year institutions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Some of these gaps in later education may be due to significant disparities in early and elementary
education, as fewer low income and racial and ethnic minority students meet kindergarten entry standards and critical reading benchmarks by third grade when compared to their higher income, White peers (Hernandez, 2011; Zill, & West, 2001).

Other disparities in the education system are evident. Commonly referred to as “correlates of achievement” (Barton & Coley, 2009), these include events occurring from birth to 3 years, contextual factors evident in schools and neighborhoods, and learning that occurs over the summer. For instance, racial and ethnic minority students and low-income students are more likely to attend schools with higher teacher turnover, larger class sizes, and greater safety hazards (Barton & Coley, 2009). Racial and ethnic minority students living in poverty are at increased disadvantage, scoring the lowest on math and reading proficiency tests than any other subgroup measured in the NAEP (Hernandez, 2011). Likewise, these students are at the greatest risk for dropping out of high school (Hernandez, 2011).

**Causes of Disparities**

Numerous scholars identify systemic discrimination and oppression as a root cause of disparities in education, particularly in light of the long history of racial and ethnic discrimination, prejudice, and oppression in urban schools. Such oppression has lead to considerable inequities in education, despite great gains towards educational equity in the 20th century (Anyon, 2009; Blanchett, 2002). Segregated schooling for White and racial and ethnic minority students is frequently cited as one key cause of the educational disparities present today. As the Supreme Court’s decision in the Brown v. Board of Education case stated, separate schools are inherently unequal (Brown v. Board, 1954). Desegregation indeed has not eliminated achievement gaps (Blanchett, 2002).
Other oppressive practices in education continue today despite this monumental Supreme Court decision in 1954. For instance, research routinely identifies racist and discriminatory practices concealed within school funding policies and strategies. For instance, Ladson-Billings (2009) and Vaught (2009) note that the ways in which funding is distributed to poor and racial and ethnic minority students systematically oppresses these student sub-groups. In particular, discriminatory housing practices and centuries of oppression have left Black citizens without equal footing in housing markets, which create inequities in funding for public education via property taxes (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Additionally, Vaught’s (2009) study of one district found that educational leaders still practiced racism in their funding practices in spite of policies seemingly designed to promote equity and equality. Oftentimes, even when policies prohibit discrimination, local authorities are able to subvert federal regulations utilizing multiple methods and motivations for doing so.

Researchers also identify aspects of school culture as potential causes of educational disparities. Payne & Kaba (2001) emphasize that the social infrastructure, building-level politics, instructional capacity, and turbulence in the school environment and community are key barriers often present in urban school reform. In addition, the high stakes driven by standards-based accountabilities within current policies make it difficult for schools to fully implement long-term change efforts (Anyon, 2005). Causes of long-standing disparities in education abound. Still, students living in poverty and/or who are racial and ethnic minorities continue to face increasingly complex educational systems that do not meet their needs.
Social Work and Social Justice in Education

Disparities in educational achievement and opportunity are of increasing concern for the field of social work, whose mission is to promote overall well-being for all people. Social workers are charged with enhancing human well-being and helping to meet the basic needs of vulnerable and oppressed populations, particularly in relation to environmental forces that “create, contribute to, and address problems in living” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2003, p. 1). Disparities in the educational context pose a social justice issue in the United States, as issues of race and social class in education are inextricably intertwined (e.g. Gottlieb, Atler, Gottlieb, & Wishner, 1994).

The long-term implications of these disparities and the lack of educational attainment today, especially among individuals who are marginalized, are clear. Educational attainment is related to future earning potential, health outcomes, and quality of life (Caspi, Wright, Moffit, & Silva, 1998; Elo, 2009). The inequitable distribution of resources, such as education, perpetuates existing inequalities and limits the potential of low-income minority youth and the communities in which they live. Denying minority children a right to quality education will further marginalize low-income minority populations by limiting their career options, earning potential, and overall well-being. Ultimately, certain groups of the population, particularly those who live in poverty or are racial and ethnic minorities, have unequal access to quality education and, therefore, have significantly lower educational attainment. Social work has a responsibility to address these social disparities.
The field of social work is beginning to prioritize these disparities as a social justice issue that must be addressed. For instance, national research groups are forming agendas focused on educational equity and social work and current scholars are calling upon social workers to develop new roles and responsibilities to create change in this area (Kelly, Frey, & Anderson-Butcher, 2011). Additionally, there is a Special Interest Group within the Society for Social Work Research focused specifically on school social work. Conversations at these meetings center on addressing disparities through direct and indirect social work practices in schools. Most recently, national associations such as NASW are strengthening their school social work practice area and guidelines and including important priorities related to addressing educational disparities. While the entire field of social work is charged with providing social welfare services to all people, school social workers are specifically prepared to address existing disparities in education across student subgroups.

School Social Work

School social work, a sub-specialty of social work, focuses on promoting the well-being and academic success of children and youth. More specifically, school social workers utilize a variety of strategies to address students’ barriers to learning. School social work practice typically occurs in a host setting (i.e., the school) and is often situated between interdisciplinary research and practice focused on schools, families, and communities (e.g., Kelly, 2008; Woolley, Koll, & Bowen, 2009). Today, public and private schools employ roughly 12% of the social work workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) and, in 2005, there were 14,636 school social workers practicing across all 50 states (School Social Work Association of America, 2005). Although school social
work employment is tightly tied to federal and state education funding, the U.S. Department of Labor (2012) projects a 20% increase in demand for school social workers. In addition, school social work research continues to inform social work practice and policy, as well as those in related fields, primarily through journals such as *Children & Schools, Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, and the *School Social Work Journal* (Franklin, 2005).

School social work practice encompasses a diverse set of skills, roles, and responsibilities largely determined by local policy and needs (Allen-Meares, 2004). Regardless of setting, school social workers target the intersections among schools, families, and communities to address both academic and non-academic barriers to students’ learning, particularly among students coming from disadvantaged circumstances. Oftentimes, school social work practice recognizes a holistic approach to children’s social-emotional development and academic learning, placing emphasis on aligning services across settings to best serve children, youth, and their families (Jozefowicz, Allen-Meares, Piro-Lupinacci, & Fisher, 2002). A variety of practice approaches and strategies are required to address students’ social-emotional and academic needs.

**Practice approaches.** Approaches are both direct and indirect. Direct methods of school social work practice frequently encompass a clinical casework model to address individual and family needs through direct counseling services and case management (Kelly, 2008). For example, direct practice strategies with children and youth include individual counseling services, the development and design of psychoeducational groups, and management of behavioral intervention or special education plans. Additionally,
school social workers routinely conduct assessments, develop and implement treatment plans, and lead service delivery teams focused on students with special education needs (Kelly & Stone, 2009).

Further, school social work is notable for its utilization of parent-centered perspectives to explore parent-school-community relationships, including substantial contributions to current knowledge about parent/guardian and family engagement in schools (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Bowen, Rose, Powers, & Glennie, 2008). Direct practice strategies for family engagement include family counseling, family case meetings, and regular communication between schools and parents/guardians. For instance, many school social workers provide truancy interventions that involve individual assessments, family counseling, teacher consultations, and behavior plan design and implementation. Likewise, practitioners frequently provide crisis intervention services with individual students and their families.

In addition, other models of school social work practice require social workers to integrate micro- and macro-level practice skills to coordinate student and family services across the entire prevention-intervention continuum (Kelly, 2008). These indirect practice roles and responsibilities include the coordination of school-family partnerships, referral for community-based services, and leadership roles for building-wide initiatives and district-wide school-family-community partnership planning (Kelly & Stone, 2009). For instance, several school social workers are leading efforts to introduce system-wide school climate and discipline strategies within Positive Behavior and Interventions Supports across the country. These types of indirect practice strategies require school social workers to participate in project management, facilitate home-school partnerships,
and coordinate program implementation across buildings (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Advocacy is also a critical component of macro-level, indirect school social work practice. School social workers frequently advocate for student and family needs within the broader educational system. The NASW Standards for School Social Work practice clearly state, “School social workers seek to ensure equitable education opportunities” (NASW, 2012, p. 1). Moreover, education reform and social justice are two guiding principles outlined in the school social work standards (NASW, 2012).

In sum, school social work practice utilizes both direct and indirect practice strategies (e.g., Bronstein, Ball, Mellin, Wade-Mdivanian, & Anderson-Butcher, 2011; Kelly & Stone, 2009). Nevertheless, the focus for all school social workers is on addressing disparities in education through a holistic, family-centered approach. Despite recent developments in school social work practice models, educational disparities and academic underachievement remain a significant social problem in the United States. Improvements in parent/guardian and family engagement strategies are one way to address these long-standing disparities. Substantial evidence supports the importance of parent/family engagement in education, as it leads to positive changes in students’ academic and behavioral outcomes (Bowen, Rose, Powers, & Glennie, 2008; Yun & Kusum, 2008). School social work practice centered on parents and families is critical for achieving equality in education for all students.

Nationally, several policies and initiatives support school social workers’ efforts to connect schools, families, and communities. Likewise, more recent policies push education and social work to further consider the ways in which schools, families, and communities can collectively eliminate disparities in education for racial and ethnic
minority students and those living in poverty. Regardless of the practice model, addressing the significant disparities in academic performance across racial and ethnic groups is an area of school social work research and practice that is receiving increased attention (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). The current policy context for school social work practice supports and guides these priorities as well.

Policy Context

School social workers’ emphasis on academic disparities and nonacademic barriers to learning requires them to operate within the context of multiple systems and policies. Current national educational policies, as well as social welfare policy, health policy, and many others, guide their practice. Education policy today is largely focused on addressing academic disparities and holding schools accountable for high academic achievement. As such, school social workers are too held accountable for student achievement, especially among those who are racial and ethnic minorities and/or living in poverty. Several policy strategies are in place to meet these ends. These strategies are broad in scope and utilize a variety of change tactics, ranging from local district policies to far-reaching federal initiatives.

Policy strategies to address disparities. Research in education and other related disciplines highlights various inroads to achieving educational equity, such as changes in school structure and processes (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007), teacher preparation and incentives (Figlio & Kenny, 2007), or community-wide initiatives (Warren, 2005). These strategies cover a broad range of concerns, but all are designed, in part, to address the disparities in academic achievement across student subgroups. Likewise, other federal initiatives also provide alternative avenues for change in this area. Most notably, the No
Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; P.L. 107-110) explicitly requires schools and districts to demonstrate academic progress for all student subgroups, including students in racial, ethnic, and low-income minority groups. The policy’s emphasis on data-informed decision-making and accountability requires schools to demonstrate proficiency for students who have traditionally been “left behind.”

Several other federal initiatives utilize other strategies to achieve equity and improved academic outcomes for children and youth. For instance, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act is the federal policy guiding and mandating early intervention, special education, and other related services for all children (and young adults) with disabilities. Likewise, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides funds for several new components of educational reform. Perhaps the most influential of the initiatives within ARRA is Race to the Top (RttT), a competitive grant program for states to support reform and innovation in education. RttT includes funding to enhance teacher evaluation and incentive programs, school turnaround strategies, comprehensive data collection and management systems for schools, and early learning programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

In addition, ARRA establishes additional School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding targeted toward the nation’s lowest performing schools serving the poorest student populations. Schools and districts selected to receive SIG funding must implement one of four rigorous school improvement models identified in current school turnaround research (e.g., transformation, turnaround, restart, and school closure; Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007). SIG dollars can be used to support new hiring initiatives, professional development, technical assistance, co-located community
services, and data management and evaluation systems (Lazarin, 2012). As of 2011, approximately $100 billion was distributed to state and local education agencies via ARRA (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

In recent years, standards-based accountability mechanisms within NCLB identified large numbers of schools as “failing,” and projections indicate that more will be identified in coming years (Center on Education Policy, 2011, p. 10). Several national initiatives support improvements in schools serving minority students, many of which are targeted to the lowest-performing schools. Current reauthorization of NCLB is underway, and ARRA funds and initiatives continue to influence strategies and interventions designed to address these academic disparities. Further, federal policy will continue to hold schools accountable for all students’ achievement, especially in relation to minority and socioeconomic status subgroup performance and decreasing disparities and disproportionality.

The latest policies in place to address academic disparities create a context in which school social workers may offer substantial contributions. They inform policy, provide direct services, manage student support services, and link student and family services across systems (Bronstein et al., 2011). Additionally, it is likely that school social workers will be called upon to take even greater roles in addressing disparities, as policy continues to move in these directions.

It is now clear that inequities in education are far-reaching and widespread, and school social workers are positioned to create change. For the first time ever, school and district-wide academic performance information is publicly available and one can clearly identify the nation’s lowest performing schools. Persistent school failures, increased
public awareness, and developing research on school improvement continue to guide educational policy across the country. One significant initiative involves school choice policies designed to address disparities by broadening the education market.

**School Choice**

School choice allows parents/guardians to choose schools outside of their public neighborhood schools (Buckley & Schneider, 2007). NCLB mandates school choice options in poor-performing districts serving low-income student populations, many of which serve high proportions of racial and ethnic minority students. Per NCLB, traditional public schools and districts that do not meet annual academic requirements for two consecutive years must allow parents/guardians to choose a school that is different from their neighborhood school.

Generally, school choice policies primarily include one or a combination of three central mechanisms of choice: inter- and intra-district enrollment; vouchers; and public charter and magnet school options (Grady, Bielick, & Aud, 2010). As options for schooling increase, parents/guardians are frequently called upon to make decisions for their children’s education. School choice policies hold several assumptions about the ways in which parents/guardians make these decisions and how the potential impacts on educational outcomes for student sub-groups.

The underlying rationale behind school choice assumes that parents/guardians will choose schools that are of the highest academic quality, thus increasing competition among schools and spurring improvement within a region (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Henig (1994) outlines other reasons proponents advocate for increased educational choice. First, a child-centered approach to education emphasizes that school choice allows for
individualized decision-making to maximize children’s intellectual growth and self-development. Second, school choice fosters communal values, particularly those related to religion or ethnicity. For example, parents/guardians with a curricular preference for Afrocentrism or Catholic education may desire the autonomy to choose schools that support these communities. Finally, local and community-driven decision-making in schools may be a catalyst for political mobilization and empowerment in oppressed communities (Mintrom, 2001).

Arguments for school choice propose that increasing schooling options will provide greater choice for traditionally underserved and marginalized families, encourage new and innovative approaches to education, and promote competition among publicly funded schools (Weitzel & Lubienski, 2010). Existing research in this area is limited and focuses almost exclusively on comparisons between school choice options and traditional public schools, particularly in relation to academic outcomes. There is still little consensus on the academic effectiveness of such policies (Lubienski, Weitzel, & Lubienski, 2009; DeLuca & Dayton, 2009); yet, the policy assumes that parents/guardians will choose schools that are academically rigorous. Research on parents/guardians’ perceptions, however, indicates that many parents perceive improvement in their children’s education as a result of school choice (Martinez, Godwin, Kemerer, & Perna, 1995).

**Segregation and integration.** Despite the potential positive outcomes of school choice policy, several negative unintended outcomes may also result from these policies. Early on, scholars (e.g., Saporito, 2003) feared that school choice policies would increase stratification across race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement.
For instance, Henig (1999) discussed fears of “white flight,” in which white parents with greater incomes might largely select higher quality schools and, in the end, an even greater divide between high-performing and low-performing students would develop. This divide could eventually undo the nation’s progress toward racial integration.

Research on the segregating and integrating effects of school choice, however, is somewhat inconclusive. For instance, creaming in higher-performing schools may enhance this segregation. Creaming occurs when schools select only high-performing students for enrollment. Limited studies, however, found that the majority of charter and magnet schools did not cream their student populations (Garcia, 2010; Lacireno-Paquet & Lacireno, 2002). Instead, Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, and Henig (2002) suggest that some charter schools may utilize another, subtler way to stratify students—“cropping” their services and admitting students with the fewest academic or behavioral difficulties. In their study, Lacireno et al. compared student characteristics across for-profit charter schools, non-profit charter schools, and traditional public schools to examine whether some types of schools are more likely than others to enroll fewer at-risk and special needs children. Indeed, their findings indicated that cropping may occur in some charter schools: “Rather than skimming the cream off the top of the potential student population, market-oriented charter schools may be ‘cropping off’ service to students whose language or special education needs make them more costly to educate” (p. 145). Both creaming and cropping, along with other potential methods of controlling student enrollment ultimately limit the potential choice options from which parents may select.
Outcomes in traditional public schools. Additionally, some fear that school choice policies will negatively impact the academic quality of traditional public schools. Studies on the academic outcomes of various school choice options yield mixed results. Small academic improvements in traditional public schools resulting from choice policies were noted in two studies (e.g., Bohte, 2004; Hoxby, 2003), while others cite small decreases in student academic performance following increases in charter school enrollment (e.g., Berry-Cullen, Jacob, & Levitt, 2005; Carr & Ritter, 2007; Ni, 2009). In addition, research points to changes in schools’ student compositions following the implementation of school choice, noting the importance of context in students’ learning. Bifulco, Ladd, and Ross (2009) studied characteristics of elementary and middle schools students in Durham, North Carolina using inter-district enrollment or electing to stay in their assigned schools. This study indicated that students who stayed in their traditional public schools not only had lower academic test scores, but were also in schools that had greater proportions of disadvantaged students than they would if all students attended their assigned school. In other words, school choice policies may result in more stratification than the traditional neighborhood model of school assignment. While studies in this area are limited, it is important to consider research that points to the potential unanticipated, negative outcomes of school choice policies.

Existing research on the outcomes of school choice policy highlight the potential for such policies to impact educational disparities for minority students, either positively or negatively. It is possible that competition within school choice will create “winners” and “losers” within the education system. As some studies note (e.g. Rosenbloom, 2010), this may harm some students enrolled in traditional public schools. Ni and Arsen (2010)
suggest that, over time, the lowest-performing and most disadvantaged students will remain in traditional public schools with few resources and limited capacity for improvement. On the other hand, this is precisely what might spur improvement within a community. Eventually, these low-performing public schools will be forced to compete (and, perhaps, improve) to sustain the changes that school choice will bring. With such high stakes, it is critical that research continue to explore how school choice is implemented within communities.

One potential reason that findings on school choice outcomes are mixed may be due to a limited understanding of the ways in which parents/guardians make school choice decisions. Current theories behind school choice assume that parents/guardians want academically rigorous schools, have information about schools that they can access and understand, and use this information to guide the choices that they make about their children’s schools (Dillon, 2008). There is little research that examines the assumptions inherent in school choice policies. A number of researchers, however, point to numerous limitations in the rationale behind school choice. For instance, parents/guardians may not prioritize academics when choosing schools, they may not have access to adequate information when making decisions, and they may use other decision-making processes to select schools for their children (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). These policy limitations may yield inconsistent outcomes that do not address the intent of the policy – to improve academic outcomes for all children. School social workers are also focused on improving academic outcomes, and may hold considerable roles in implementing school choice policies.
School choice and school social work. School social workers focus on school-home connections and may inform our understanding of parents/guardians within the school choice policy context, especially given social work’s focus on social justice and person-in-environment perspectives. Oftentimes, school social workers are employed in the country’s poorest performing schools serving diverse populations. They focus on addressing disparities and strengthening school-family connections. As such, school social workers also play a key role within school choice policy implementation. They may assist parents/guardians in their decision-making, providing information and potentially empowering families to engage in their children’s education further.

Empowerment is one specific component of a social work perspective that also is integral in school choice settings, and may provide insight into parents/guardians’ school choice decisions.

Empowerment

Broadly defined, empowerment is “a process by which individuals gain mastery or control over their own lives and democratic participation in the life of their community” (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, p. 726). More specifically, Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) propose three distinct elements that are key components of empowerment and operate in conjunction with contextual factors (e.g., opportunities for shared decision-making, institutional oppression, etc.) that may foster or inhibit an individual’s empowerment process.

The first, self-efficacy, is identified as a core element of individual empowerment (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Guiterrez, 1991). In relation to school choice, parent/guardian self-efficacy refers to parents/guardians’ judgments of their own
capabilities to execute actions required to make a school choice decision. Self-efficacy is domain specific and is clearly related to an individual’s motivation and performance (Bandura, 1986). In addition, several scholars emphasize the importance of knowledge in an empowerment process, specifically in relation to knowledge of evident power dynamics, resources needed, and possible routes to obtain them (Cattaeneo & Chapman, 2010; Gutierrez, 1991). Here, knowledge may be defined as parents/guardians’ understanding of the school choice process, including an understanding of power disparities in their communities and schools, resources and avenues necessary for obtaining information, and possible routes to making a school choice decision. The third component is competence. In Cattaneo and Chapman’s broader empowerment model, an individual also must possess actual skill as well, termed competence.

Parents/guardians who are empowered in their school choice decision-making process possess skills related to obtaining information, advocating for his or her child, and evaluating various schools in their choice sets. Further, parents/guardians who are empowered may also utilize different criteria in their decision-making process, perhaps more in line with the assumptions of rational choice theory. For instance, parents/guardians who experience greater self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence in relation to school choice might weigh costs and benefits associated with a particular choice differently from parents/guardians who feel less empowered.

Three studies loosely draw upon a conceptual framework of empowerment to understand school choice. These studies provide a starting point for future research that applies empowerment theory to school choice contexts. Andre-Bechely’s (2005) and Cooper’s (2007) qualitative studies with African-American mothers highlight the
importance of parents/guardians’ competence related to school choice decision-making. These studies were limited by their qualitative nature, including small sample sizes within narrow geographic regions.

While providing a rich understanding of parent/guardian school choice decision-making, quantitative studies are able to examine specific models of decision-making that may be more generalizable. As such, Goldring and Shapira (1993) utilized quantitative survey research methods and found that parents/guardians’ perceived opportunities for empowerment within schools was related to their satisfaction with their schools of choice. This is the only quantitative study of school choice using empowerment as a conceptual framework. Still, the author is unaware of any studies that examine empowerment as it is defined within empowerment theory. The theory suggests that parents/guardians use self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence would all relate to parents/guardians’ decision-making in school choice. In some ways, parent/guardian decision-making and school choice provide support for this contention.

**Parent/Guardian Decision-Making and School Choice.** Parent/guardian decision-making sits at the crux of school choice policy implementation. Research on decision-making covers a wide scope of decisions, ranging from political decision-making (Dean & Croft, 2009) to childcare selection (Kim & Fran, 2009). Some existing research indicates that people make decisions based on rationality, in which options are weighed and ultimate decisions maximize benefits and minimize costs (West, 2009). Others suggest that decisions involve more than rationality, often including contextual factors, such as the use of a reference point for comparison (e.g. Glockner & Pachur, 2012) or social norms and shared expectations (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Little is known,
however, about how parents/guardians make decisions, particularly in relation to school choice (Vergari, 2009). Current research, however, indicates that parents/guardians have different priorities in their school choice decision-making and utilize a myriad of information to inform their decisions (Buckley & Schneider, 2007).

Although early research has begun to illuminate parent/guardian school choice decision-making processes, considerable research is still needed to fully understand how these policies can best serve children and families. Many studies examine demographic differences between parents/guardians who keep their children in a regularly assigned public school and those who select other school options. Their findings indicate that parents/guardians who select higher-performing schools are more often White, have more education, and greater incomes than those who stay in their traditional public schools (Kleitz et al., 2000; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999).

In addition, it is clear that parents/guardians report that academics are the greatest priority in their decision-making (Buckley & Schneider, 2007); other priorities, however, also may be of equal importance (e.g., student population characteristics, safety, transportation, etc.). No studies examine how these factors are related to the academic rigor of the schools of choice, even though the rationale behind school choice policies assumes that parents/guardians select schools of the highest academic quality. Further, empowerment theory (and, more specifically, self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence) also may offer a useful lens with which to examine school choice contexts. As such, there is a need for research that examines the relationship between parent/guardian decision-making processes, including the prioritization of academic and nonacademic factors, and
the actual quality of their school choice outcomes (Kisida & Wolf, 2010; Goldring & Shapira, 1993).

Integration of Concepts

In summary, school social work policy, practice, and research prioritize educational equity, as low-income and racial and ethnic minority students are disproportionately impacted by inequality in American education (Orfield, 2009). National policies and initiatives focus a great deal of attention on addressing these disparities, yet little change has demonstrated considerable positive impact. It is critical that social work continue to study the ways in which vulnerable populations receive a free and public education. School choice policies are often touted as potential strategies to provide more equitable educational options for all students.

These policies place parents/guardians as consumers in an educational market designed to encourage competition and improve education. By relying on parent/guardian consumer choice, school choice policies make several assumptions about parent/guardian decision-making. For instance, it is assumed that parents/guardians prioritize academic factors related to schooling, have access to quality information about their options, and will make decisions to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Bart & Walburg, 2004). Little is known, however, about how parents/guardians make decisions, especially parents/guardians who are living in poverty or are racial and ethnic minorities.

Empowerment theory is one potential lens that researchers and social workers may use to understand parent/guardian decision-making in school choice contexts. Few studies utilize empowerment to understand school choice. Further, the author is unaware of studies in school choice that utilize empowerment theory as current research defines it,
incorporating self-efficacy, knowledge, and perceived competence as critical components of an empowerment process and outcome. Given these limitations, as well as the importance of school choice policies for addressing disparities, this study sought to further understanding of parents/guardians’ decision-making in relation to school choice.

**Proposed Study**

This study utilized empowerment theory to develop a measure of parent/guardian empowerment and examine the following research questions:

1) Is Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors related to the Quality of School Choice?

2) Is the relationship between Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Quality of Choice moderated by parent/guardian Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors?

Studies exploring parent/guardian empowerment in school choice processes are essential as educators, social workers, and policy makers consider a myriad of strategies to improve academic achievement for students who are racial and ethnic minorities or living in poverty. As school social workers routinely serve at the intersections of families and schools, it is increasingly necessary for social work research to develop the ways in which education policies can best serve families, communities, and students.

This study builds upon existing research and utilizes social work perspectives to better understand parents/guardians’ decision-making related to school choice. A measure of parent/guardian empowerment in schools is developed that will allow school social work practitioners and researchers to further examine and assess parents/guardians’ roles and perceptions of education. Likewise, this study also examines the relationships among
parents/guardians’ empowerment, prioritizing factors, and the quality of parents/guardians’ school choices. Findings will guide school social work practice in numerous ways. For instance, understanding parents/guardians’ decision-making in school choice contexts may help to identify priorities for parents/guardians, and thus inform the ways in which school social workers engage parents/guardians in education and develop school-family-community partnerships. Improved understanding may, in turn, address educational disparities and contribute further to social justice imperatives evident in social work.

Definition of Terms

**Quality of choice:** the extent to which a school provides students with an education that satisfies parents/guardians’ expectations and meets state academic standards for academic rigor

**Parent/guardian decision-making:** the process that parents/guardians undergo in choosing schools for their children in school choice contexts

**Parent/guardian satisfaction with school quality:** the extent to which parents/guardians report positive perceptions of their children’s schools

**Academic rigor:** the extent to which a school provides students an education that allows them to be “proficient” on state standardized tests

**Parent/guardian choice-making:** the extent to which parents/guardians make a choice in relation to their children’s schooling.

**Parent/guardian empowerment:** parents/guardians’ utilization of self-efficacy, knowledge, and perceived competence to act toward making a school choice decision
**Parent/guardian self-efficacy:** parents/guardians’ judgments of their own capabilities to execute actions required to make school choice decisions

**Parent/guardian knowledge:** parents/guardians’ understanding of their children’s education, local school system, and potential roles and responsibilities parents/guardians might have in relation to schooling

**Parent/guardian perceived competence:** parents/guardians’ perceptions of their abilities and actions related to making decisions for their children’s education, once they have made a school choice decision

**Prioritization of Academic Factors:** the perceived importance of academic school characteristics to parents/guardians in the school choice decision-making process

**Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors:** the perceived importance of nonacademic school characteristics to parents/guardians in the school choice decision-making process
Chapter 2: Literature Review

School choice policies are increasingly popular across the United States, as significant disparities and disproportionalities call for new reforms in education (USDOE, 2010). This policy context presents an opportunity for social work research to examine the implementation of school choice policies that have the potential to impact a large number of children and youth, particularly those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed. School social work practice and research are especially aligned with the intent of school choice policies, as school social workers are skilled in connecting and coordinating services across schools, families, and communities.

School Choice

School choice policies allow parents/guardians increasing control over their children’s education by allowing them to choose schools outside of their neighborhood public schools. These different schools could include charter schools, other public schools within the district, private schools, or other public schools in different districts. The number of charter schools, voucher use, and students utilizing other school choice options continues to rise across the nation (NCES, 2011).

As more parents/guardians are offered school choice options, it becomes increasingly important to understand the implementation of these policies. Proponents of school choice argue that de-limiting parents/guardians’ choices for education allows for
increased accountability and local autonomy, while also creating market-based reform in education. The rationale behind market-driven school choice asserts that increased educational options will break the government’s monopoly on education and, thus, allow parents/guardians to take on the roles of “consumers” (Buckley & Schneider, 2007; Chubb & Moe, 1990). In the schooling market, parents become consumers who “shop” for schools, ultimately using their voice as consumers to select high-quality schools. Friedman (1955) argues that the forces of a free market serve as impetuses for improvement in public schools, fracturing a system historically protected from competition. Ultimately, the new consumer-based market encourages new suppliers (i.e., schooling options) to enter the market, create competition, and drive changes that better meet parents/guardians’ and students’ needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Market-based theories require an understanding of consumer decision-making (Henig, 1999). In this case, the ways in which parents/guardians’ make school choice decisions hold the potential to drastically impact the ways in which market forces shape education reform.

**Decision and Choice Theories**

Several theories attempt to explain how people make decisions, some emphasizing individual decision-making and others highlighting the contextual influences on individual decisions. These theories can provide insight into how parents/guardians make decisions within the school choice market.

Rational choice theory is one theory utilized to design school choice programs and understand parents/guardians’ decision-making within a school choice context. This theory suggests that individuals will utilize rationality to optimize their decision-making (Coleman & Fararo, 1992; Elster, 1986; Zey, 1998). In turn, the assertion is that public
good will result from individuals’ rational choice, free from governmental control (Friedman & Friedman, 1980; Sciulli, 1992). Within the school choice context, parents/guardians are viewed as rational actors who weigh their options and choose schools based on the optimization of rewards in relation to costs.

Based largely on an economic model of choice making, rational choice theory does not account for parents/guardians’ subjective appraisals of the school choice context. The psychological concepts of construals and heuristics also may be used to understand parent/guardian decision-making. As individuals use subjective appraisals of their world, termed construals, to guide their decision-making, they increasingly rely on heuristics to simplify multifaceted situations. Ultimately, this reliance can result in reasonable decisions, but could also result in undesirable decisions, especially when the situation is complex or unclear (Chaudry, Henly, & Meyers, 2010).

Likewise, prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) proposes that decisions involve an assessment of choice options that is made relative to some reference point (e.g., the status quo). In addition, individuals making a decision place greater emphasis on potential losses, rather than potential gains. As such, parents/guardians facing school choice decisions may compare their potential school options to their children’s current school; they may also place greater weight on any potential losses, rather than the gains, that may result from their decisions.

Childcare decision-making has also been studied and provides an approximation to school choice decision-making theory. In relation to parents/guardians’ childcare decisions, Meyers and Jordan (2006) propose a more comprehensive model of decision-making. Their “accommodation model” emphasizes both contextual and other inter-
dependent family decisions, suggesting that parents/guardians’ childcare decisions are actually “accommodations” to the market, family, and social realities at play in their decision-making context (Meyers & Jordan, 2006, p. 4). As a result, parents/guardians consider a wide variety of factors, and place varying degrees of emphasis on these factors, that are dependent upon available information, choices, social norms, and individual and collective experiences. An application of the accommodation model to school choice suggests that parents/guardians’ decisions are impacted by several individual and systemic factors, such as the availability of information about schools, the expectations of their social groups, their own experiences with education, and evident power dynamics within their communities.

Parents/Guardians & School Choice

Regardless of the wide variety in decision-making theories, current school choice policy relies heavily on rational choice theory as a guiding framework for parents/guardians’ school choice decision-making. School choice policies currently assume that parents/guardians will choose schools based on reducing potential costs and maximizing benefits. As Bart and Walberg (2004) explain, “Parents choose schools for their children based on costs and benefits (incentives), the availability of information, and the presence of opportunities (choices)” (p.432). Costs and benefits, however, differ for individual parents/guardians and across demographic groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities or those living in poverty (Bell, 2009a; Goldring & Phillips, 2008).

Parent/guardian school choices vary depending on several individual factors. For example, Goldring and Phillips’ (2008) survey study with African-American and White parents/guardians indicated that those who reported greater participation in school
activities were more likely to choose a private school for their children. In addition, early research examined the characteristic differences among parents/guardians who choose school choice options versus their neighborhood public school. Smrekar and Goldring (1999) found that parents/guardians who participated in school choice had higher incomes and greater educational attainment.

Likewise, Goldring and Hausman (1999) conducted survey research with over 900 parents/guardians to examine differences in demographic characteristics across participants choosing magnet schools and neighborhood public schools for their children. They found that White parents/guardians with higher incomes were considerably more likely to choose a magnet school than racial and ethnic minority participants. Moreover, parents/guardians choosing their neighborhood schools were predominately racial/ethnic and socioeconomic minorities. Other studies found similar results, indicating that different parents/guardians choose different types of schools for their children (e.g., Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Henig, 1996). These findings point to alternative explanations for parents/guardians’ school choice decisions that go beyond economic models of rational choice. Individual characteristics and demographics are not the only factors that may impact parents/guardians’ decision-making. The context and structural characteristics of the setting in which parents/guardians make decisions are also of great importance.

**Structural Influences.** Research indicates that structural factors, such as available choice sets, resources, or community context, may offer potential explanations for differences in parents/guardians’ school choice decisions (Bell, 2009; Hastings & Weinstein, 2008). Sociological research on education has long pointed to institutional
barriers within the American education system, particularly those impacting students and families with limited economic and social resources (Jones & Schneider, 2009). Previous research directs our attention to the ways in which systems outside of the family may impact children’s educational attainment. For instance, researchers point to between-school disparities that disproportionately impact racial/ethnic and socioeconomic minority students; these include wide differences in teacher quality across schools (Rivkin, Hanushek, and Cain, 2005), concentrations of high-achieving students in particular school districts (Zimmer & Toma, 2000), and varying norms and expectations for student success across schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

In recent years, school choice research has examined similar systems-effects on parent/guardian decision-making. Several studies indicate that parents/guardians frequently choose schools that are conveniently located (Hastings et al., 2005; Holme, 2002). Geography, however, may hold a more complex role in parents/guardians’ school choice decisions than simple concepts of proximity and convenience. Bell (2009a) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study examining the ways in which neighborhood and community factors were related to parent/guardian school choice decisions. Her interviews with families living in metropolitan Detroit demonstrated that the presence of conveniently located schools was not sufficient reason for parents/guardians’ to choose them. In addition, parents/guardians reported that the context within their communities determined which schools they considered in their choice-making process. For example, a child’s walk home may be safer from one school than from another school that is rumored to be more academically rigorous. This was especially true for parents/guardians who were choosing from a set of schools that were not their top picks.
Bell’s findings highlight the importance of choice sets, the groups of schools from which parents/guardians are limited to choose. Geography and available resources were key determinants of parents/guardians’ choice sets in Bell’s studies (2009a; 2009b). These choice sets required parents/guardians to operate within a context of bounded rationality, in which they had to attempt to make rational decisions within the bounds of available options. For low-income racial and ethnic minority parents/guardians, school choice options may be increasingly limited due to local community factors.

Dillon’s (2008) research elaborates on the restrictions of parent/guardian choice sets. He utilized Geographic Information Systems to analyze the inter-district and intra-district choice options of parents/guardians in low-performing, high-poverty school districts. Results revealed that parents/guardians assigned to the lowest-performing public neighborhood schools had few options to improve their children’s educational opportunities. More specifically, Dillon mapped parent/guardian choice sets within multiple decision-making scenarios. In some instances, he examined parent/guardian choice sets within a 20-minute driving distance from their low-performing schools. This analysis found that less than 10 percent of parents/guardians in these communities would be able to choose a higher-performing school unless they were willing to take on a commute longer than 20 minutes. In comparison, more than 15 percent of families living in more suburban communities could choose a higher-performing school within 20 minutes from their neighborhood schools. Ultimately, parents/guardians who must choose from a choice set that only includes poor performing schools may find it nearly impossible to enroll their children in better performing schools (Dillon, 2008).
Although school choice policies assume that parents/guardians make rational choices (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996), current research indicates that parents/guardians’ individual characteristics, along with other systemic factors, impact the implementation of school choice policies across the United States. In fact, parents/guardians may not experience true free choice in school choice policy settings.

Despite growing evidence on parent/guardian school choice decision-making, research on parents/guardians and school choice is still limited in scope and methodology. Qualitative research indicates several important aspects of parent/guardian decision-making, including structural components that may limit parents/guardians’ agency in the school choice process (Bell, 2009a). Existing quantitative research frequently utilizes secondary data analytic techniques to examine demographic characteristics across parents/guardians participating in school choice. Little research examines parents/guardians who elect to enroll their children in their assigned neighborhood school and our understanding of parent/guardian perceptions of school choice is largely unexplored. Initial research on parent/guardian school choice decision-making focused on the information parents/guardians use to determine which schools are right for them.

**School Information.** The methods that parents/guardians use to gain information about their school choices may also explain variation in parent/guardian school choice decisions. This is especially true in light of evidence that issues related to access, power, and agency in the local community may even restrict parents/guardians’ knowledge of their children’s schooling.
For instance, Ball and Vincent (1998) indicate that informal, interpersonal networks were the method of choice for parents/guardians seeking information and recommendations about their children’s schooling. Interpersonal networks include the ways in which parents/guardians gain information via social connections, such as neighbors, friends, or relatives. Formal networks, however, describe the ways in which parents/guardians gain access to information that is publicly available, such as published brochures or achievement data, public meetings, or websites. Bosetti’s study of parents/guardians in Alberta, Canada and Goldring and Phillips’ (2008) survey in Nashville, Tennessee revealed that parents/guardians did not use formal networks to gain information about potential schooling options. Instead, they utilized word-of-mouth information from friends and family members, rather than information provided by the school, academic reports, or discussions with school personnel (Bosetti, 2004). Schneider et al. (1997) utilized a quasi-experimental approach to compare parents/guardians’ decision-making in two New York City districts with diverse student populations. Consistent with other research, they found that parents/guardians with higher incomes and greater educational attainment used more formal networks to obtain more accurate information about schools.

Hastings and Weinstein (2008) conducted a field experiment to test whether the type and accessibility of school information influenced low-income African-American parents/guardians’ decisions in one intra-district school choice program. The researchers compared parents/guardians’ school choices and student test scores five times across a span of four years. During these four years, several changes in the information parents/guardians received from the district were modified. During years one, two, and
three, every parent/guardian in the district received a promotional 100-page booklet that contained subjective descriptions of each of their school options. They also had access to a website that contained various characteristics of the district’s schools, but required parents/guardians to enter each school individually to obtain the information. Years four and five of the experiment occurred immediately following new accountability requirements within NCLB. Thus, instead of receiving the promotional booklet or utilizing the website, parents/guardians received a three-page spreadsheet listing the test scores of each school.

When Hastings and Weinstein compared parent/guardian decisions across the years, they found that parent/guardian school choices were significantly different following the availability of objective school information. More specifically, the proportion of parents/guardians who chose a school that was different from their child’s current school significantly increased and the average student test scores of their chosen schools also increased. In short, Hastings and Weinstein’s study suggests that parents/guardians will, in fact, make different school choice decisions depending on the school information they are given.

School choice policies assume that parents/guardians gather and evaluate information on the schools in their choice sets; issues related to access, power, and agency in the local community, however, often restrict parent/guardian knowledge of their children’s schooling. The limited research in this area indicates that parents/guardians make choices about their children’s schools; but, oftentimes, parents/guardians make these choices with limited information from a variety of sources. Moreover, the information available to parents/guardians is often inadequate,
inaccessible, or difficult to comprehend (Neild, 2005). While some research suggests that parents/guardians use informal networks (Ball & Vincent, 1998) to obtain information on their children’s schools, little research examines the quality of parent/guardian knowledge about their children’s schools. This is particularly true in relation to academic indicators. Understanding how parents/guardians make school choice decisions requires examination of the prioritizing factors parents may consider in their process, as well as the quality of the information they use to make school choices.

**Prioritization of Factors in Decision-Making**

Even when parents/guardians have accurate and accessible information, rational choice theory still supposes that parents/guardians will utilize this information to glean factors about the school that are important to them. Then, they will weigh these factors and prioritize some over others to identify their ultimate school of choice. Although few studies examine the relationship between parent/guardian priorities and the school choice outcome, this relationship may illuminate a critical mechanism within school choice policies. Existing evidence highlights various factors that parents/guardians may consider when choosing a school for their children. Often, scholars divide these factors into broad categories, such as academic factors, discipline/safety factors, moral factors, and nonacademic school characteristics (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Kleitz, et al., 2000; Neild, 2005). Generally, factors can be categorized as those that are related to the academics of a school and those that are related to other, nonacademic characteristics of a school.

*Academic factors.* Survey research indicates that most parents/guardians, regardless of race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status, rate academic factors as their greatest priority when choosing a school. Witte’s (2000) study with low-income
parents/guardians in Milwaukee found that high academic standards and good teachers were important; similarly, Kleitz et al. (2000) in Texas and Goldring and Hausman (1999) in St. Louis both found that educational quality was the most important factor for parents/guardians choosing charter and magnet schools. The factors that are considered “academic factors” are varied across studies, and measured in different ways. For instance, in some studies (e.g., Kletiz et al., 2000), participants were asked only to indicate if “educational quality” was an important factor in their decision-making. Other studies, however, (e.g., Bosetti, 1994; Schneider, Marshall, Teske, & Roch, 1998) provided several factors for parents/guardians to choose from that include a broad range of academic factors, such as quality of teachers and staff, high math or reading scores, or academic reputation. Nevertheless, most research on parents/guardians’ preferences clearly reports that parents/guardians say they make school choices primarily based on academics.

Nonacademic factors. While academics are typically reported as the most important priority in school choice decisions, parents/guardians also report considering several other types of factors. Discipline/safety factors are frequently identified as important considerations for parents/guardians. These include classroom management practices, discipline policies, and the general safety of the neighborhood or school building (Goldring & Phillips, 2008). Schneider et al. (1998) surveyed parents/guardians in four New York school districts. Racial and ethnic minority parents/guardians (i.e., black, Hispanic, and Asian) were significantly more likely to report that schools’ discipline procedures were the most important factor in choosing school. Similarly, other research indicates that safety is primarily a concern for lower income and minority
parents/guardians (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Neild, 2005). No studies specifically explore the reasons for parents/guardians preferences; however, Lee et al. (1996) suggest that many low-income and racial/ethnic minority parents/guardians feel as if they must prioritize discipline and safety because their neighborhoods and communities typically require such vigilance.

Moral factors, such as shared values, beliefs, or character education, also are cited as important in parents/guardians’ school choice decisions. Several studies note that factors related to morals are far more preferred by parents/guardians who choose private schooling options, particularly those that are religiously affiliated (Bosetti, 2004; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Goldring & Phillips, 2008). Despite these findings, few studies of parents/guardians’ priorities include moral or value-related factors in school choice decisions.

The current emphasis on alternative pedagogies for racial and ethnic minority children, particularly African-American students, may yield more research in this area. Bosetti’s survey does not distinguish among various factors related to morals, values, or beliefs; instead, one item measured this factor as “shared values and beliefs.” Other studies (Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Schneider et al., 1998) include a wide range of factors under this category, such as “opportunities for parental involvement” and “the school shares my values and beliefs.” More research is needed to better understand moral factors as a potential priority in parents/guardians’ decision-making.

Finally, several other nonacademic factors are highlighted in existing research, such as school demographics, location, and transportation concerns, among others. The importance that parents/guardians place on a school’s racial and ethnic composition is
one area that is widely studied in school choice research. Evidence suggests that the priority parents/guardians place on racial and ethnic composition varies across racial and ethnic groups. Neild’s (2005) qualitative research conducted with African-American and Cambodian families in Philadelphia suggests that parents/guardians in that study sought schools that had student populations of the same race and ethnicity as their own (Neild, 2005). A quantitative survey study (Schneider et al., 1998) however, found that less than one percent of the study’s sample rated racial and ethnic similarity as an important factor in their school choice decision-making. When the same parents/guardians were asked if racial and ethnic diversity was an important factor, close to ten percent of the sample reported that it was either the first or second most important characteristic of a good school. So far, it is unclear the extent to which parents/guardians prioritize the racial and ethnic composition of schools. This is especially noticeable in studies utilizing multiple measures of parents/guardians’ preferences.

Currently, research on these nonacademic factors largely reflects what parents/guardians say is important to them. Yet, Buckley and Schneider (2007) found mixed results when utilizing different measurement techniques. Their survey research with parents/guardians indicated that student diversity and demographic characteristics were not high priorities for them in choosing a good school. On the other hand, data gathered from an online school information search tool indicated that parents/guardians most often searched information on school diversity and student demographics, suggesting that they may consider these nonacademic school characteristics more than existing research shows (Buckley & Schneider, 2007).
Parents/guardians also frequently cite transportation concerns as a priority in their decision-making. Parents/guardians with the least concern for transportation are those more likely to be White and have higher socioeconomic status (Goldring & Hausman, 1994; Wilson, Marshall, Wilson, & Krizek, 2010). Kleitz et al. (2000) found that school location was a priority for the majority of parents/guardians, regardless of income or race/ethnicity. Still, Hispanic parents/guardians were the most likely of all subgroups to place a high importance on school location. These findings are supported by other studies indicating that location and convenience are of greater importance to Hispanic parents/guardians, although they are not the most important factor (Haynes, Phillips, & Goldring, 2010).

As research indicates that parents/guardians consider a myriad of factors, Bell’s (2009a; 2009b) qualitative research found that parents/guardians’ school choice decision-making was limited by other constraints, particularly if parents/guardians prioritized context-specific factors (e.g., neighborhood safety, proximity to the home). For instance, some parents/guardians limited their school choice sets to only those on their commuting path. Others limited their choice sets to certain neighborhoods and then compared only the schools within that neighborhood. Research on the connection between geography and school choice continues to highlight the important role of physical space in parents/guardians’ school choice decision-making (e.g., Henig, 2009).

These findings suggest a shift in the ways parents/guardians might make choices in relation to school choice policies. In his critique of current school choice policies, Ben-Porath (2009) notes that maximized utility is not often the only consideration in a choice situation. Ben-Porath equates school choice policies with bounded rationality, a type of
rational decision-making that occurs within limits. Bounded rationality suggests that parents/guardians’ rationality is limited by their available options, information, or understanding of the process. Choice sets and geography both serve as constraining forces in parents/guardians’ school choice decisions. When faced with a school choice decision, parents/guardians are limited to choose within their available school options; oftentimes, geography and available resources are key determinants of one’s choice set (Bell 2009b). Thus, parents/guardians may utilize bounded rationality to prioritize various factors related to a school, perhaps leading to decreased optimization.

Existing research also highlights specific factors parents/guardians have indicated as priorities and emphasizes the influence of choice sets on their final decisions. Parents/guardians overwhelmingly indicate that academic factors are their greatest priority when choosing schools, regardless of racial/ethnic identity and income (Teske & Schneider, 2001). In addition to academics, parents/guardians also indicate that they prioritize other, nonacademic characteristics of schools. These include various geographical considerations, the racial/ethnic composition of the school, or transportation. Likewise, research notes that moral factors and concerns about safety/discipline are also of importance to some parents/guardians, and these factors may vary across subgroups.

Despite individual preferences, parents/guardians also are often limited in their decision-making as various structural factors influence their choice sets. Much of the research in this area does not definitively indicate what might influence the ways parents/guardians prioritize factors related to school choice. For instance, some differences have been noted across racial and ethnic groups, socioeconomic statuses, and
geography (Goldring & Phillips, 2008). Still, these differences are inconsistent across studies and do not consider other factors related to parent/guardian decision-making. For example, parent/guardian perceptions of the education system or their own involvement in their children’s schools might guide their choice-making process. A social work perspective suggests that empowerment theory offers some potential explanation for parent/guardian decision-making and priorities in school choice, especially in relation to populations that have experienced historic oppression and discrimination.

**Empowerment Theory**

Empowerment theory provides a conceptual framework that might help researchers further examine parents/guardians’ decisions in school choice contexts, especially among low-income and racial and ethnic minority parents/guardians. Empowerment is studied in a variety of disciplines and contexts, beginning in community psychology and social work (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Gutierrez, 1998). Early social work scholars emphasized the need to address both individual needs and contextual power dynamics, specifically in light of urban industrialization in the early 1900s (Simon, 1994). Over time, empowerment practice in social work became further aligned with strengths-based perspectives that acknowledge individual self-determination and structural and cultural influences on social change (Gutierrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998). Today, empowerment is a critical component of ethical social work practice (NASW, 2003).

Generally, empowerment is described as both a process and an outcome that includes the use of democratic participation to develop individuals’ sense of mastery and control over their personal lives (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Existing studies on
empowerment cover a wide range of disciplines and areas of practice. A review conducted by Gutierrez (1997) indicated that the majority of research on empowerment utilizes an individual psychological perspective and focuses on micro-level practice methods. Other research highlights macro-level conditions and practices that impact collective empowerment, such as shared decision-making, collaborative planning, and capacity building (Fawcett, Paine-Andrews, Francisco, Schultz, Richter, & Lewis, 1995).

Empowerment theory is frequently cited as a guiding framework for social work practice and research with marginalized and vulnerable populations. For instance, Travis and Deepak (2012) discuss the ways in which empowerment theory can inform the use of hip hop music as a group intervention for at-risk children and youth. Empowerment theory also is commonly applied to social work practice with women and senior citizens. Cox and Parsons (1999) studied the effects of an empowerment-oriented group intervention with a sample of low-income elderly women. Their findings indicate that an empowerment approach with this sample improved their sense of belonging and helped the group participants strengthen their social networks. In addition, social work research utilizes empowerment theory to understand the context for social work practice with African-American families. Harvey, McCullough-Chavis, Littlefield, Phillips, & Cooper (2010) describe an empowerment practice model designed to utilize strengths-based and Africentric perspectives to strengthen empowerment among African-American parents. Likewise, Waites (2009) describes an empowerment-oriented practice model with African-American intergenerational families. These studies highlight the importance of empowerment theory for understanding practice with minority populations who have experienced a history of oppression.
Despite growing research on empowerment, there is little consensus or evidence supporting that individuals or groups experience a single defined process of empowerment. Within social work scholarship, Gutierrez et al. (1998) urge social work researchers to examine empowerment using a multi-dimensional perspective that includes several critical components, including: (1) beliefs in one’s self that promote action; (2) recognition that experiences are shared collectively; (3) knowledge and skills for action; and, (4) action. These components are consistent with findings from several other disciplines, emphasizing that empowerment occurs within psychological, sociological, organizational, political, and other dimensions, as well as across different levels (e.g., individual, group, and community; Speer, 2000). Specifically, Hur’s (2006) synthesis and analysis of theoretical literature on empowerment identifies several critical components of empowerment. These components include teamwork, a sense of community, knowledge, social support, and participation, among many others.

Hur utilized this synthesis to develop a model of empowerment that incorporates individual and collective empowerment. Critical components of individual empowerment are a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Hur’s conceptualization of meaning utilizes earlier theory developed by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) to describe the fit between one’s personal values and actual roles (Hur, 2006). In this model of empowerment, “meaning” encompasses other related constructs, such as self-efficacy and mastery. Competence is defined as the belief that one has the skills necessary to achieve a task or a goal. Self-determination, often identified as personal control in other studies (e.g., Speer, 2000), describes the belief that one has the autonomy to make decisions and carry out individual actions. Finally, the impact component of
individual empowerment includes an individual’s belief that he or she has the ability to influence a systemic or organizational outcome (Hur, 2006).

Similar to Hur’s model, Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) further synthesized these core elements and developed a model that specifically highlights self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence within individual empowerment. These three components of empowerment are interrelated and operate together as individuals undergo an empowerment process. These three components may provide a framework for understanding the ways in which parents/guardians’ sense of empowerment is related to school choice decision-making. Each of the three components is described briefly here, and then an application to parent/guardian empowerment is presented.

**Self-efficacy.** The first component, self-efficacy, is formally defined as a person’s judgments of his or her own capabilities “to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance” (Bandura, 1986; p. 391). Self-efficacy is domain specific and related to an individual’s motivation and performance (Bandura, 1986). Consistent with other research on empowerment (e.g., Gutierrez, 1991; Zimmerman, 1995), Cattaneo and Chapman considered self-efficacy a core element of the empowerment process. Gutierrez (1991) applied the concept of self-efficacy to empowerment in social work settings, defining it as a person’s “experiencing oneself as a powerful and capable person” (p. 202). Self-efficacy is a critical component of motivation and is often a link between goal-setting and performance. In fact, goal-setting theory explains that people with greater self-efficacy are more likely to achieve goals because their commitment to the goal is enhanced by their perceived ability to perform the task at hand (Locke & Latham, 2006).
Knowledge. Knowledge, defined by Cataneo and Chapman as “an understanding of the relevant social context, including the power dynamics at play, the possible routes to goal attainment, the resources needed, and the ways to obtain them” (p. 653), is another critical component of an empowerment model. Gutierrez’s (1991) research on empowerment identified the importance of a power analysis, in which individuals identified power disparities in their lives. This knowledge is similar to the concept of critical consciousness put forth by Friere (1970), in which members of a marginalized or disenfranchised group recognize the oppression they experience and take action against this oppression, thus resulting in increased power. As such, scholars persistently note that critical consciousness (and thus consciousness-raising) is a necessary impetus for social action (Carr, 2003; Friere, 1970; Gutierrez, 1991; Carr, 2003). Gutierrez, DeLois, & GlenMaye (1995) break down the development of critical consciousness into three subprocesses: (1) group identification; (2) the development of group consciousness; and (3) the development of individual and collective efficacy. Group identification and cohesion occurs as individuals begin to identify with a shared understanding of norms, culture, and experiences. Over time, the newly-developed group begins to recognize the political, institutional, or structural dynamics that affect their lives, and no longer view individual failings as the causes of disparity. This knowledge and understanding strengthens individuals’ perceived abilities and creates momentum for action.

Competence. Self-efficacy and knowledge are not sufficient for an individual to realize the outcome of empowerment. Cataneo and Chapman also indicate that one must also possess the skills needed to take action, termed competence. Existing research recognizes the importance of learning new skills and identifying skill deficits as critical
to the empowerment process (Gutierrez, 1991). While self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence are related (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Zimmerman, 1995), it is important to distinguish among the three components. Knowledge and competence are conceptually distinct, as Cattaneo and Chapman indicate: “Knowing what to do is not the same thing as knowing how to do it” (p. 653).

These three components of individual empowerment identify critical areas on which research can begin to focus. In summary, empowerment theory offers a conceptual framework that can highlight important components of individual and collective experiences toward gaining mastery and control over their lives. Previous research demonstrates the utility of empowerment theory in research with various minority populations as well. When applied in a school choice context, empowerment theory proposes that self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence are essential aspects of parents/guardians’ empowerment. This theory is a useful lens through which parents/guardians’ roles and decisions in school choice decision-making may be examined.

**Parent/Guardian Empowerment in School Choice Decision-Making**

While little is known about parent/guardian involvement in school choice, empowerment theory offers a framework for understanding the ways in which parents/guardians might navigate through this policy context in their own communities. Empowerment theory provides a lens for examining parents/guardians’ decision-making processes in relation to school choice. The empowerment of parents/guardians has been studied in a wide variety of settings, but is most extensively applied in the areas of children’s mental health (Olin, Hoagwood, Rodriguez, Ramos, Burton, Penn, et al.,
parent/family engagement in education for children with disabilities (Akey, Marquis, & Ross, 2000), and parent involvement in home-school relationships (McGrew & Gilman, 1991). Research on empowerment theory and, more specifically, parent/guardian empowerment can be applied to the school choice context, utilizing the framework established by Cattaneo & Chapman focused on self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence.

**Parent/Guardian self-efficacy in school choice.** In relationship to parent/guardian empowerment, parent/guardian self-efficacy may be defined as parents/guardians’ judgments of their own capabilities to execute actions required to make school choice decisions. The author is unaware of research specifically exploring parent/guardian self-efficacy in the school choice context. Parent/guardian self-efficacy, however, has been studied in other related contexts, such as children’s mental and physical health and home-school partnerships. Findings in these contexts indicated that parent/guardian self-efficacy was an important component of children’s at-home care related to mental and physical illness (Prussell & White, 2011) and lead to improved partnerships between parents/guardians and school personnel (Durand, 2011). Researchers also found a relationship between parental self-efficacy and children’s academic outcomes, particularly among racial and ethnic minority parents/guardians (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). Jones and Prinz’s (2005) systematic review of research on parent/guardian self-efficacy and child adjustment stressed the importance of parent/guardian self-efficacy as a predictor of child functioning and a target for prevention and intervention efforts aimed at improving overall child and family well-
being. Self-efficacy is routinely considered a critical component of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995; Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

**Parent/Guardian knowledge in school choice.** In this study, parent/guardian knowledge is defined as a parents/guardians’ understanding of the school choice process, including resources needed, evident power dynamics, and possible routes to making a decision. Research indicates, however, that few parents/guardians have knowledge of their children’s schooling, let alone information about school choice (Kisida & Wolf, 2010; van Dunk & Dickman, 2002). Studies also highlight differences in knowledge among parents/guardians. For instance, Kisida and Wolf (2010) compared low-income and racial/ethnic minority parents/guardians’ knowledge of their children’s schools between groups of parents/guardians who utilized vouchers in choice schools and those who enrolled their children in their neighborhood public schools. Their findings revealed that parents/guardians who chose to use the vouchers had more knowledge of their children’s schools (e.g., principal’s name, class size). In addition, after controlling for race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, Howell (2006) concluded that parents/guardians with children in underperforming schools had the most knowledge of NCLB provisions than did parents/guardians in higher-performing schools.

Two qualitative studies specifically examined parent/guardian knowledge of the school choice process. Andre-Bechely’s (2005) narrative analysis of three African American mothers revealed their processes of decision-making. These findings indicated that mothers underwent a process of gaining knowledge about not only their choice sets, but also about methods of navigating the structures and institutions involved in the
complex process of school choice. Andre-Bechely’s research revealed the experiences of racial and ethnic minority mothers as they operated within strict bureaucratic boundaries.

Cooper (2007) also utilized in-depth interviews with racial and ethnic minority mothers to develop an understanding of how race, class, and gender interfaced in these mothers’ decision-making. Participants expressed strong desires to “fight battles” (p. 500) on behalf of their children in the school choice context, often needing to develop a comprehensive understanding of the intricate details of school choice policy (Cooper, 2007).

Together, Andre-Bechely (2005) and Cooper (2007) both found that participants were unaware of several critical components of the school choice process and available options. These findings are consistent with empowerment theory, especially as Cataneo and Chapman’s model specifies that knowledge is linked with self-efficacy in an individual’s process of empowerment. While parent/guardian knowledge has been explored in relation to other critical areas of child development, there is little information about parents/guardians’ knowledge related specifically to school choice. This is especially true for parents/guardians who are low-income or from racial and ethnic minority groups (Schneider et al., 1997). Existing research has several limitations as well. Much of it is limited to qualitative designs and quantitative studies typically focus on only parents/guardians’ knowledge of their children’s school characteristics, such as the name of the principal or class size, rather than knowledge of the school choice process (e.g., Howell, 2006).

**Parent/guardian perceived competence in school choice.** The third component of Cattaneo and Chapman’s model is competence. This study defines parent/guardian
perceptions of competence in relation to school choice, describing parent/guardian perceived skill in navigating the educational system and school choice process as they are already involved in school choice decisions. It is important to recognize that, until parents/guardians have taken action, their perceptions of self-efficacy and competence will likely be the same (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). Once parents/guardians have engaged in a decision-making process, they will then be able to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement within their school choice skill sets.

There is no research on parent/guardian perceived competence related to school choice. The limited qualitative research of Andre-Bechely (2005) and Cooper (2007) indicated that African-American mothers expressed difficulty taking action within a school choice context, commonly citing various roadblocks related to the school systems’ bureaucratic structures. Mothers in these studies described activities related to gaining and evaluating information about their choice sets and systematically navigating the school choice process. Participants in both studies described their experiences as “battles” for their children in a complex context (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Cooper, 2007, p. 500). Additionally, interviews with racial and ethnic minority parents/guardians in Neild’s (2005) study underscore the uncertainty and frustration that parents/guardians feel when making school choice decisions. Several participants in this study reported experiencing “mix-ups” and “unexpected events” that made it difficult for them to determine what their child’s options were and the likelihood that their children would be accepted to their schools of choice. Neild also found that the parents/guardians with more education demonstrated greater confidence in resolving problems that arose with their child’s applications to change schools.
These studies point to important struggles that parents/guardians may face in school choice decision-making processes. Parents/guardians may have difficulty making school choice decisions with limited, inaccurate, or inadequate information. This might be especially true for parents/guardians from low-income or racial and ethnic minority groups who have traditionally been excluded from equitable educational options. As existing studies indicate, parents/guardians experience school choice decisions as difficult processes mired in bureaucracy (e.g., Andre-Bechly, 2005). Empowerment theory posits that parents/guardians who feel more empowered may experience greater self-efficacy, knowledge, and perceived competence in relation to school choice.

**Preliminary research.** Current research on parent/guardian empowerment in school choice does not typically utilize the framework described by Gutierrez et al. (1998) or the models outlined by Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) and Hur (2006), despite widespread consensus that these components of empowerment theory are central to empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). Initial conceptualizations of school choice and empowerment provide preliminary support that this model could help to identify important areas of study.

Early scholarship focused on the ways in which parent/guardian empowerment is conceptualized within an educational context. Vincent (1996) argued that the literature on parent/guardian empowerment and schools is narrowly focused on two related visions of parent/guardian empowerment. The first, a social democratic understanding of empowerment, emphasizes increased parent/guardian participation in public institutions, often directly addressing long-standing inequalities and power differentials across racial and ethnic groups and social classes. School reform efforts based on the social
democratic understanding of empowerment typically rely on initiatives that encourage parent/guardian involvement in schooling, but do not often address issues of power (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007; Vincent, 1996).

The second vision of parent/guardian empowerment is one largely focused on redefining empowerment as consumer choice (Vincent, 1996). Instead of involving parents/guardians in public institutions, this view of empowerment purports that increasing choice options for parents/guardians gives them political power within the system of education. Understanding parent/guardian empowerment as an individual level variable can help us further understand the distinction Vincent draws between empowerment as democratic participation and empowerment as consumer choice. The two differing conceptualizations of parent/guardian empowerment related to education are often competing, as the first places the site of change within social structures and institutions (i.e., schools) and the second emphasizes personal responsibility and parents/guardians as the sites of change.

Goldring and Shapira (1993) offer the only empirical investigation of parent/guardian empowerment in the school choice context. Utilizing a survey research design with a sample of 337 Israeli parents/guardians, they examined the relationships among parent/guardian satisfaction with schools of choice, perceived empowerment, and involvement in schools. Their findings indicated a significant and positive relationship between parent/guardian empowerment and satisfaction with their schools of choice. This study, however, defined parent/guardian empowerment as “the extent to which parents perceive they can influence or take part in decision-making processes” (p. 403). More specifically, Goldring and Shapira’s measure included one question asking
parents/guardians to rate the opportunities for involvement in their children’s schools. Arguably, this operational definition is not conceptually aligned with existing research on empowerment (e.g., Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010) because it only examines parent/guardian actions (i.e. participation), rather than parents/guardians’ perceptions of their abilities, knowledge, or competence in relation to the situation.

It is plausible that empowerment theory might further illuminate the ways in which parents/guardians experience the process of school choice. Cattaneo and Chapman’s model of individual empowerment supposes that parents/guardians who are empowered in their school choice decision-making processes possess skills related to obtaining information, advocating for their children, and evaluating various schools in their choice sets. Further, parents/guardians who are empowered may also utilize different criteria in their decision-making process, perhaps more in line with the assumptions of rational choice theory. For instance, a parent/guardian who experiences greater self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence in relation to school choice might weigh costs and benefits associated with a particular choice differently from a parent/guardian who feels less empowered.

More research that applies empowerment theory to school choice is needed to examine these components of parents/guardians’ empowerment. An improved understanding of parent/guardian empowerment in school choice, and its relationships with prioritization of academic and nonacademic factors and quality of school choice, may provide necessary insight into parents/guardian’s decision-making processes. While theories project how parents/guardians make school choice decision, it is still unclear
how other factors may relate to their school choice decision. Additional research is needed to examine the ways in which empowerment theory might inform our understanding of the school choice context, particularly in relation to parents/guardians who are low-income or racial and ethnic minorities.

**Current Study**

The current study built upon Cattaneo and Chapman’s model of empowerment, and utilizes other research on prioritization of factors, to examine parents/guardians’ school choice decisions. Empowerment theory suggests that parents/guardians who are more empowered will demonstrate self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence when participating in school choice decisions. Existing research applying empowerment theory to parents/guardians’ school choice decision-making is limited. This study aimed to expand upon existing research and address some of the limitations in current studies. More specifically, this study explored the relationships among parent/guardian empowerment, prioritization of factors, and the quality of the school choice outcome. As outlined in Figure 1, it was hypothesized that parent/guardian empowerment is related to prioritization of academic and nonacademic factors and to the quality of parents/guardians’ school choice outcomes. This study also hypothesized that prioritization of factors would moderate the potential relationships between parent/guardian empowerment and quality of school choice. In addition, this study sought to develop a measure of parent/guardian empowerment in relation to school choice contexts, as well as examine the relationships among various demographics in relation to the study’s variables. Instrument development was needed because there is no tool in existence that measures parent/guardian empowerment in schools.
This study will address key limitations within existing research to develop a measure of parents/guardians’ empowerment and to examine parents/guardians’ empowerment in school choice, prioritizing factors, and the quality of parents/guardians’ school choice decisions. A cross-sectional survey research design will be used to examine this study’s research questions:

1) Is Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors related to the Quality of School Choice?

2) Is the relationship between Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Quality of Choice moderated by parent/guardian Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors?

This study was comprised of two phases, each devised to address one of the research questions. The following chapter will describe the methods and results of Phase I, while Chapter 4 will describe the methods and results of Phase II. In each chapter, the
methods are initially presented (including relevant context, procedures, sample descriptions, measures, and data analytic techniques) followed by the results for each phase as well.
Chapter 3: Phase I Methods and Results

The Office of Responsible Research Practices at The Ohio State University determined all procedures for both phases exempt from review by the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board. This research was exempt because it included the collection of de-identified data using survey procedures with adults. As such, this study posed minimal risk to all participants. Phase I, as outlined here, sought to develop and test a measure of parents/guardian’s empowerment.

Methods

**Context and Instrument Development.** Existing measures of Parent/Guardian Empowerment (e.g., Koren, DeChillo, & Friesen, 1992) measure empowerment within specific contexts, none of which relate to education or school choice. As such, Phase I of this study sought to develop and test a modified version of the Family Empowerment Scale (FES; Koren, DeChillo, & Friesen, 1992), a scale that was originally developed for use with parents/guardians of children with emotional disabilities. The FES was developed to measure four domains of Parent/Guardian Empowerment, including: (1) self-efficacy; (2) knowledge; (3) competence; and, (4) systems advocacy. The FES has demonstrated good internal consistency as measured by Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .93$). Each subscale within the FES also has good internal consistency, ranging from a Cronbach alpha of .78 for self-efficacy to .89 for knowledge (Singh, Curtis, Ellis, Nicholson, Villani, & Wechsler, 1995).
Given that empowerment is context-specific (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2001), the FES was modified to assess Parent/Guardian Empowerment in the school choice context. In this study, Parent/Guardian Empowerment was defined as parent/guardian utilization of self-efficacy, knowledge, and perceived competence to act toward making a school choice decision.

Specifically, 20 items from the FES were modified to ask parents/guardians to report their perceptions in relation to education and school choice. Items from only the self-efficacy, knowledge, and perceived competence scales of the FES were modified for use in this study, as items from the systems advocacy scale were beyond the scope of the study’s research questions. Items were modified as minimally as possible. For example, an item from the FES is: “I understand how service systems for children are organized” (Koren et al., 1992). This item was modified as such: “I understand how the school system in my community is organized;” and, “When problems arise with my child in school, I handle them pretty well.” This type of modification was necessary as DeVellis (2003) indicates that survey items are most reliable when they are consistent with regard to level of specificity. In addition, items were measured using the same 5-point response scale established in the FES. Responses ranged from 1 = not true at all to 5 = very true. It also is important to note that the directions in the Parent/Guardian Empowerment in Schools (P/GES) scale ask parents/guardians to choose one child to reference as they complete the survey. To reduce any potential bias, parents/guardians are instructed to answer the questions in relation to their child with the soonest upcoming birthday (Dillman, 2000).
Once items were developed based on the FES, four faculty members with expertise in survey research, scale construction, parent/family engagement in schools, and/or education research reviewed the initial 20 items for readability and face validity, as suggested by DeVellis (2001). Suggestions from these experts included minor language changes to more clearly indicate that these items refer to educational settings, along with the suggested addition of two items: (1) “The information I have about schools in my community is accurate;” and, (2) “The information I have about schools in my community is adequate to allow me to make a decision about my child’s school.” These items were added in light of existing research documenting the inadequacy and inaccessibility of information on schools for parents/guardians to utilize in school choice decision-making (Neild, 2005).

Following the expert review, two parents/guardians also reviewed the draft measure for readability and face validity. Based upon their recommendations, the wording for one item was revised again for clarity. Specifically, the original item was, “I know what the rights of parents and children are in the educational system.” The parent/guardian reviewers noted that some parents/guardians may not understand what “the educational system” refers to, perhaps suggesting that the “system” is just one school, the district, or the national system. Instead, the item was revised to read, “I know what the rights of parents and children are in my community’s school system.”

In total, the Parent/Guardian Empowerment Scale (P/GES) contained 22 items measured on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 = not true at all to 5 = very true. The initial P/GES scale is available in Appendix A. The scores of P/GES items sum to
represent a level of parents/guardian empowerment; possible mean scores range from 1 to 5, and higher mean scores indicate greater perceptions of empowerment.

**Sampling and Data Collection Procedures.** A cross-sectional online survey research design was used to collect data on the newly-developed P/GES. Participants were recruited via email. The researcher asked local churches, community centers, youth development programs, and parent organizations to forward a recruitment email to all organization members on their private email distribution lists. In total, the following organizations participated in this study: two faith-based organizations, three statewide parent associations, one government entity, one youth organization, and one settlement house.

Those organizations that wished to do so also forwarded follow-up emails from the researcher (attached in Appendix B) at both one week and two weeks following the initial recruitment email. The recruitment email (available in Appendix B) explained the study, relevant procedures, risks and benefits, and eligibility criteria. Potential participants who were eligible were directed to use a link in the email to access the online survey hosted on surveymonkey.com. Participants were also welcomed to forward the recruitment email to other potential participants as well.

In the end, this snowball sampling procedure resulted in 249 parents/guardians responding to the online survey. Out of these respondents, 226 individuals provided data on the P/GES, thus 11 individuals were removed from the sample (as described in the section titled “Data screening and assumptions”). T-tests ($\alpha = .05$) to determine any differences between the participants who completed the P/GES and those who did not
indicated no statistically significant differences in race/ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, or household income between the two groups. As such, Phase I sample was comprised of 226 individuals.

This is an adequate sample size for this phase of the study. More specifically, the recommended sample sizes for studies using factor analytic procedures are dependent upon the size of the hypothesized model, the number of factors, and item communalities (MacCullum, Widaman, Zhang, & Hong, 1999; Schmitt, 2011). As such, researchers offer numerous rules of thumb to estimate adequate sample size. Tinsley and Tinsley (1987) provide a conservative estimate of five to 10 participants per item up to 300 participants, while Tabachnik and Fidell (2001) recommend a sample size of at least 300 for factor analysis. Reise, Waller, and Comrey (2009) however, indicate that a sample size of 200 is adequate in most studies involving 40 or fewer items. This study’s measure included 22 items, thus a sample of size of approximately 110 to 220 participants would fit most recommendations. The sample in this study was considered adequate (N = 226) because it fit these various recommendations.

Sample. Sample demographic information is presented in Table 1. Over three-fourths of participants were female (n = 177) and the mean age for all participants was 41.40 years (SD = 7.19). Sixty-eight percent of participants indicated their race/ethnicity as Caucasian/White, followed by African-American/Black (24.4%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3.6%), Multiracial (1.9%), and “other” (1.3%). Less than one percent of participants reported their race/ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino. The majority of participants in Phase I resided in Ohio (79.9%), followed by Michigan (9.1%),
California (3.2%), and Florida (2.3%). Participants reported living in other states as well, but fewer than four participants each lived in those states (Illinois, Florida, Tennessee, New York, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Virginia).
### Table 1. Demographic characteristics of Phase I study sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables (N = 226&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Attainment</strong></td>
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<td>Vocational/Trade School</td>
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<td>Associate's Degree</td>
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<td>4-year College Degree (BA/BS)</td>
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<td>PhD/MD/JD</td>
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Continued
### Table 1 Continued

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<th>Demographic Variables (N = 226(^a))</th>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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#### Yearly Household Income

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<th>Income Level</th>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
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</tr>
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<td>20.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater than or equal to $100,000</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>224</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lunch Choice</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>226</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### State of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>219</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Some participants did not complete all demographic questions.
Only 15.9% of participants reported that their children were eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch. In addition, participants’ yearly household incomes were varied. Most participants reported incomes greater than or equal to $100,000, (36.2%), followed by $75,000 to $99,999 (20.5%), then $50,000 to $74,999 (21.0%), $25,000 to $49,000 (15.2%), and less than $24,000 (7.1%). Participants’ levels of educational attainment also were varied. The majority of participants reported that the highest level of education they received was a graduate/professional degree (36.4%). Nearly one quarter of participants reported a 4-year college degree as their highest level of education (24.4%), followed by high school/GED (11.1%), an Associate’s Degree (8.0%), a PhD/MD/JD (7.6%). Some participants noted that they have taken graduate courses without receiving a degree (6.7%), and others reported their highest level of education as vocational/trade school (4.4%). Three participants (1.3%) indicated “other” as their highest level of education.

Participants also provided details about their relationship with the child they chose to reference for the P/GES items. All participants reported that they were the legal guardians for their children. Additionally, the majority of participants were their children’s mother or father (98.2%). Two participants reported that they were their children’s aunt or uncle, while one participant reported being another relative and one reported being a nonrelative. The mean age in years of the child participant’s selected to report was 10.57 ($SD = 3.91$).

**Measures.** The online survey included the initial 22 items of the P/GES. Items measuring demographic characteristics also were included in the survey to aid in scale
construction, as recommended by DeVillis (2001) as a way to examine stability and reliability of items across groups. These items solicited information about the participants’ age, gender, race/ethnicity, income, and educational attainment. These are important demographic variables to explore because previous studies indicate differences in parents/guardians school choice decision-making across various subgroups. For instance, parents/guardians who are white and have higher incomes did not prioritize school safety as an important factor in their school choice decision (Schneider et al., 1998). Additionally, parents/guardians with higher levels of education were more likely to cite school diversity as an important factor (Schneider et al. 1998).

**Data screening and assumptions.** Following data collection, it was necessary to clean and screen the data for errors, inconsistencies, and missing data. Statistical analyses were conducted using Version 19 of the Statistical Pack for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Such screening allows for an appropriate interpretation of results and helps to determine the generalizability of the study’s findings (Schlomer, Bauman, & Card, 2010). Consistent with the recommendations of Tabachnik and Fidell (2007), the amount and distribution of missing data were analyzed to determine if data were missing completely at random (MCAR), missing at random (MAR), or missing not at random (MNAR).

First, 11 of the 249 initial respondents were removed because they did not provide usable data on any of the items in the P/GES. Following this removal, the percentage of missing data on items ranged from 0 to 2.2%. T-tests ($\alpha = .05$) comparing participant responses to the P/GES items were conducted to see if missingness was related to any of the other items. These tests revealed no systematic relationships in missingness across items. In addition, a Little’s MCAR test yielded a statistically insignificant result ($p =$
0.63), indicating that MCAR may be inferred. In the end, twelve participants were removed because their responses contained greater than 5% of missing data and MCAR was inferred. Listwise deletion was used to handle these missing data as the amount of missing data was minimal and data were MCAR.

Exploratory techniques were used to determine that the data met the assumptions of all planned statistical procedures. Means, standard deviations, and analyses of skewness and kurtosis were used to test the assumption of normality (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). Exploratory analysis indicated that all 22 items of the initial P/GES were strongly negatively skewed, as skewness statistics ranged from -0.818 to -1.766. In addition, two items had kurtosis statistics above a value of 3, demonstrating that the distributions of these items were strongly peaked. A normal distribution is expected to have a skewness statistic of 0 and a kurtosis measure below 3 (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). To meet the assumptions of normality, all 22 items of the P/GES were transformed using an inverse transformation.

Scatterplots of each item also were assessed to determine if the data met the assumption of linearity. In addition, bivariate correlations were assessed to determine if multicollinearity existed between variables. Multicollinearity occurs when variables are too highly correlated, causing an increase in standard error. Bivariate correlations greater than 0.90 are problematic and may be omitted (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001). None of the items in this study had correlations above 0.90.

**Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).** An EFA was used to test the underlying factor structure of the P/GES. There are three reasons an EFA was determined to be an appropriate methodology for this study. First, the models of individual empowerment
already identified in the literature (Cataneo & Chapman, 2010; Hur, 2006) are tentative and untested. Conceptual research emphasizes that self-efficacy, knowledge, and perceived competence are important components of empowerment, yet empirical investigation of these three constructs, and their interrelationships, is undeveloped. Second, the original scale guiding the development of the P/GES (i.e., the FES; Koren et al., 1992) was designed to describe and measure parents/guardians’ empowerment in healthcare settings. The P/GES, however, was designed to assess parents/guardian empowerment in the school choice context. Finally, this study was the first attempt to develop a measure of parent/guardian empowerment in school choice, as well as the first attempt that built upon existing conceptualizations of empowerment that include self-efficacy, knowledge, and perceived competence. For these reasons, this research is largely exploratory in nature.

In addition, EFA analyzes covariance, versus a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) which analyzes all variance, both unique and error (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). The use of PCA is best reserved for analysis without any underlying theory of factorial structure, as it maximizes the variance evident in the observed variables. EFA, however, allows for an examination of covariance by removing unique and error variances and leaving only shared variance in the solution. Thus, EFA is the most appropriate factor analytic technique for examining the relationships among observed variables in this study because previous research already identifies several potential latent variables within empowerment theory (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007).

Given these reasons, an EFA using principal axis factoring and promax rotation was conducted to explore the number of factors underlying the correlations among and
variations within the scale items. An oblique rotation was used with the expectation that any underlying factors would correlate, as suggested by existing research on the interrelatedness of domains within empowerment (e.g., Akey, Marquis, & Ross, 2000). Additionally, an EFA was used to identify which items load onto each factor and to eliminate items that do not load onto any of the extracted factors. Research is largely unclear in determining the strengths and weaknesses of various factoring methods (e.g., maximum likelihood, principal axis, etc.; Costello & Osborne, 2005). Still, Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, and Strahan (1999) argue that the principal axis factors method is most appropriate when assumptions of normality are even moderately violated.

The most parsimonious factor solution was identified using individual item factor loadings, percentage of variance explained, and theoretical criteria (Matsunanga, 2010). More specifically, a combination of the Kaiser-Guttman retention criteria and an examination of the scree plot were used to retain factors that had eigenvalues greater than 1.00 (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). Item factor loadings were then screened using the pattern matrix to determine the extent to which items load onto each factor. Existing literature does not identify clear cut-off points in determining which items clearly load on which factors (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Comrey & Lee, 1992). Generally, higher loadings indicate that the item is a more pure measure of the latent construct (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In addition, Comrey and Lee (1992) established the following criteria: loadings greater than 0.71 are considered excellent; 0.45 is considered good; and, 0.32 is considered poor. In this analysis, items with factor loadings greater than 0.45 were retained. Following examination of factor loadings, factors were identified and named depending on the conceptual constructs they assessed. In addition, existing research and
models of empowerment (e.g., Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010) also were considered in the decisions to retain or eliminate items and factors. Finally, Cronbach’s alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the items within each factor and of the scale as a whole. Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was used to assess the validity of all measurement scales (DeVellis, 2003; Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007).

**Results**

This section will provide the results of Phase I of this study. First, descriptive statistics and correlational analyses are presented, followed by results from the EFA.

**Preliminary analyses.** A factor analysis was determined appropriate with this sample, given a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($p = .000$; Bartlett, 1954) and an observed Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.93 (Kaiser, 1974). A significant test of sphericity ($p < .05$) indicates that the correlations in a correlation matrix are larger than zero. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy indicates if the items share a common factor. In this case, a value of 0.93 is desirable as Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) suggest that values of 0.60 or greater are necessary to assure factorability.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the initial items in the P/GES. Generally, participants reported that the initial test items were true for them, with item mean scores ranging from 4.09 to 4.56. The lowest mean scores were as follows: “I know what the rights of parents and children are in my community’s school system” (item 3); “I make efforts to learn new ways to help my child grow and develop in school” (item 16); and, “My opinion is just as important as educators’ opinions in deciding what services my child needs in school” (item 21). In addition, the highest item mean score was 4.56 and this was the mean score for three of the 22 items: “I am able to make good
decisions about the education my child needs” (item 5); “I feel confident in my ability to help my child grow and develop in school” (item 11); and, “When problems arise with my child in school, I handle them pretty well” (item 13). Item standard deviations demonstrated moderate variability in responses, ranging from 0.64 (item 13) to 1.06 (item 3). Finally, each of the initial items of the P/GES was significantly and positively correlated with all other items of the P/GES.
Table 2. Initial Descriptive Statistics for P/GES Items ($N = 226$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M ($SD$)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Skew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I understand how the school system in my community is organized.</td>
<td>4.14 (.99)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I know the steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving a poor education.</td>
<td>4.29 (.94)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I know what the rights of parents and children are in my community’s school system.</td>
<td>4.09 (1.06)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have a good understanding of the school system that my child is involved in.</td>
<td>4.28 (.92)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am able to make good decisions about the education my child needs.</td>
<td>4.56 (.70)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I know what to do when problems arise with my child in school.</td>
<td>4.52 (.70)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am able to work with schools and educators to decide what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>4.45 (.83)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Range^a</th>
<th>Skew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. I make sure that educators understand my opinions about what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>4.33 (.86)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am able to get information to help me better understand my child’s needs in school.</td>
<td>4.43 (.69)</td>
<td>3 – 5</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I know what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>4.41 (.80)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel confident in my ability to help my child grow and develop in school.</td>
<td>4.56 (.68)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I believe I can solve problems with my child related to school.</td>
<td>4.52 (.70)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. When problems arise with my child in school, I handle them pretty well.</td>
<td>4.56 (.64)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I make efforts to learn new ways to help my child grow and develop in school.</td>
<td>4.41 (.77)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. When faced with a problem involving my child in school, I decide what to do and then do it.</td>
<td>4.48 (.75)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Skew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I tell professionals what I think about services being provided to my child at school.</td>
<td>4.14 (.97)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>When necessary, I take the initiative in looking for school services for my child and family.</td>
<td>4.33 (.92)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>My opinion is just as important as educators’ opinions in deciding what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>4.54 (.72)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I feel that I have a right to approve all services my child receives in school.</td>
<td>4.44 (.78)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I make sure I stay in regular contact with educators who are providing services to my child in school.</td>
<td>4.42 (.78)</td>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Range&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Skew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. The information I have about schools in my community is accurate.</td>
<td>4.15 (.87)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The information I have about schools in my community is adequate to allow me to make a decision about my child’s school.</td>
<td>4.28 (.84)</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>Note</sup>. Means and standard deviations are based on raw scores.

<sup>a</sup>Items were measured using a 5-point response set ranging from 1 = Not at all true to 5 = Very true.
Exploratory Factor Analysis

The initial run of the EFA indicated that the 22 items of the P/GES were represented by four underlying factors accounting for 65.25% of the total variance. An examination of the factor loadings, however, indicated that two items on the scale cross-loaded on multiple factors. Further, one of the factors was not well-defined, as only two items had sufficiently high loadings on the factor (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). The screeplots also indicated that only the first three factors were distinct. Only two items loaded on the fourth factor, both items that were added by the expert review during scale development: (1) “The information I have about schools in my community is accurate;” and, (2) “The information I have about schools in my community is adequate to allow me to make a decision about my child’s school.” While these items assessed an important component of parent/guardian decision-making, they were not conceptually aligned with existing models of empowerment. To identify the most parsimonious solution, the decision was made to eliminate these two items, along with the two that cross-loaded on other factors, and run the EFA again.

The results of the second EFA indicated that the remaining 18 items included three factors accounting for 62.86% of the total variance. Yet, the third factor was not well-defined and one item cross-loaded on multiple factors. The three problematic items were items from the original FES that were somewhat ambiguous in relation to context (e.g., “I feel I am a good parent”). Again, the decision was made to eliminate these three items and run the EFA again. Using the same criteria, a 15-item version of the P/GES resulted. In this analysis, the 15 items were represented by two underlying factors.
accounting for 59.32% of the total variance. The factor loadings from the pattern matrix are shown in Table 3.

Factor 1, which was labeled *Parent/Guardian Knowledge*, accounted for 46.57% of the variance and included seven items. This label was selected given that all of the items indicate parents/guardians’ perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of their children’s education and related school systems. The second factor accounted for 12.75% of the variance and included eight items. This factor was labeled *Perceived Competence* as it measures parents/guardians’ perceived actions related to making decisions for their children’s education once they have made a school choice decision.

As expected, the correlation between the two factors was positive ($r = .61$). Table 3 also presents the descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimates ($\alpha$) for the factors based on the subscale scores. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients suggested that both factors demonstrated high internal consistency, as well as the scale in its entirety. Specifically, Factor 1 (Parent/Guardian Knowledge) had a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .92, Factor 2 (Parent/Guardian Competence) had a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .87, and the entire scale had a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .91.

In the end, the results of the EFA were similar to the findings of Singh et al.’s (1995) analysis of the FES in that both Knowledge and Perceived Competence emerged as distinct factors. Self-efficacy, however, emerged as a factor in Singh et al.’s CFA, but was not evident as a factor in the P/GES. Further, 15 of the 20 items modified from the FES were retained in the final version of the P/GES.
Table 3. Items, factor loadings, and descriptive statistics for the P/GES (N = 226)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I understand how the school system in my community is organized.</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I know the steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving a poor education.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I know what the rights of parents and children are in my community’s school system.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have a good understanding of the school system that my child is involved in.</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am able to make good decisions about the education my child needs.</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I know what to do when problems arise with my child in school.</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am able to work with schools and educators to decide what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I make sure that educators understand my opinions about what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I make efforts to learn new ways to help my child grow and develop in school.</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. When faced with a problem involving my child in school, I decide what to do and then do it.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I tell professionals what I think about services being provided to my child at school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. When necessary, I take the initiative in looking for school services for my children.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. My opinion is just as important as educators’ opinions in deciding what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I feel that I have a right to approve all services my child receives in school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I make sure I stay in regular contact with educators who are providing services to my child in school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Percent Variance</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.99</td>
<td>46.59</td>
<td>4.33 (.73)</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>12.75</td>
<td>4.39 (.60)</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Pattern Matrix from the Principal Axis Factor Analysis with a Promax Rotation.
Chapter 4: Phase II Methods and Results

In Phase I, the P/GES was developed to measure Parent/Guardian Empowerment in school choice. The second phase of the study utilized this scale to examine the study’s research questions:

1) Is Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors related to the Quality of School Choice?
2) Is the relationship between Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Quality of Choice moderated by parent/guardian Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors?

Similar to Chapter 3, this chapter first will describe the methods of Phase II, including a summary of the context for the study, description of the sample, measures, procedures, and data analytic techniques. This will be followed by a description of the results for Phase II.

**Method**

**Community context.** As outlined in Chapter 2, school choice policies include multiple mechanisms that create more options for parents/guardians. Example mechanisms include vouchers, inter- and inra-district enrollment, and charter schools. Given this, it is important to provide some description of the context for Phase II of this
study, as the geographical area and educational structure are relevant to the study’s procedures and ultimate findings (Schneider et al., 1998).

Phase II of this study took place in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is the capital of Ohio and is situated in the center of Franklin County. The city has a population of approximately 787,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and its residents are predominately White (61.5%), followed by Black/African-American (28%), and Hispanic/Latino (5%) in 2010. Several social and economic indicators are important to note in relation to children, families, and school communities in Columbus, Ohio. This is particularly true for those living in poverty or who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups. In 2010, over half of the children living in Columbus (65%) lived in households that were at or below 250% of the poverty line and 18% lived in extreme poverty. Further, 40 percent of children in Columbus lived in families where no parent had full-time year-round work (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The enrollment rates in public assistance programs also are indicative of the poverty among children and families living in Columbus. For instance, in 2010, 11,068 households with children received cash assistance to supplement their incomes and 59,943 households received benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program within the previous year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

In addition, children living in poverty in Columbus often are segregated from other communities that are more diverse in income and racial/ethnic make-up. For instance, current research (Logan, 2011) indicates that the city’s White and Black/African-American populations were historically segregated and this segregation continues today. This is especially troubling as pockets of concentrated poverty are
apparent throughout the city, as eight zip codes in Columbus have 20 percent or more households living beneath the poverty line (i.e., high poverty zip codes; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

**Educational Context.** The educational context in Columbus is also of importance, as school choice policies are locally-driven and community-specific. Columbus City Schools (CCS) is the only school district completely within the city’s limits. The district served 49,616 of the city’s children during the 2010-2011 school year, of which 81.9% were considered economically disadvantaged. CCS is racially and ethnically diverse, yet the majority of students are Black/African-American (58.9%), followed by White/Caucasian (27%), then Hispanic (6.8%), Multiracial (5.1%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (2.1%). Thus, it must be noted that CCS’ racial and ethnic enrollment patterns, as well as the higher proportion of students living in poverty, are not aligned with the city’s demographic characteristics. While residents of the city are predominately White, and the median household income is $43,122 (U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, 2010), the majority of CCS students is Black and lives in poverty (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2011a).

CCS, as do all districts in Ohio, receives designations from ODE indicative of their students’ academic performance, graduation rates, and progress over time. These designations range from the poorest possible rating, Academic Emergency, to the highest rating, Excellent with Distinction (ODE, 2011a). When NCLB first went into affect in 2002, CCS received a designation of “Academic Emergency” and moved up to “Academic Watch” in 2003. Following two years in “Academic Watch,” CCS was designated in “Continuous Improvement” and has maintained this designation for the past
six years. Currently, CCS has a designation of “Continuous Improvement,” indicating that the district has not made expected progress for at least two years and is in the process of implementing a state-mandated process of district-wide improvement.

Although CCS is improving, as indicative by their movement in designation, many students are still not achieving academically. As reflected in its report card rating, students in CCS demonstrate poorer performance on state standardized tests than their peers throughout Ohio (ODE, 2011a). For instance, students in CCS had Ohio Graduate Test (OGT) passage rates of 72.4%, 63.8%, and 51.2% for reading, math, and science, respectively, compared with 86.3%, 81.0%, and 73.0% for students across Ohio (ODE, 2011a). Community Research Partners (2011), however, point to student performance differences within CCS as well. For example, some high schools within the district have student passage rates below 70% on all subject-specific annual standardized tests. Yet, four district high schools have student OGT passage rates above 90%. Overall, 43.2% of the schools in CCS were in academic emergency or academic watch during the 2010-2011 school year. For the same time period, 31.4% were in Continuous Improvement (ODE, 2011b).

The state of education in Columbus, Ohio is indicative of many other large, urban areas in the United States. Numerous urban districts are experiencing similar crises in education that predominately impact low-income and racial and ethnic minority student populations (Blanchard, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). The context in Columbus offered an opportunity to study parent/guardian decision-making related to school choice in a community that is experiencing significant academic disparities. In addition, Columbus is
also host to numerous types of school choice options, as parents/guardians in this city are frequently called upon to make decisions about their children’s schooling.

More specifically, CCS is required to offer school choice to any parents/guardians living within the district, as indicated by NCLB. Therefore, all parents/guardians living within the city (and in this study) are eligible to choose a school other than their regularly assigned public neighborhood school. As of the 2011-2012 academic year, there were 72 charter schools within the CCS boundary area, and an additional four charter schools within five miles of the city border (ODE, 2012). If parents/guardians would like to change their children’s schools but still stay within the district, they have three magnet options. They also may participate in intra-district enrollment. Intra-district enrollment would open their choice sets to include the three CCS magnet schools, 19 high schools, 25 middle schools, and 74 elementary schools. To participate in either of these options, parents/guardians are required to participate in the district’s lottery process. The process entails an application for each potential school desired and entry into the electronic lottery for school selection. The lottery randomly selects children for specific schools and it is repeated until all lottery offers are made. Then, parents/guardians whose children were not selected for a lottery school are offered available positions in the remaining schools (CCS, 2012). Children may be selected for their parents/guardians’ schools of choice or waitlisted for various other schools.

Parents/guardians who wish to enroll their children in schools outside of CCS have a few options. The first, residential relocation, requires parents to move their residence outside of CCS and within the boundaries of another school district. The second, inter-district open enrollment, allows parents/guardians the option of enrolling
their children in other neighboring school districts that are accepting students from other districts. Not all neighboring districts allow open enrollment and parents/guardians living within CCS must select from only those who are accepting students from CCS. Finally, parents/guardians have the option of applying for the local voucher program, termed the EdChoice Scholarship Program. In Ohio, families who are selected to receive the voucher can get up to $4250 for elementary and middle school students and $5000 for high school students per year (ODE, 2011c). In recent years, Central Ohio has experienced significant increases in charter school and voucher use and decreases in CCS enrollment. For instance, in one neighborhood of Columbus, only one-third of children living in the area attend CCS schools and 20 percent attend local charter or private schools (Johnson, Mills, & Wilson, 2010).

Given these complexities for school choice in Columbus, the community and educational context for this study includes a wide variety of school choice options targeted at low-income and racial and ethnic minority parents. As such, Columbus was an appropriate setting to examine this study’s research questions. Many areas of the city have predominately low-income or racial and ethnic minority populations, all parents/guardians living with CCS boundaries have the option of school choice, and a number of other school options were available to participants outside of their neighborhood public schools.

**Sampling and data collection procedures.** To answer the research questions in Phase II, a cross-sectional survey research design with a convenience sample of parents/guardians in Ohio was used. Eight zip codes within the geographical boundaries of the city’s largest school district were considered high poverty areas, defined as an area
where at least 20 percent of the area’s population lived at or below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These areas were selected for this study to yield a greater proportion of parents/guardians living in poverty. Additionally, all parents/guardians who lived within these boundary areas lived in a district in which all students were eligible for school choice under the provisions of NCLB. Children who lived in these zip codes were assigned to attend one of the district’s seven high schools. Churches, community centers, and charter schools located within the selected boundary areas were identified for participant recruitment procedures. Convenience samples from these locations served as the study sample.

Recruitment and data collection occurred at 11 sites within the previously identified boundary areas. In total, they included five churches, two charter schools, two community centers, and two youth development programs. These sites were chosen because they were in the geographical boundary areas targeted in this study and it was expected that the majority of people attending events at these sites would have children who attend local schools, and would represent a wide array of schooling options. The sites were initially contacted to serve as recruitment and data collection sites. Contacts included site recruitment emails, phone calls, and meetings that described the purpose of the study, study procedures, and timelines for data collection. All sites were offered a cash incentive of $250 to assist with recruitment of parents/guardians. This incentive was chosen as a cost-efficient way to encourage sites to assist with the study. Example recruitment materials are available in Appendix B.

IRB-approved researchers attended events scheduled at the sites to recruit study participants. Events included: weekly bible study sessions and services at the churches;
parent/family informational sessions at the schools; a community dinner and talent show at the community centers; and, family events at the youth development programs. Before, during, and after these events, recruiters sat at tables and asked people to participate in the study as they walked by the table. Potential participants were read a recruitment script explaining the inclusion criteria, purpose of the study, and any risks or benefits that may result from participation (see Appendix B). Elements of informed consent were verbally described to participants and all potential participants were offered a hard copy of the information (Appendix C). To protect participants’ privacy, signatures on consent documentation were waived with the understanding that participants who elected to complete the survey granted their consent as they completed the survey.

Those who elected to participate were then asked to complete a paper-pencil survey. It was important that parents/guardians complete the survey in reference to one child only, as their children may attend different schools or they may hold differing perspectives for children of different ages. To provide a random method for selection of that one child, parents/guardians were instructed to select the child with the closest upcoming birthday as they completed the survey’s questions. This procedure is recommended by Dillman (2000) and was used in other studies of school choice (e.g., Schneider et al., 1998).

**Sample size.** The number of required participants needed to obtain necessary power was determined based on the recommendations for multiple regression and canonical correlation procedures, the analytical strategies used in Phase II. This study included a maximum of seven independent variables in the canonical correlation analysis and seven independent variables in the multiple regression analysis. Thus, an a priori
power analysis using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) indicated that a sample size of 107 would be sufficient to obtain the power necessary to reject the null hypothesis with a moderate effect size at $\alpha = 0.01$ (Cohen, 1992).

**Participants.** The demographic characteristics for the Phase II sample are provided in Table 4. In sum, a total of 110 parents/guardians provided usable data for Phase II of this study. The majority of participants were female ($n = 81$) and the mean participant age was 39.91 years ($SD = 8.88$). Additionally, most of the participants reported that they identify themselves as African-American/Black (81.5%), followed by Caucasian/White (13.9%), then Hispanic/Latino (2.8%), and Multi-racial (1.8%). Most participants reported a high school diploma/GED as their highest level of education (33.3%), but 19.0% reported vocational school, 18.1% reported an associate’s degree, 11.4% reported a 4-year college degree, 6.7% reported taking graduate courses, 6.7% reported a graduate/professional degree, and 4.8% reported “other” as their highest level of education. Nearly three-quarters of participants reported that their children are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch ($n = 76$), yet the sample was somewhat distributed across incomes. Nearly half of participants reported that their annual household incomes were less than $24,000 (41.0%), 40.0% reported their incomes between $25,000 and $49,000, 13.3% as $50,000 to $74,999, and 5.7% as greater than $75,000. In total, participants reported that an average of 2.42 children age 18 or under lived in their homes. Finally, 69% of participants lived in a zip code that contains 20% or more households living in poverty.

**Participants’ children.** Participants completed the survey in relation to only one of their children. They provided the demographic information for that child as well. All
of the participants reported that they are the legal guardians for their children and the majority of participants reported that they were the child’s mother or father (86.2%). Still, a small number of participants reported that they were the child’s grandmother or grandfather (6.9%), foster parent (3.4%), or aunt or uncle (3.4%). Nearly all of the participants indicated that they live in the same house as the child for most of the week (93%). Overall, the children selected by participants were both male (54.9%) and female (45.1%). Most of the children were African-American/Black (n = 93), while 12 were Caucasian/White, 4 were African-American and White, 3 were African-American and Hispanic/Latino, 2 were Hispanic/Latino, and 1 was African-American and Asian. The mean age for the children was 12.12 years, and ages ranged from 4 to 19 years.

Participants’ schools. Participants also indicated the names of the schools that their children with the soonest upcoming birthdays attended. Participants largely reported that their children attended traditional public schools (63.8%) across six districts, but 36.2% reported that their children attended charter schools. Most of the children attending traditional public schools were concentrated in CCS (89.6%), while no more than two children attended each of the remaining five districts. In total, participants indicated that their children attended 63 different schools. Participants choosing private schools (thus potentially using vouchers) were excluded from this study because information on the study’s dependent variables is not collected by the State Department of Education. Three participants completed the survey but were not included in the sample because they indicated that their children attended a private school.
Table 4. Demographic characteristics of Phase II study sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables (N = 110\textsuperscript{a})</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>76.4</td>
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<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American/Black</td>
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<td>Caucasian/White</td>
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<td>13.9</td>
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<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>108</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Attainment</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School/GED</td>
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<td>4-year College Degree (BA/BS)</td>
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<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
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<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
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Continued
Table 4 Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables (N = 110&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yearly Household Income</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than $24,000</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $49,000</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than $75,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>72.4</td>
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<td>27.6</td>
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<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High Poverty Zip Code</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Some participants did not complete all demographic questions.

**Measures.** Participants completed a 20-minute paper-pencil survey measuring the following areas of interest. The full instrument is available in Appendix D.

**Parent/guardian empowerment.** The P/GES developed in Phase I of this study was used to measure Parent/Guardian Empowerment in Phase II. Overall, the first phase of this study indicated that the P/GES is a psychometrically sound measure of
Parent/Guardian Empowerment with adequate reliability. The P/GES is comprised of two subscales measuring parents/guardians’ perceptions of their empowerment in relation to schools. The first is Parent/Guardian Knowledge and the second is Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence. As such, Parent/Guardian Empowerment was defined as parents/guardians’ utilization of knowledge and perceived competence to act toward making a school choice decision.

Parent/guardian knowledge. The first subscale, termed Parent/Guardian Knowledge, included seven items that assessed parents/guardians’ perceptions of their knowledge of their children’s education, local school system, and potential roles and responsibilities parents/guardians might have in relation to schooling. Example items within the Parent/Guardian Knowledge subscale were: “I know the steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving a poor education,” and “I know what to do when problems arise with my child in school.” Items were measured on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This subscale demonstrated adequate internal consistency with this sample (α = .89).

Parent/guardian perceived competence. The second subscale, termed Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence, included eight items that assessed parents/guardians’ perceptions of their abilities and actions related to making decisions for their children’s education. Example items within the competence subscale were: “When necessary, I take the initiative in looking for school services for my children,” and “I tell professionals what I think about services being provided to my child at school.” The Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence subscale used the same 5-point response
scale as the Knowledge subscale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree), and demonstrated adequate internal consistency as well (α = .87).

Prioritization of academic and nonacademic factors. Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors was defined as the perceived importance of academic school characteristics and nonacademic school characteristics to parents/guardians as they consider potential schooling options for their children. This concept was measured using a scale developed for the Utah Charter Schools Study (Rorrer, Hausman, & Groth, 2006). The original 27-item scale listed factors parents/guardians may consider when choosing a school. Participants were asked “Why did you enroll your child in this school?” and then instructed to mark “yes” on all factors that were reasons for their choice. Example items were: “The location is close to my home, job, or childcare;” “Opportunities for parental involvement;” and, “The school is safe.” Participants in the Utah Charter Schools Study (Rorrer et al, 2006) noted an additional four factors that were important to them, but were not included in the original scale. For this reason, these items were added to the scale used in the current study. These items were: (1) More challenging learning environment; (2) School uniforms are required; (3) My other children already attend this school; and, (4) I wanted to support my neighborhood school.

These 31 items were organized into two categories: (1) academic factors; and (2) nonacademic factors. Fourteen items measuring various factors related to the academic qualities of a school comprised the Prioritization of Academic Factors variable. Example items included: “More challenging learning environment,” “High test scores of students attending the school,” and “Students get more individual help at the school.” Seventeen items measuring factors related to nonacademic qualities of a school comprised the
Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors variable. Example items included: “Before and/or after school child care available at the school,” “The school is safe,” and “The location of the school is close to my home, job, or child care.”

Participants were instructed to mark “yes” for those items that they considered priorities when choosing a school. As such, scores needed to be calculated to create a continuous variable for use in this study. The procedures to calculate scores for these scales were identical for both scales. First, all “yes” responses were coded as 1. Then, total scores were calculated for each scale by summing the responses coded as 1 for each participant. For instance, if a participant marked “yes” for six of the ten items on the Prioritization of Academic Factors scale, that participant would receive a raw score of 6 (representing the six items marked “yes”). Because the two subscales were different on metrics, a relative score then was created for each scale. To do this, the raw scores (count of “yes” responses) for each scale were divided by the highest possible score of each scale. For example, a raw score of 6 on the academic factors scale was rescaled to a score of .43 (6 divided by 14). Thus, scores on the Prioritization of Academic Factors scale ranged from 0 to 1, as did scores on the Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors scale. Higher scores indicated that the participant noted more of the factors on that scale as relevant in their school choice decision-making.

**Parent/guardian choice-making.** Considerable research identifies demographic differences between parents/guardians who choose schools other than their traditional neighborhood school and those who remain in their regularly assigned neighborhood school (e.g., Schneider et al., 1998). For this reason, this study also included a measure of Parent/Guardian Choice-Making, defined as the extent to which parents/guardians’ made
a choice in relation to their children’s schooling. This measure was comprised of three specific questions, each assessing one type of decision-making process in relation to participants’ school choice decisions. The first question measured the extent to which parents/guardians made an active decision to send their child to the current school. Parents/guardians were asked to choose from the following three options: (1) My child’s current school is his or her regularly assigned school; (2) My child’s school is a school I chose and is not my child’s regularly assigned school; and, (3) I don’t know if my child’s current school is his or her regularly assigned school. The second question was: “Did you choose where to live so that your child could attend his or her current school? “ (0 = No; 1 = Yes; 2 = Don’t know). This question measured whether or not parents used residential choice to select a school.

In addition, CCS allows parents/guardians to enroll their children in a district-wide lottery in which children may be selected from all potential enrollees for a limited number of available spots in high-demand schools. The final question the measure assessed was the extent to which participants utilized the district’s school choice lottery in their decision-making process. Specifically, the survey asked parents to report if they participated in the district’s school choice lottery for the current school year (1= yes; 2 = no).

The Parent/Guardian Choice-Making variable was computed using a composite score of these three questions. This variable was a dichotomous variable with scores of 1 indicating that the participant made an active choice to enroll his or her children in the current school and scores of 0 indicating that the participant did not make an active choice to enroll his or her child in the current school. Scores of 1 on the choice-making
variable were coded if one or more of the following scores on the variable’s three items were present: (1) the participant answered question 1 with “My child’s school is a school I chose and is not my child’s regularly assigned school;” (2) participant provided a “yes” responses to question 2, indicating the use of residential choice; and (3) participant provided a “yes” response to question 3, indicating participation in the school choice lottery to make a decision for the child’s school. These responses indicate that the participant made an active choice in his or her school choice decision-making. Thus, parents/guardians who did not provide any of the responses above were coded as 0 for the Parent/Guardian Choice-Making variable, indicating that they did not make an active choice in their school choice decision-making. Nearly three-quarters of participants (72.7%) reported that they made an active choice in their school choice decision-making, as measured by the Parent/Guardian Choice-Making variable. This measure is a composite variable that is a preliminary measure of Parent/Guardian Choice-Making, as few measures exist to assess this aspect of parent/guardian decision-making.

**Covariates.** Household Income and Educational Attainment were included as covariates in this study, as research notes that parents/guardians who are low-income or have less educational attainment may make different school choice decisions than those who have higher incomes and greater educational attainment (Schneider et al., 1998). Household Income was measured using one question that asked participants to indicate their annual household income (1 = less than $24,000, 2 = $25,000 - $49,000, 3 = $50,000 - $74,999, and 4 = greater than $75,000). Participants were asked to indicate their Educational Attainment as well (1 = High School/GED, 2 = Vocational/Trade
School, 3 = Associate’s Degree, 4 = 4-year College Degree, 5 = Graduate courses, no degree, 5 = Graduate/Professional Degree, 6 = PhD/MD/JD).

**Quality of School Choice.** Two separate variables were used to measure the quality of parents/guardians’ schools of choice. The first was Academic Rigor and the second was Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality.

*Satisfaction with school quality.* In this study, Satisfaction with School Quality was defined as the extent to which parents/guardians report positive perceptions of their children’s schools. This variable was measured using the Parent Satisfaction Scale from the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (PFI), developed for the National Household Education Surveys Program (U.S. DOE, 2010). The Parent Satisfaction Scale is a 4-item scale assessing parent/guardian satisfaction with the quality of the following aspects of their children’s schools: (1) the school overall; (2) the teachers; (3) the academic standards; (4) the order and discipline the school maintains. Parents/guardians were asked to rate the extent to which they were satisfied with each component using a 4-point response set (1=very dissatisfied, 2=somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 4=very satisfied). The National Center for Education Statistics uses this scale in its National Household Education Surveys Program (NHESP). NHESP used the standard error of the estimates to indicate the reliability of the Parent Satisfaction Scale, noting that standard errors for the items in the scale were 0.6 and 0.7. These standard errors are measured on the same scale as the items, with a maximum score of 4, indicating that the items in the measure of Satisfaction with School Quality had low standard errors, and thus adequate reliability.
**Academic Rigor.** Academic Rigor was defined as the extent to which a school provides students an education that allows them to be “proficient” on state standardized tests. As such, secondary data available from the school’s academic report card were used to assess the Academic Rigor of the school the participant indicated that his or her child attends. Specifically, each school’s Performance Index score was obtained from the schools’ report cards publicly posted on the Ohio Department of Education’s (ODE) website. Public school report cards in Ohio outline a number of measures of academic indicators, including student passage rates on standardized tests, graduation rates, and yearly progress. Together, the report card reports on 26 indicators of a school’s academic quality. The majority of these indicators are related to student passage rates on state-required standardized tests. In Ohio, the tests are only administered to students in grades three through eight in reading, math, and science subject areas. In addition, students’ proficiency level is noted for the Ohio Graduate Tests (OGT), administered in grades ten and eleven. These indicators are included in calculations of the Performance Index score.

The Performance Index is a weighted measure of the percentage of the student population scoring at each of five levels of performance (i.e., limited, basic, proficient, accelerated, or advanced). Students scoring in the advanced level of performance must receive at least a 75% passage rate on state-required tests. To calculate the Performance Index Score, districts and schools earn points based on student test performance on all tested subjects and the OGT. The percentage of students performing at each performance level (e.g., limited, basic, etc.) is multiplied by the weight assigned to each level. The greatest weight is given to scores in the “advanced” category. Weights decrease for each level of performance and the percentage of untested students is given a weight of zero.
Performance Index scores were used as the measure of Academic Rigor. Scores range from 0 to 120. Higher scores indicate that greater numbers of students in that school achieved higher academic test scores on state-required measures of academic proficiency. The schools that parents/guardians selected in this study had scores of Academic Rigor ranging from 56.80 to 104.30 and a mean score of 85.69 ($SD = 9.64$). In the 2010-2011 academic school year, schools in Ohio had Performance Index scores ranging from 35.49 to 116.19.

A number of measures for academic rigor were possible for this study (e.g., Cullen et al., 2005; Burgess & Briggs, 2009). It is important to recognize several aspects of the Performance Index score that limit its use as a measure of Academic Rigor in this study. First, students’ scores on standardized tests are widely debated as indicators of academic quality (Cullen et al., 2005). Second, the requirements schools must follow to submit student test scores are subject to several regulations that limit the reliability of Performance Index scores as a measure of students’ academic achievement. For instance, schools must only report academic test scores for students who are enrolled in the school for greater than 120 days (ODE, 2011). Despite these limitations, Performance Index scores were chosen for this study because it is the only academic measure available for all grade levels in Ohio, and it is a supported measure of academic rigor evident in existing research (Chester, 2005).

**Data screening and cleaning.** Data collected in Phase II were cleaned and screened prior to analysis. First, data were checked for inconsistencies and errors. Analyses were then conducted to determine the amount and distribution of missing data. Missing data ranged from 4.3% for Satisfaction with School Quality to 12.8% for
Parent/Guardian Knowledge. Missing data were determined to be MCAR, as t-tests ($\alpha = 0.05$) indicated that missingness was unrelated to other variables and Little’s MCAR test yielded a statistically nonsignificant result ($p = .42$). Data that are MCAR do not require handling of missing data beyond mean substitution (Schlomer, Bauman, & Card, 2010); thus, expectation-maximization (EM) techniques were used to impute missing values.

After handling missing data, exploratory techniques were used to determine that the data met the assumptions of all planned statistical procedures. As in Phase I, means, standard deviations, and analyses of skewness and kurtosis were used to test the assumption of normality (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). Three of the study’s variables were strongly negatively skewed (i.e., Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality, Parent/Guardian Knowledge, and Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence). In addition, scatterplots of bivariate relationships were assessed for linearity. The plots indicated that all relationships were linear, but were somewhat weak or moderate in nature. As such, Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality, Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence, and Academic Rigor were transformed using a cube transformation. A cube transformation was deemed the most appropriate type of transformation given the amount and direction of skewness (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2008). Moreover, Tabachnik & Fidell (2007) suggest the use of a cube transformation to improve linearity. At this time, a check for multicollinearity also was conducted by examining the intercorrelation between variables. None of the variables in this phase of the study had bivariate correlations greater than 0.70, indicating that multicollinearity would not substantially influence the results of the statistical analyses (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007).
Finally, data from six participants were identified as outliers using graphical displays of bivariate relationships and examinations of data distributions, as they had exceptionally low scores on the Academic Rigor variable, indicating that they were univariate outliers in this sample. These six participants were removed from the sample, as outliers typically have large impacts on correlational analyses (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). T-tests ($\alpha = .05$) indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the participants who were removed from the sample and those who were retained. Following these procedures, 110 participants were included in this sample for analysis.

**Examining research questions.** Initially, correlational analyses examined the relationships among variables. Both canonical correlation analysis and hierarchical multiple regression then were used to examine the study’s research questions. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS v. 19 software.

**Canonical correlation analysis.** Canonical correlation analysis allows the use of one analysis to examine multiple dependent variables, and thus reduces the likelihood of Type I error (Sherry & Henson, 2005). Canonical analysis is a statistical technique that creates two linear combinations, or canonical variates, of the study variables. The first set is formed from the predictor variables, and the second from the criterion variables. In short, canonical variates are essentially synthetic predictor and criterion variable sets (Sherry & Hanson, 2005; Thompson, 1984). The canonical analysis then maximizes the correlation between the two variable sets, thus allowing analysis of multiple dependent and independent variables concurrently.
The results of canonical correlation analyses yield multiple canonical functions. These functions are sets of standardized coefficients (from the two linear equations) that indicate the relationships between observed independent or dependent variables and the opposite canonical variate. In addition, the canonical correlation of an analysis is the Pearson $r$ relationship between the two canonical variates on a given canonical function. The canonical correlation represents the bivariate correlation between the two canonical variates, and thus indicates the strength of the overall relationship between the variates (Sherry & Hanson, 2005).

Given the study’s research questions, Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence, Prioritization of Academic Factors, and Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors served as predictor variables. The predictor set for this analysis was termed Parent/Guardian Decision-Making. Performance index and Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality served as criterion variables. The criterion predictor set was termed Quality of Choice for this analysis.

**Hierarchical multiple regression.** The canonical correlation analysis identified the variables most relevant in understanding parent/guardian decision-making and quality of choice. This analytic technique, however, did not allow for the examination of direct effects and interactions among the study’s variables (i.e., research question 2). Therefore, hierarchical regression analyses also were used after the canonical correlation analysis to examine this study’s research questions further. More specifically, two separate regression analyses examined whether Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors were significant predictors of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality and Academic Rigor, respectively. In addition, these
regression analyses also examined Prioritization of Academic Factors and Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors as moderating variables in the relationships among Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality, and Academic Rigor.

Two regression analyses were conducted. The first analysis tested whether the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors moderated the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Satisfaction with School Quality. The second analysis was similar to the first analysis; however, Academic Rigor was the dependent variable in this regression analysis and covariates were entered as well. Thus, the second hierarchical regression analysis tested whether the prioritization of academic and nonacademic factors moderated the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Academic Rigor. The study’s covariates, Household Income and Parent/Guardian Educational Attainment, were entered on Step 1 of the hierarchical regressions, followed by the study’s independent variables on Step 2, and then the interaction of these variables on Step 3. As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), the predictor variables were centered and the interaction terms were formed as the cross-products of the centered variables. The interaction variables entered on Step 3 were used to determine whether the interactions significantly added to the prediction of the dependent variables beyond the independent effects of each variable.

Consistent with the recommendations of Cohen, Cohen, Aiken, & West (2003), statistically significant interactions were probed using simple slopes analyses to determine the nature of the interaction effect. To do this, two simple regression analyses were used to test the significance of the simple slopes of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction.
with School Quality on Parent/Guardian Knowledge at various levels of Prioritization of Academic Factors. Values of the Prioritization of Academic Factors that were one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the centered mean of Prioritization of Academic Factors were used to form two separate conditional variables that represented high and low levels of Prioritization of Academic Factors (Cohen et al., 2003). Then, conditional interaction terms were formed as the cross-product of Parent/Guardian Knowledge and the high conditional prioritization of academic factors variable and the low conditional prioritization of academic factors variable. One post-hoc regression analysis was conducted for each of the two conditions. More specifically, each post-hoc regression analysis included the main effect of Parent/Guardian Knowledge, a conditional interaction variable, and the conditional independent variable. These analyses allowed for the manipulation of the 0 point of the moderator to examine conditional effects of Parent/Guardian Knowledge on Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality. The examination of the conditional interaction term provided additional information about the interaction of Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Prioritization of Academic Factors, indicating the ways in which the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality is different for varying levels of Prioritization of Academic Factors.

Results

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the study’s variables. Participants generally chose schools with moderate to high Academic Rigor, as indicated by the mean score and standard deviation of Academic Rigor ($M = 85.69; SD = 9.64$, range: 0-120). The mean score for Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality
also indicated that participants were satisfied with the quality of several characteristics of their schools ($M = 3.36; SD = .80$). An examination of the descriptive statistics for the independent variables suggests that parents/guardians also reported high levels of empowerment, both in terms of Parent/Guardian Knowledge ($M = 4.17; SD = .83$) and Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence ($M = 4.35; SD = .62$). While both variables had high means, the mean score for Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence was slightly higher than that for Parent/Guardian Knowledge. On the other hand, the variability was
Table 5. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations of Phase II Study Variables (N = 110)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. P/G Knowledge</td>
<td>4.17 (.83)</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. P/G Competence</td>
<td>4.35 (.62)</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Academic</td>
<td>.21 (.14)</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nonacademic</td>
<td>.32 (.23)</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Academic Rigor</td>
<td>85.69 (9.64)</td>
<td>0-120</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.36 (.80)</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Education</td>
<td>2.83 (1.92)</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Income</td>
<td>1.86 (.92)</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. P/G Knowledge = Parent/Guardian Knowledge; P/G Competence = Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence; Academic = Prioritization of Academic Factors; Nonacademic = Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors; Satisfaction = Satisfaction with School Quality; Education = Educational Attainment; Income = Household Income; Means and standard deviations are based on transformed variables. **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05
greater for Parent/Guardian Knowledge than for Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence. Parents/guardians also reported fairly low Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors. These variable scores represent standardized values ranging from 0 to 1. Neither Prioritization of Academic Factors nor Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors had a mean score above 0.50, indicating that parents/guardians largely selected less than half of the available factors listed as potential priorities for them. Parents/guardians in this study reported slightly greater Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors (\(M = .32; SD = .23\)) than Prioritization of Academic factors (\(M = .21; SD = .14\)).

An examination of the bivariate correlations reveals several statistically significant relationships among the study’s variables. Specifically, there was a significant and positive relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality (\(r = .42; p < 0.01\)), indicating that participants with greater perceptions of empowerment related to their knowledge also reported greater satisfaction with the quality of their schools of choice. Both the Prioritization of Academic Factors (\(r = .33; p < 0.01\)) and Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors (\(r = .20; p < 0.05\)) also were statistically and positively related to Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality. In this sample, parents/guardians who reported greater Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors also reported greater Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality. Both of these relationships, however, were only moderate in strength. The Prioritization of Academic (\(r = .28; p < 0.01\)) and Nonacademic (\(r = .21; p < 0.05\)) Factors also were both significantly and positively related to Academic Rigor, as parents/guardians with greater Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors also chose schools with higher Academic Rigor scores. Again,
these relationships were only moderate in strength. Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence was not significantly related to any of the dependent variables.

As expected, an examination of the relationships among the independent variables indicated a strong statistically significant and positive relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence ($r = .65; p < 0.01$). Parent/Guardian Knowledge also was significantly and positively related to the Prioritization of Academic Factors ($r = .25; p < 0.01$), but not significantly related to the Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors. Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence was not significantly related to any other independent variables in the study. There was a statistically significant, positive relationship between the Prioritization of Academic Factors and the Prioritization of Nonacademic Priorities ($r = .54; p < 0.01$), indicating that parents/guardians who had a greater amount of academic priorities also had a greater amount of nonacademic priorities. The study’s two dependent variables were significantly and positively related ($r = .25; p < 0.01$) as well. Parents/guardians in this sample who chose schools with greater Academic Rigor also reported greater satisfaction with the quality of their schools.

Additionally, the two covariates in this study, Household Income and Educational Attainment, were both significantly and positively related to Academic Rigor, but not significantly related to Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality. These two covariates also were significantly and positively related to each other. So, in this sample, parents/guardians with higher incomes also were more likely to have greater educational attainment and more likely to choose schools that were more academically rigorous. Parents/guardians with higher incomes and greater educational attainment were not,
however, more likely to report greater satisfaction with the quality of their schools of choice.

**Canonical Correlation Analysis.** A canonical correlation analysis was conducted to address the first research question of this study: Is Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors related to Quality of Choice? This allowed for the relationships between the predictor variables and the quality of parents/guardians’ school choice variables to be examined.

The canonical correlation analysis yielded two functions with squared canonical correlations of .27 and .03. Collectively, the full model across both functions was statistically significant (Wilk’s $\lambda = .71, F(8, 208.00) = 4.88, p < .001$). Wilk’s $\lambda$ represents the variance unexplained by the model, thus $1 - \lambda$ yields the full model effect size. The set of two canonical functions in this analysis explained 29% of the variance shared between the variable sets.

While the full model was statistically significant, only the first function explained a statistically significant amount of shared variance between the sets ($p < .001$). Function 2 did not explain a statistically significant amount of shared variance between the variable sets, $F(3, 105) = .97, p = .40$. The first canonical correlation for the first function, $R_c = .52$, suggested a moderate relationship between the sets of variables, explaining 27.16% of the variance in the dependent quality of choice canonical variate. The canonical correlation for the second function, $R_c = .16$ explained only .03% of the variance in the dependent Quality of Choice variable. Only the value of the first function met the 10% criterion for overlap in variance deemed as meaningful by Tabachnik & Fidell (2007). As such, only the first function was interpreted.
Function 1. Canonical loadings provide additional information about the contribution of each variable to the multivariate relationships in Function 1. Table 6 presents the standardized canonical function coefficients, structure coefficients, and the squared structure coefficients for the function. Structure coefficients above .45 are noted in bold type to show the variables deemed useful for interpretation (Sherry & Henson, 2005). The canonical loadings indicated that Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality ($r_s = .96$) and Academic Rigor ($r_s = .51$) were both meaningful criterion variables; Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality, however, was the most meaningful variable in the criterion set, as it explained 92.16% of the variance in the variable set. Academic Rigor explained 26.01% of the variance in the variable set.

Among the predictor variables, Parent/Guardian Knowledge was the most relevant variable in the variable set, as indicated by the large structure coefficient ($r_s = .79$) and the standardized canonical function coefficient (.88). Prioritization of Academic Factors was relevant ($r_s = .72$), explaining 51.84% of the variance in the variable set. Finally, Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors ($r_s = .45$) also was a relevant predictor variable in Function 1, explaining 20.25% of the variance in the set. All relevant variables in both the predictor set and the criterion set were positively related. All of the predictor variables were positively related to the criterion variables in Function 1. Finally, Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence was not identified as a meaningful variable in this analysis. This was indicated by the low structure coefficient ($r_s = .33$), and it only explained 10.89% of the variance in the variable set.
Table 6. Canonical Solution for Parents/Guardians’ Decision-Making Predicting Quality of Choice for Function 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef</th>
<th>$r_s$</th>
<th>$r_s^2$ (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictor Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/guardian Knowledge</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>62.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/guardian Perceived Competence</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>10.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritization of Academic Factors</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>51.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>20.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R_s^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criterion Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Rigor</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>26.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/guardian Satisfaction with School Quality</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>92.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Structure coefficients ($r_s$) greater than |.45| (45%) are in **bold**. Coef = standardized canonical function coefficient; $r_s$ = structure coefficient; $r_s^2$ = squared structure coefficient.
Hierarchical Multiple Regression. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to answer the study’s second research question, specifically exploring if the relationship between Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Quality of Choice was moderated by Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors. The analyses built upon the results of the canonical correlation analysis described above. More specifically, the results of the canonical correlation analysis found that many of the study variables were meaningful in understanding the relationship between Parent/Guardian Decision-Making and Quality of Choice. Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence, however, was not a meaningful variable in this relationship; and, it was not included (Sherry & Hensen, 2005). As such, two separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to individually explore the relationship between the independent variables (Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Prioritization of Academic Factors, and Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors) and the two separate measures of Quality of Choice. Also, each analysis explored the interactions among the independent variables and their relationships with each Quality of Choice variable.

Parent/guardian satisfaction with school quality. A hierarchical regression was used to examine any relationships the predictor variables may have with Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality, as well as determine if the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors were moderating variables in the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Satisfaction with School Quality. Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Prioritization of Academic Factors, and Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors were entered in Step 1 of the hierarchical regression, followed by the interaction of these variables in Step 2. Consistent with the recommendations of Aiken and West
(1991), the interaction variables were formed as the cross-product of the centered
variables. Table 8 outlines the results of the hierarchical regression analysis on
Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality.

Specifically, the omnibus F-test on Step 1 of the regression indicated that the
model accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in Satisfaction with
School Quality ($F(3, 106) = 11.10, p < .01$). The adjusted $R^2$ value for the model in Step
1 was .22, indicating that the optimal linear combination of the independent variables
accounted for 22% of the variability in Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality.
Parent/Guardian Knowledge was the only statistically significant predictor of variability
in Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality ($\beta = .37, p < .01$). The Prioritization
of Academic Factors did not predict a significant amount of variability in
Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality ($\beta = .20, p > .05$), and neither did the
Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors ($\beta = .08, p > .05$).

The omnibus F-test for Step 2 of the regression also indicated that the model
accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in Parent/Guardian
Satisfaction with School Quality ($F(2, 104) = 8.09, p < .01$) with an adjusted $R^2$ value for
the model on Step 2 of .25. Parent/Guardian Knowledge again was the greatest predictor
of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality ($\beta = .37, p < .01$). The relationship
between these two variables was positive, indicating that parents/guardians with greater
knowledge were more likely to report greater satisfaction with the quality of their schools
of choice. The interaction of Parent/Guardian Knowledge and the Prioritization of
Academic Factors was a statistically significant predictor of the variability in
Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$). As outlined in Table 8, however, the interaction terms entered on Step 2 did not significantly add to the prediction of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality above and beyond the independent effect of Parent/Guardian Knowledge ($\Delta R^2 = .04, p > .05$).

The results of simple slope analyses suggested that the simple slope for the high Prioritization of Academic Factors regression line was statistically significant and positive, as indicated by the significance test of the Parent/Guardian Knowledge variable ($\beta = .57, p < .001$). The simple slope for the low Prioritization of Academic Factors regression line was not statistically significant ($\beta = .16, p > .05$). As such, the change in Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality was only statistically significant for the high Prioritization of Academic Factors regression line. The positive direction for this relationship indicated that as Parent/Guardian Knowledge increased, Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality also increased.
Table 8. Summary of Regression Analysis Predicting Satisfaction with School Quality (N = 110)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>β</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/G Knowledge</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prioritization of Academic Factors</td>
<td>18.27</td>
<td>9.41</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>17.02</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors</td>
<td>11.06</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>14.48</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>P/G Knowledge x Academic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.50</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/G Knowledge x Nonacademic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
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<td>$F$</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11.10**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.09**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.22</td>
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<td>.25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. P/G Knowledge = Parent/Guardian Knowledge; P/G Knowledge x Academic = Parent/Guardian Knowledge x Prioritization of Academic Factors; P/G Knowledge x Nonacademic = Parent/Guardian Knowledge x Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors; *$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .03, p = .06$.*
**Academic Rigor.** The second analysis tested whether Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors moderates the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and the Academic Rigor of their schools of choice when controlling for Household Income and Educational Attainment. As in the analysis examining Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality, the study’s independent variables were included as predictors in this hierarchical regression analysis. The addition of Household Income and Educational Attainment was determined based on previous school choice research that determined that parents/guardians who chose charter schools had higher incomes and greater educational attainment (Schneider et al., 1998). In addition, the correlation analyses in this study indicated that both Household Income and Educational Attainment were positively related to Academic Rigor. As such, Household Income and Educational Attainment were entered as covariates in this hierarchical regression analysis.

To do so, Household Income and Educational Attainment were entered on Step 1, allowing for the analyses in subsequent steps to control for any effects of Household Income and Educational Attainment on the independent and dependent variables. Then, Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Prioritization of Academic Factors, and Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors were all entered on Step 2 of the hierarchical regression, followed by the interaction of Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Prioritization of Academic Factors and the interaction of Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors on Step 3. Again, the interaction terms were formed as described for the first analysis consistent with the recommendations of Aiken and West (1991). Step 2 explored
whether the interaction terms significantly added to the prediction of Academic Rigor above and beyond the independent effects of each independent variable.

Table 9 outlines the results of the hierarchical regression analysis on Academic Rigor. The omnibus F-test on Step 1 of the regression indicated that the model accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in Academic Rigor ($F(2, 107) = 3.65, p < .05$) with an adjusted $R^2$ value for the model in Step 1 of .05. The individual significance tests show that household income was a significant and positive predictor of the variability in Academic Rigor ($\beta = .22, p < .05$). Educational Attainment was not a significant predictor of the variability in Academic Rigor ($\beta = .08, p > .05$).

The omnibus F-test for Step 2 of the regression also indicated that the model accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in Academic Rigor ($F(5, 104) = 3.52, p < .01$) and the adjusted $R^2$ value for the model on Step 2 was .10. As indicated in Table 9, household income was still a significant and positive predictor of the variability in Academic Rigor ($\beta = .25, p < .05$). In addition, the Prioritization of Academic Factors also was a significant and positive predictor of Academic Rigor ($\beta = .24, p < .05$), although the change in $R^2$ was small ($\Delta R^2 = .08, p < .05$). None of the other independent variables predicted a statistically significant amount of the variability in Academic Rigor.

Finally, the results of the omnibus F-test for Step 3 of the regression also indicated that this model accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in Academic Rigor ($F(7, 102) = 3.18, p < .01$). The adjusted $R^2$ value for the model in Step 3 was .12, indicating that the optimal linear combination of the independent variables
accounted for 12% of the variability in Academic Rigor. As in Step 2, Household Income ($\beta = .26, p < .01$) and Prioritization of Academic Factors ($\beta = .27, p < .05$) were the only statistically significant predictors of variability in Academic Rigor. In addition, both variables were positively related to Academic Rigor, suggesting that parents/guardians with greater household incomes were more likely to choose more academically rigorous schools, as were parents/guardians with more academic priorities. When entered with the other variables, neither of the interaction terms entered in Step 3 predicted a significant amount of variability in Academic Rigor, indicating that neither the Prioritization of Academic Factors nor Nonacademic Factors moderated the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Academic Rigor ($\Delta R^2 = .03, p > .05$). In this hierarchical regression analysis, when controlling for Household Income, only the Prioritization of Academic Factors was a significant predictor of variability in Academic Rigor. Results indicated, however, that this variable predicted only a small amount of variability in Academic Rigor above and beyond the direct effect of Household Income.
Table 9. Summary of Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Rigor (N = 110)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>54339.22</td>
<td>24351.20</td>
<td>.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9077.71</td>
<td>10979.28</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/G Knowledge</td>
<td>163.59</td>
<td>555.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>218909.43</td>
<td>104558.77</td>
<td>.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonacademic</td>
<td>119008.48</td>
<td>160614.66</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/G Knowledge x Academic</td>
<td>-4484.53</td>
<td>2672.31</td>
<td>-.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/G Knowledge x Nonacademic</td>
<td>8364.73</td>
<td>4353.00</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 9 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>3.65*</td>
<td>3.52**</td>
<td>3.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Income = Household Income; Education = Educational Attainment; P/G Knowledge = Parent/Guardian Knowledge; Academic = Prioritization of Academic Factors; Nonacademic = Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors; $p<.05$; **$p<.01$; Step 2 $\Delta R^2 = .08, p<.05$; Step 3 $\Delta R^2 = .03, p = .12$
Chapter 5: Discussion

This study utilized empowerment theory to develop a measure of Parent/Guardian Empowerment related to schools. Two research questions guided the study:

1) Is Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors related to the Quality of School Choice?

2) Is the relationship between Parent/Guardian Empowerment and the Quality of Choice moderated by parent/guardian Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors?

This study included two phases. The first phase developed a measure of Parent/Guardian Empowerment. The second examined relationships among Parent/Guardian Empowerment, Prioritization of Academic Factors, Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors, and Quality of School Choice. The findings from both phases are discussed in this chapter, first highlighting key findings for Phase I and Phase II. Study limitations are then discussed, as well as implications for research, policy, and practice presented. Conclusions are drawn to summarize the main findings and utility of the study.

Phase I

Phase 1 found that the 15-item P/GES is a psychometrically sound tool for measuring parent/guardian perceptions of empowerment in school contexts. The P/GES was modified from the FES, perhaps the most widely cited measure of parent/guardian empowerment in behavior and mental health treatment settings (Koren, DeChillo, &
The EFA conducted in Phase I of the study provided initial support for the factorial structure of the tool, as well as indicated that the tool has adequate reliability and face validity. More specifically, the EFA yielded a two-factor solution comprised of one factor measuring knowledge and one factor measuring perceived competence, two of the three factors included in the FES. Further details are provided next.

**Parent/Guardian Knowledge.** The EFA in this study yielded a seven-item factor, termed Parent/Guardian Knowledge. As in the FES, the individual items in this factor largely reflect parent/guardian understanding of the relevant social context. In relation to school choice, these items assess parent/guardian understanding of their children’s education, local school system, and potential roles and responsibilities parents/guardians might have in relation to schooling. This factor accounted for the largest amount of variance in the scale as well.

These findings are consistent with other empirical examinations of the FES’ underlying factor structure. Specifically, Singh et al. (1995) identified knowledge as a factor in their confirmatory factor analysis of the FES, noting that the knowledge factor in their study accounted for the most variance in their analysis. As such, the knowledge subscale of the P/GES is a measure of Parent/Guardian Knowledge in relation to schools as one component of Parent/Guardian Empowerment in school choice contexts. Furthermore, the Parent/Guardian Knowledge factor demonstrated strong internal consistency.

**Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence.** The second factor that emerged in the EFA was termed Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence. This factor explained less variance than the Parent/Guardian Knowledge factor, but is still identified as a dimension
of Parent/Guardian Empowerment in schools. In the P/GES, the Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence factor assesses parent/guardian perceptions of their abilities and actions related to making decisions for their children’s education once they have made a school choice decision. As with the Parent/Guardian Knowledge factor, Singh et al.’s (1995) investigation of the FES also noted competence as a strong factor in the FES. While the latent variable of competence is evident in this measure, the individual items represent a slight departure from other researchers’ conceptualizations of competence. This factor is titled “perceived competence” because the nature of the assessment limits participants’ responses to only perceptual data. As such, the items (and data gleaned from the measure) reflect participants’ perceptions of their abilities and actions related to making decisions for their children’s education. The items in this factor also demonstrated strong internal consistency.

**Other Findings.** The original FES also included a third factor, self-efficacy. This factor, however, was not supported in the P/GES. Despite research supporting self-efficacy as a dimension of empowerment, an underlying factor measuring self-efficacy did not emerge in this study. Previous research and established measures of empowerment, such as the FES, identify self-efficacy as an important component of empowerment. In the context of school choice, self-efficacy refers to parent/guardian judgments of their own capabilities to execute actions required to make a school choice decision. In relation to self-efficacy, the findings of the EFA are not consistent with previous models of empowerment.

The findings related to self-efficacy may be due to concerns that Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) raise in regard to competence. They note that “before a person has taken
action, assessing their perceptions of their own competencies is the same as assessing their self-efficacy” (p. 653). It is possible that items designed to assess the self-efficacy and competence components of empowerment did not have adequate precision to yield two separate factors for each component. For instance, item 10 (“I feel confident in my ability to help my child grown and develop in school.”) is an item that was designed in accordance with Bandura’s (1986) recommendations for the development of self-efficacy measures. Additionally, five of the eight items that make up the Parent/Guardian Perceived Competence factor were modified items from the original FES. Singh et al.’s (1995) factor analysis of the FES found that these five original items loaded onto one factor that they termed self-efficacy. Although the P/GES only modified these items to relate to the school context, these items did not load onto a factor assessing self-efficacy in this study. It is possible that items created to specifically measure parent/guardian self-efficacy in relation to school choice, rather than those modified from an existing measure, may have loaded onto a separate factor that assessed self-efficacy. Perhaps items designed using only Bandura’s (1986) recommendations for item creation would have been more precise and yielded different results in the EFA, as these items might be more sensitive to the latent variable of self-efficacy than items in the FES. Still, as Catteneo and Chapman (2010) suggest, the distinction between perceived competence and self-efficacy may be too small to identify in this measure of empowerment.

**Phase II**

Findings from Phase II examined the study’s two primary research questions by exploring the relationships among Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Prioritization of Academic Factors, Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors, Parent/Guardian Satisfaction
with School Quality, and the Academic Rigor of schools of choice. Several findings emerged that contribute to the knowledge base related to parent/guardian decision-making in school choice contexts.

**Primary variables related to Quality of School Choice.** Findings from the canonical correlation analysis found three primary variables related to Quality of School Choice, including: (1) Parent/Guardian Knowledge; (2) Prioritization of Academic Factors; and (3) Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors. Each is an important element to consider in relation to parent/guardian decision-making processes in school choice contexts. The analysis indicated that parent/guardian decision-making and quality of school choice are moderately related, with Parent/Guardian Knowledge explaining the greatest amount of variance in Quality of School Choice.

**Parent/guardian knowledge.** The results of the canonical correlation analysis indicate that parent/guardian knowledge is an important parent/guardian decision-making factor in school choice. In this study, Parent/Guardian Knowledge is defined as parent/guardian understanding of their children’s education, local school system, and potential roles and responsibilities parents/guardians might have in relation to schooling. Findings suggest that parent/guardian knowledge is positively related to quality of school choice, suggesting that the more knowledge parents/guardians have about their children’s schooling, the more likely they are to choose high quality schools.

This finding is consistent with existing research on empowerment theory and parent/guardian decision-making. Cattaneo and Chapman’s (2010) model of empowerment includes knowledge as a central component of an empowerment process, noting that individuals must have knowledge of available resources, power dynamics, and
relevant processes involved in achieving a goal. As such, parents/guardians who are more knowledgeable of the educational context in their communities, including various power dynamics and available resources, may experience greater empowerment as they make decisions for their children’s schooling. As found here, parent/guardian knowledge is related to the quality of their school choices as well.

Several other researchers also note the importance of knowledge in an empowerment process, especially knowledge that brings about an awareness of social inequality (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Gutierrez, 1998; Hur, 2006). Knowledge is essential as individuals begin to take action toward their empowerment-oriented goals. Here, Parent/Guardian Knowledge is a relevant correlate of Quality of School Choice, as parents/guardians with greater knowledge may be more empowered to create change. For instance, parents/guardians who experience greater empowerment may choose higher quality schools because they know how to distinguish among the many types of school options available. They also may have greater knowledge of the school choice process, allowing them to successfully navigate complicated systems and, ultimately, enroll their children in higher quality schools.

**Prioritization of academic factors.** Prioritization of Academic Factors in this study is defined as the perceived importance of academic school characteristics to parents/guardians in the school choice decision-making process. Findings suggest that the Prioritization of Academic Factors also is a primary variable related to Quality of School Choice. In fact, Prioritization of Academic Factors is the most meaningful predictor variable in the canonical correlation analysis. The relationship between Prioritization of Academic Factors and Quality of School Choice was positive as well. These findings
support that parent/guardians in this study who placed greater priority on academic school characteristics were more likely to choose high quality schools.

This study’s findings are consistent with previous studies on parent/guardian priorities in schools. For instance, parents/guardians in other studies overwhelmingly indicate that academic priorities are their most important consideration in choosing schools (Bosetti, 1994; Witte, 2000). This is especially relevant given the way in which school quality is measured in this study. The measure of Academic Rigor is the Performance Index, a weighted index based on students’ test scores. The measure of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality is an assessment of participants’ perceptions of the academic quality of their schools. As parents/guardians prioritize academics in their school choice decision-making, they are more likely to choose schools that are more academically rigorous and report greater satisfaction with the quality of several characteristics of their schools, including academics. These types of choices are consistent with the expectations of school choice policies, as the assumption is that parents/guardians will choose schools that are academically rigorous.

Prioritization of nonacademic factors. This study found that the Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors also is a meaningful positive correlate of quality of choice. The strength of the relationship, however, is minimal. In other words, parents/guardians in this study who prioritized nonacademic factors, such as school location, safety, and extracurricular activities, were more likely to choose high quality schools, but the relationship was somewhat weak. This finding is aligned with existing research indicating that nonacademic priorities are important in parent/guardian decision-making. This is
similar to other studies (e.g., Buckley & Schneider, 2007) that found parent/guardian nonacademic priorities to be important in parent/guardian school choice decision-making.

For instance, factors such as location, safety, extracurricular opportunities, or demographic characteristics of the student population have been found to impact parent/guardian decision making (Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Neild, 2005). Moreover, Bell’s research highlights the importance of structural factors in parent/guardian school choice decision-making, such as the geographical constraints of individuals’ communities and the available choice sets that limit parent/guardian school options. The relationship between Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors and Quality of School Choice was not particularly strong. While parents/guardians in this study may prioritize nonacademic factors in their school choice decision-making, these factors were not related to the quality of their choices as strongly as the Prioritization of Nonacademic Factors.

Taken together, the canonical correlation findings related to Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors indicate that parents/guardians who have more academic priorities are more likely to choose higher quality schools. These findings point to important considerations in the relationship between parent/guardian decision-making and the quality of schools of choice. Parents/guardians who prioritize academic school characteristics may choose schools that are of higher quality. Those who prioritize nonacademic school characteristics may also choose schools that are high quality, but this is less likely. Parents/guardians in this study seemed to prioritize both academic and nonacademic factors, but to varying extents. Thus, some may have enrolled their children in schools that are not high quality because they prioritize other characteristics. This is of particular concern if schools are high quality in some aspects of schooling and low
quality in others. For instance, a school that is academically rigorous but does not offer quality opportunities for social-emotional development. These findings are an important contribution to the literature because few studies examine the quality of the school choice outcome in relation to parents/guardians’ priorities. Findings from additional analyses further explore these relationships and provide additional insights related to parent/guardian decision-making and school choice.

**Predictors of Quality of School Choice.** Additional analyses were conducted to explore specific predictors of Quality of School Choice and any moderating relationships among Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors, and Quality of School Choice. The findings from these additional analyses are presented here.

**Parent/guardian knowledge.** Findings suggest that Parent/Guardian Knowledge is related to Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality. In this study, parents/guardians who report greater knowledge of their school systems and their children’s educational rights also report that they are more satisfied with the quality of the schools they choose for their children.

These findings are consistent with the results of the canonical correlation analysis and support an application of empowerment theory to school choice contexts. Empowerment theory suggests that parents/guardians with more knowledge are more empowered, and thus choose schools that are high quality because they know how to navigate the education system, are aware of their rights, and understand the relevant processes. As such, parent/guardian knowledge may be essential for change to occur.
within school choice contexts. The relationship between parent/guardian knowledge and the quality of parents/guardians’ school choices, however, may be complex.

While knowledge is a significant predictor of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality in this study (as measured by parents/guardians’ subjective assessments of quality and objective assessments of students’ academic proficiency), it does not necessarily predict academic rigor. Further, when comparing the two models, it is important to note that Parent/Guardian Knowledge alone predicted a greater amount of variance in parent/guardian satisfaction than the total effect of all the variables in the model predicting academic rigor. These results suggest that Parent/Guardian Empowerment is more related to Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality than it is to the Academic Rigor of choice schools. This finding is interesting as parents/guardians who experience greater empowerment may perceive that their schools of choice are higher quality, but this study indicates that parents/guardians with greater empowerment are not more likely to choose schools that are academically rigorous. Again, school choice policies assume that parents/guardians will experience greater power as consumers in the educational market and will choose schools that are academically rigorous as a result. This assumption of school choice policy is not supported with this study’s sample of parents/guardians.

A consideration of choice sets provides one potential explanation for these findings. Parents/guardians often have limited options when choosing schools for their children, and their choice sets are frequently constrained by a variety of factors (e.g., availability, location, safety). This is particularly true for low income and racial and ethnic minority parents/guardians in urban areas (Dillon, 2008). In this study, the
parents/guardians all live within the same school district, which has received poor academic performance ratings for 10 years. As such, the majority of schools within this district are considered poor-performing schools. There are few options for high performing schools in this community. Parents/guardians in this study may have considerable knowledge related to education, but they may have been limited by their choice sets in the community. Thus, despite their knowledge of the school system, they still might be unable to select schools that are academically rigorous. Such contextual constraints on parent/guardian decision-making are common in large urban districts serving low-income and racial and ethnic minority students, as historical segregation and concentrated poverty create large pockets of poor-performing schools (Dillon, 2008).

In addition, it is important to consider that choice sets, as well as parent/guardian decision-making, are relative to one’s own experiences, as people evaluate their choices in light of their own opinions, values, knowledge, and personal history. Several decision-making theories (e.g., prospect theory, accommodation theory) emphasize that individuals make decisions based on their own expectations, values, and heuristics (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). These theories suggest that parents/guardians in school choice contexts are constantly comparing their current schools to their children’s previous schools. Given this, parents/guardians in this study may perceive their schools as higher quality because their schools of choice are, in fact, higher quality than the schools their children attended before. It is important to note, however, that the schools parents/guardians in this study choose still may not be academically rigorous, as this study’s measure of academic rigor was an index of student’s test scores. As has been noted previously, parent/guardian perceptions of quality are influenced by a variety of
other factors such as their perceptions of the quality of other schools and the heuristics they use to evaluate quality (Teske & Schneider, 2001),

While school choice policies assume that parent/guardians make rational choices, other decision-making theories (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Meyers & Jordan 2006), along with Bell’s (2009a) research on choice sets, point to the complexity of school choice. As parents/guardians compare their potential options to their previous schools, they may not perceive their choices as improvements. Even if parent/guardian choice sets in this sample include high-performing schools, parents/guardians may not perceive these schools as high-performing. In the end, parents/guardians may not choose these schools for their children because they do not feel that the potential benefits outweigh the costs. It is possible that parents/guardians in this sample who prioritize academics are not more likely to choose academically rigorous schools because they do not perceive that high performing schools are an option, or are even academically rigorous.

Together, these findings indicate that parents/guardians who experience greater empowerment, specifically empowerment defined as knowledge of their children’s education and local school system, choose schools that they view as high quality. These schools, however, are not necessarily schools that are considered high quality by objective measures of academic outcomes. School choice policies place parents/guardians in roles of consumers in educational markets, assuming that they will demand (via school choice) schools that are academically rigorous. Over time, parent/guardian demands will shape the market and schools overall will become more academically rigorous; thus,
students’ academic performance will improve and academic disparities will diminish. This study, however, does not support the school choice policy assumptions.

While parents/guardians in this study who experience greater empowerment are more likely to choose schools that they perceive as high quality, parents/guardians’ perceptions of quality may not be aligned with the policy’s indicators of quality (i.e., student test scores). Several other indicators of quality may be of importance to parents/guardians, such as opportunities for social-emotional development, a safe learning environment, or adequate physical facilities. Parents/guardians with differing priorities may experience empowerment differently, and choose schools of differing quality for their children. This study further examined parent/guardian empowerment and priorities in school choice to determine if the Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors had moderating effects on the relationship between Parent/Guardian Empowerment and Quality of School Choice. The findings of these analyses indicate that the relationship between Parent/Guardian Decision-Making and Quality of School Choice is different for parents/guardians who hold different priorities. More details follow.

**Prioritization of academic factors.** The hierarchical regression analysis suggests that Parent/Guardian Knowledge is a significant and positive predictor of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality. In addition, the analyses indicated that the Prioritization of Academic Factors moderates the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality. While the moderating effect is statistically significant, it does not explain a substantial amount of variance in Satisfaction with School Quality above and beyond the other
predictors in the model. Although the change in $R^2$ was minimal, simple slopes analyses of the moderating effect indicate interesting relationships among Parent/Guardian Knowledge, Prioritization of Academic Factors, and Parent/Guardian Perception of School Quality that are important to note in relation to school choice.

More specifically, simple slopes analyses of the moderating effect suggest that parents/guardians who prioritize academic school characteristics and have more knowledge of the education system are more likely to be satisfied with their schools of choice. The interaction effect, however, is not significant for parents/guardians who prioritize fewer academic school characteristics. These findings indicate that parents/guardians with different priorities and different levels of knowledge may make different school choices as well. An application of empowerment theory to school choice indicates that parents who have more knowledge will choose schools that are of greater quality; and, previous analyses in this study indicate significant relationships between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Quality of School Choice. Rational choice theory posits that parents/guardians who have knowledge and prioritize academics will choose schools that maximize the potential for positive academic outcomes (Coleman & Fararo, 1992). This study’s findings support these theories, as parents/guardians in this study who prioritize academics and have more knowledge are more likely to choose schools that they think are better quality.

This study also found that the Prioritization of Academic Factors is a predictor of Academic Rigor, but it only explains a small amount of variance in Academic Rigor. This finding provides further insights into parent/guardian decision-making in school choice, specifically in light of Meyers and Jordan’s (2006) research on parents/guardians’
childcare decisions. Their accommodation model emphasizes that parents/guardians consider a number of factors when making decisions, and their ultimate decisions are an “accommodation” to the environments in which they live (Meyers & Jordan, 2006, p. 4).

As Meyers and Jordan’s model suggests, parents/guardians in this study may prioritize academic factors in their school choice decision-making, but their prioritization of academic factors is not the greatest predictor of their choice. As such, there may be a number of other factors that they consider in their school choice decision-making that have stronger relationships with the quality of their school choice. For instance, parents/guardians may prioritize their family’s previous experiences with a school, its location in relation to other community organizations (e.g., community centers, parks, etc.), or its connections to other available resources (e.g., food banks, health services). This study includes a set of academic and nonacademic priorities from which parents/guardians may choose. Some factors that are not measured here indeed may be important to parents/guardians. Accommodation theory perhaps is especially relevant in this study, as its sample is limited to racial and ethnic minorities, many of which are low-income. Families living in poverty and/or historically marginalized often are struggling to meet basic needs. As such, they may have other priorities that are not included in this study.

A potential explanation for the weak relationship between Prioritization of Academic Factors and Academic Rigor may be that parents/guardians’ priorities are dependent upon the information they have about schools. Parents/guardians largely utilize informal, interpersonal networks to gain information about schools (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Additionally, Hastings and Weinstein (2000) note that parents/guardians
make different school choices dependent upon the availability and the type of information they have. Parents/guardians in this study may prioritize academic school characteristics, but not have the knowledge of the education system to navigate the school choice process and choose schools that are academically rigorous.

In summary, parents/guardians in this study who are more empowered also are more satisfied with the quality of their schools, and chose schools that they believe are of higher quality. This relationship is moderated by the extent to which they prioritize academic factors in schools. While this relationship holds, the relationship between Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Academic Rigor is not significant. School choice policies assume that parents/guardians will choose schools that are academically rigorous. The results of this study indicate that parents/guardians who are more empowered do not necessarily choose schools that are more academically rigorous, but they feel as though their selected schools are of higher quality than parents/guardians who report less empowerment. These findings are important in relation to current school choice policies, as parents/guardians’ perceptions of quality and actual school quality may be quite different.

Market theories of education suggest that school choice policies will position parents/guardians’ as consumers, increase competition, and improve academic outcomes (Chubb & Moe, 1990). In relation to this study’s findings, it is possible that the outcomes of school choice policies may rely heavily on parents/guardians’ perceptions of quality. In the end, school choice policies may not improve academic outcomes for students if parents/guardians do not choose schools that are academically rigorous. Instead, parents/guardians may prioritize academics, and choose schools that they perceive as
high quality, but these schools may not be high-performing when measured by objective indicators of students’ academic outcomes.

**Income and educational attainment.** Finally, Parent/Guardian Household Income was a significant and positive predictor of Academic Rigor, to nearly the same extent that Prioritization of Academic Factors was a predictor of Academic Rigor. This is consistent with existing research on school choice, as most studies indicate that parent/guardian socioeconomic status is related to multiple components of parent/guardian decision-making. For instance, research notes that parents/guardians with higher incomes are more likely to choose charter schools for their children (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999), utilize more academic information to make school choice decisions (Bosetti, 2004), and are more engaged with their children’s schools after making a school choice (Goldring & Phillips, 1998). In addition, considerable research notes that parents/guardians with higher incomes place greater priority on academic factors and utilize more formal networks to gain information about schools (Ball & Vincent, 1998). The findings in this study provide additional support for the relationship between income and parents/guardians’ decision-making. These findings echo other research indicating that low-income and racial and ethnic minority children traditionally have limited access to quality education (Anyon, 2009). As such, evidence is mounting that low-income and racial and ethnic minority children are disproportionately disadvantaged in the American education system.

Parents/guardians in this study who had higher household incomes were more likely to choose schools that were academically rigorous. This finding is especially notable in this study because over three-quarters of the sample reported that their
household incomes were less than $50,000. Generally, parents/guardians in this sample had moderately low household incomes, yet it still predicted variance in academic rigor. The persistent relationship between income and school quality evident throughout the literature is troubling, as parents/guardians who live in areas of concentrated poverty (such as participants in this study) are disproportionately impacted by the effects of poor performing schools. They experience limited choice sets and reduced resources to choose schools outside of their immediate communities (Bell, 2009a; Dillon, 2008). These findings related to income echo other researchers’ grave concerns that socioeconomic status is a significant determinant of children’s educational success (Ayon, 2009).

Educational attainment, however, was not a significant predictor of the academic rigor of parents/guardians’ schools of choice. This is not consistent with existing research that indicates that parents/guardians’ with more education prioritize academic factors more and are more likely to choose schools that are different from their neighborhood schools (Bosetti, 2004; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). Choice sets may, again, offer a potential explanation for this study’s findings. Parents/guardian educational attainment in this study may not predict academic rigor because parents/guardians may have limited options in their choice sets, particularly as this sample’s school district is historically low-performing. The majority of participants in this sample were low-income, African American mothers living in areas of high poverty. Parents/guardians in these communities generally have few options for their children, posing significant difficulties for parents/guardians who seek more educational opportunities for their children. Adults in these communities also typically experience fewer opportunities for employment, limiting their opportunities and options even more. As few studies examine predictors of
parent/guardian decision-making in school choice, it will be important to continue to investigate parent/guardian educational attainment as a potential predictor of academic rigor.

**Sample characteristics.** Two final findings related to the sample characteristics of Phase II are important to note as well. First, six outliers were removed from the analysis for Phase II due to exceptionally low scores on the Academic Rigor variable. All six participants who were removed attended the same charter school that had a Performance Index score greater than three standard deviations below the mean score for the sample. This charter school primarily served students who had previously dropped out of school and were returning to complete their high school educations. In many ways, this school is an exemplar of the schools that school choice policies are designed to create – it is a charter school sponsored by a local organization targeted at the lowest-performing, highest-risk youth. It is important to note that the participants in this study whose children attended this school chose a school that is extremely low-performing (as measured by the Performance Index score), even though they had a choice. This is one potential example of the limits of school choice policies, as parents/guardians and their children who are most in need of high quality education are constrained by other factors in their choice-making, such as previous educational experiences or other nonacademic barriers to learning.

The second important finding related to sample characteristics provides insight into the nature of schooling in this study’s community. Data in this study were collected in distinct zip codes within Columbus, Ohio. Given the traditional neighborhood model of schooling, one might expect that parents/guardians who attend community events
within one zip code may also enroll their children in schools located within these same zip codes. This study, however, found that parents/guardians did not choose schools that were predominately located within the zip codes in which they lived. As such, it was evident in this sample that participants chose schools throughout the metropolitan Columbus area. This finding is relevant to understanding school choice, as these policies broaden parents/guardians’ options and thus minimize the impact that public neighborhood schools may have on local communities.

Limitations

Research on parent/guardian decision-making in relation to the quality of parent/guardian schools of choice is limited. This study is an initial investigation to develop a measure of Parent/Guardian Empowerment and to identify and measure factors related to parent/guardian school choice decisions. The findings of this study provide additional information about Parent/Guardian Empowerment, Prioritization of Academic and Nonacademic Factors, and Quality of School Choice. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study must be considered in interpreting these findings. More specifically, this study relies on correlational research with specific limitations related to generalizability, survey design studies, and scale construction.

Both phases of this study used convenience sampling, a nonprobability sampling procedure that is particularly susceptible to bias. These sampling techniques are important to note, but pose limitations for the findings of Phase II especially. The sample size in Phase II poses limitations as it is only representative of a small percentage of parents/guardians in geographically distinct areas. This study did not use a random sample and thus the data cannot be generalized to other populations. Moreover, the local
context for this study limits generalizability of these findings. The organization and operation of educational systems are largely determined by local policies and procedures, particularly in relation to public schools. Participants in the second phase of the study lived within one specific educational system in Ohio. It is likely that parents/guardians in other regions may have differing viewpoints or processes related to school choice decision-making. Therefore, the results of the study must be interpreted cautiously in other geographical areas. Additionally, the use of small sample sizes warrants even further caution when drawing conclusions.

One also must consider the characteristics of the sample when interpreting these findings. The sample in Phase II is predominately African-American, low-income, and female. Other racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups are not adequately represented in this study. Additionally, male participants are under-represented in these samples. For these reasons, additional studies are needed to determine the applicability of these findings to broader groups. Although this sample was limited in diversity, it is important to consider the context of school choice policies. Participants in Phase II of this sample were largely low-income African-American mothers, precisely the parents/guardians that research identifies as the primary decision-makers related to children’s schooling (Andre-Bechely, 2005). School choice policies are targeted toward this population, and thus this study’s limited sample was as well.

The possibility of selection bias, specifically undercoverage and response bias in the sample are important to note, particularly in relation to Phase II (Dillman, 2000). Participants in this study were self-selected. It is possible that parents/guardians with especially strong opinions, or those more actively involved in their children’s
educations, were more compelled to complete the surveys than other parents/guardians. In addition, the sampling strategy in Phase II may have introduced potential bias in that data were collected in community-based agencies and organizations that are typically attended by those more engaged in their communities. As such, parents/guardians who are more actively engaged in their communities may be over-represented in this sample. These families may have more supports in place, and thus experience greater empowerment. Future research may focus more on parents/guardians who are less connected to their community organizations to inform understanding of parent/guardian decision-making further.

The use of survey measures also may pose a limitation in this study, specifically in relation to the study sample and target population. Research documents the substantial difficulty that parents/guardians have obtaining and understanding information about their schools and the broader education system in their communities (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Neild, 2005). This study only measured specific components of school choice decision-making and the survey measures, in some ways, required parents to have a foundational understanding of their child’s education system. While these measures are valid and reliable, a more complex measurement of parent/guardian empowerment and decision-making could allow for greater understanding of these constructs.

In addition, adequate measures of Quality of School Choice also are difficult to identify, as a number of indicators may signal a high quality school (e.g., student test scores, teacher ratings, opportunities for youth development). This is especially debatable in relation to academic rigor. Substantial research points to the difficulty of
evaluating children’s learning in schools, and some criticize exclusive use of student test scores as a measure of academic rigor (Chester, 2005). It will be important for research to continue to examine Quality of School Choice as a latent variable in itself.

Many of the measures used in this study are preliminary measures of the study's variables (e.g., Prioritization of Academic Factors, Satisfaction with School Quality), as little research has been done on parent/guardian decision-making in school choice. Moreover, the P/GES was developed in this study and is limited in its use to date. There are no confirmatory factor analyses of the P/GES and it has not been tested for invariance across multiple samples. Other important items or even, perhaps, domains of empowerment may be missing from this measure. Findings of this study should be considered cautiously in light of these measurement limitations.

Finally, there are limitations inherent to correlational research including the inability to determine causation. Correlational research only allows for the discovery of relationships among variables while more advanced statistical analyses can explore moderating and mediating effects among these variables. In addition, the use of hierarchical regression analyses poses analytical limitations, as it requires multiple analyses and thus increases the likelihood of Type I error (Cohen, Cohen, Aiken, & West, 2003). Further research can address these limitations and expand the knowledge base in these areas.

Implications for Future Research

Four specific suggestions for future research build upon this study to improve understanding of parent/guardian decision-making related to school choice: (1) the further exploration of potential predictors and covariates related to the quality of
parents/guardians’ school choices; (2) the examination of parent/guardian decision-making as it relates to both satisfaction with school quality and academic rigor; (3) a continued examination of empowerment theory in school choice; and, (4) the investigation of various sample characteristics.

**Predictors of the quality of choice schools.** This study only explored a few predictors of school choice (i.e., parent/guardian empowerment, prioritization of academic factors, and prioritization of nonacademic factors). The findings indicate that parent/guardian knowledge and academic priorities are significant and positive predictors of the quality of school choices. In addition, household income is a significant covariate in the relationship between parent/guardian knowledge and the academic rigor of choice schools. Further study of the predictors of school choice outcomes is warranted to improve understanding of parents/guardians’ decision-making related to school choice.

Numerous researchers note the importance of parent/guardian information-seeking in the school choice decision-making process (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Buckley & Schneider, 2007). This study’s finding that parent/guardian knowledge is the greatest predictor of satisfaction with school quality provides evidence that the information parents/guardians have about schools may be an additional factor worthy of examination. Specifically, future research should explore the information parents/guardians use in relation to both academic and nonacademic priorities as they predict school choice outcomes. Research in this area may provide specificity that is lacking in existing research on parent/guardian decision-making as it relates to the quality of schools of choice. For instance, some parents/guardians may have less information on nonacademic aspects of schools, and may be less likely to relate this to their appraisals of
school quality. Or, they may utilize more nonacademic information to make decisions, and thus their schools of choice may not be academically rigorous.

Parent/guardian choice-making, defined as the extent to which parents/guardians made a choice in relation to their children’s schooling, was included in this study’s measures, but was not analyzed in this study due to limitations in the measure. For instance, the measure of parent/guardian choice-making in this study did not provide adequate precision to distinguish between parents/guardians who chose inter-district enrollment and those who enrolled their children in their neighborhood public school. Future studies might examine parent/guardian choice-making as another potential predictor of quality that was unexamined in this study. The significant predictors identified in this study may be related to whether or not parents/guardians actively participate in the school choice decision-making process. Some parents/guardians may be unaware that they have a choice, or unsure of the full array of schools that make up their choice sets. Perhaps the relationships among this study’s variables are different for parents/guardians who actively choose their children’s schools, as opposed to those who maintained the neighborhood model of schooling without knowing they had options. Other studies indicate demographic differences between parents/guardians who choose charter schools and those who do not (Schneider et al., 1998). Moreover, parents/guardians who are unaware of their choice options may experience less empowerment than those who are aware of their options and choose schools different from their neighborhood schools. This may be due to reduced knowledge of the school system and perceived competence in relation to creating change for their children’s learning. More research on parent/guardian choice-making, and the ways in which it
relates to school choice outcomes, could highlight these additional facets of parent/guardian decision-making that are currently unexamined.

Additional research on covariates in the relationship between parent/guardian empowerment and quality of schools of choice is also warranted. This study found that parents/guardians with higher incomes were more likely to choose schools that were academically rigorous. It also found that the prioritization of academic factors among parents/guardians is a significant predictor of academic rigor, even when controlling for income. A further investigation of income in this model may highlight the ways in which parents/guardians with varying socioeconomic status experience school choice decision-making differently. Likewise, this study did not find that educational attainment was a significant predictor of quality of schools of choice, although several other researchers found this to be an important covariate (e.g., Smrekar & Goldring, 1998). A more in-depth examination of educational attainment and income are necessary to distinguish between these two indicators of socioeconomic status.

Further, it will also be important for future research to utilize additional data analytic techniques that allow a more in-depth investigation of predictors. This study utilized correlational analysis to examine the relationship between parent/guardian empowerment and quality of school choice. Other techniques of multivariate analysis, such as path analysis and structural equation modeling, could be used with larger samples to examine causal pathways and mediating relationships among parent/guardian empowerment, prioritizing factors, and quality of choice. This would allow for an improved understanding of the predictors of parent/guardian decision-making in school
choice contexts, as the strength of specific predictors and complex relationships among predictors could be examined more fully.

**Parent/guardian satisfaction and academic rigor.** Study findings point to a need for the further examination of differences among parent/guardian subjective assessments of quality and other objective indicators of academic rigor (e.g., students’ scores on college entrance exams). Parents/guardians in this study reported moderately high knowledge and those parents/guardians with more knowledge were more likely to choose schools that they perceived as high quality. Parent/guardian knowledge, however, was not related to the academic rigor of parents/guardians’ schools of choice, as measured by the performance index. There is a substantial need for more research in this area, as parent/guardian decision-making is largely based on their perceptions of their options and their choice sets. Future research can build upon this study to further investigate parent/guardian empowerment as it relates to school choice outcomes, particularly in regard to parent/guardian satisfaction with school quality and students’ actual academic outcomes.

**Empowerment theory in school choice.** Further research might further examine the utility of empowerment theory in school choice contexts. This study utilized empowerment theory to explore parent/guardian decision-making, as it provides a lens that highlights potential factors relevant as parents/guardians experience new roles within school choice. Additionally, empowerment is especially relevant in light of the persistent disparities that primarily impact populations that experience marginalization and oppression. Social work’s emphasis on eliminating these disparities provides a useful
research context to study parent/guardian empowerment and school choice decision-making.

This study found that the P/GES is a brief, psychometrically sound measure of parent/guardian empowerment in schools. Future research could build upon this study to develop this measure further, utilizing additional tests of validity and reliability. In addition, tests to confirm the factor structure of the P/GES will be necessary to examine the underlying factors of empowerment more extensively. Invariance testing also will be necessary to determine stability of the measure across parent/guardian subgroups.

Future studies may continue to develop measures of parent/guardian empowerment in schools that capture multiple dimensions of empowerment. The further development of self-efficacy subscales especially is needed. This study was limited to parent/guardian knowledge and perceived competence as components of individual empowerment, but empowerment models highlight the importance of several other components of empowerment as well, such as actual competence and collective empowerment. Collective empowerment includes the empowerment that groups of individuals may experience, as well as opportunities for empowerment within communities. This study did not examine community-level aspects of empowerment, but existing models of empowerment emphasize the relationship between individual and collective empowerment (Cataneo & Chapman, 2010; Hur, 2006). Examinations of these variables will provide valuable contributions to the existing research on school choice, especially as school choice is context-specific and strongly guided by local policy.

**Sample characteristics.** Finally, future research should continue to explore parent/guardian empowerment in school choice using samples diverse in race/ethnicity,
geographic location, and socioeconomic status. The sample in this study primarily includes White and African-American parents/guardians living in the Midwest region. Other studies may examine this study’s variables and questions with samples that include a more diverse representation of parents/guardians. Existing research clearly points to the importance of power in empowerment theory (Gutierrez, 1998; Hur, 2006). Parents/guardians from differing majority and minority populations may experience school choice differently. Further, Bell (2009a; 2009b) and Dillon (2008) emphasize the importance of bounded rationality in parents/guardians’ school choice decisions. Parents/guardians’ choice sets, and their school choices, are influenced by the contexts in which they must make decisions. As such, it is essential that future research consider the collective experiences of parents/guardians, while also remaining attuned to the differences between and within subgroups.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this study hold implications for current school choice policy, specifically in relation to parent/guardian decision-making and parent/guardian roles as consumers in the education market.

**Parent/guardian decision-making.** School choice policies hold several assumptions about parent/guardian decision-making, including that parents/guardians desire academically rigorous schools, have access to accurate information about schools, and utilize this information to make decisions about their children’s schools (Dillon, 2008). Moreover, current policies are reliant on rational choice theory, assuming that parents/guardians will evaluate their potential school options and make choices that optimize benefits and minimize costs (Henig, 1997; Dillon, 2008). The current policies in
place are not well-supported by this research, thus changes in policy may be necessary to achieve meaningful improvements in children’s academic outcomes. The findings of this study suggest that parent/guardian knowledge of the education system and priorities related to school choice are important considerations in understanding parent/guardian decision-making. This may be especially so for specific subgroups of parents/guardians, such as those who are socioeconomic or racial and ethnic minorities.

More specifically, parents/guardians who have more knowledge may make different decisions than those who have less knowledge and are less empowered. Likewise, parent/guardian empowerment may impact the schools that they consider as options, and those they choose in the end as well. School choice policies can be altered to include specific provisions that target parent/guardian knowledge, and perhaps inform their decision-making processes.

For instance, specific emphasis within education and school choice policies is needed in relation to improving parent/guardian knowledge, and thus the increasing the quality of information parents/guardians use to guide their decision-making. Current policies already require that all schools provide information about academic outcomes. Moreover, poor-performing schools must notify parents/guardians of their options to choose other schools (NCLB; P.L. 107-110). Considerable research documents the difficulty that parents/guardians have in obtaining access to this information and understanding it when they do get it (Vernez & Li, 2009). Policy makers might strengthen policy language to foster mechanisms within districts that provide parents/guardians with accurate and accessible information, perhaps by standardizing the dissemination of academic information or utilizing parents/guardians’ interpersonal
networks to share information strategically. Likewise, it may be necessary to utilize existing research and input from parents/guardians (e.g., Shirley, 1992) to guide the school-family communication. Schools and districts may not understand parents/guardians’ informational needs, and thus provide information that parents/guardians do not understand or find useful. In turn, these policy changes may improve parent/guardian knowledge, increase feelings of empowerment, and assist in school choice decision-making.

**Parents/guardians as consumers.** School choice policies also place parents/guardians in the roles of consumers in a marketplace, especially as there are increasing options for children’s schooling (Chubb & Moe, 1990). This study, along with others (Buckley & Schneider, 2007), suggests that current policies are not necessarily aligned with parent/guardian decision-making processes. Instead, policies can support parent empowerment by utilizing parent-centered perspectives that focus on parents/guardians’ expressed concerns and priorities. This study indicates that some parents/guardians prioritize academic school characteristics, and that they may utilize their knowledge of the school system to choose high quality schools. Policies can support parents/guardians in building knowledge about academic school characteristics, and utilizing this knowledge to make school choice decisions. For instance, policies might require poor-performing districts to develop infrastructure that specifically focuses on informing parents/guardians of school choice options. Policies may also require school choice coordinators within districts or state departments of education that coordinate the dissemination of information to parents/guardians.
In addition, parents/guardians may choose schools for nonacademic reasons. In this study, prioritization of nonacademic factors is not a significant predictor of the quality of school choice, although it is a meaningful correlate in the relationship between parents/guardians’ decision-making processes and quality. School choice policies assume that parents/guardians prioritize academic school characteristics over nonacademic school characteristics. If parents/guardians do, in fact, choose schools for nonacademic reasons, policies may need to focus attention on schools that have nonacademic strengths but are not academically rigorous. For instance, policies might provide incentives to schools that parents/guardians choose that will encourage development in academic areas while still maintaining the nonacademic characteristics that parents/guardians prioritize. School choice policies must be attuned to parents/guardians’ existing priorities to improve education that is still addresses family needs.

Additionally, one potential inroad for policy change may involve a shift in the way educational policy traditionally views parent/family engagement. Traditional perspectives on parent/family engagement in schools center on the ways in which parents/guardians commit various resources to children’s academic lives, such as their time, money, or physical materials (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994). Current provisions within NCLB (P.L. 107-110) prioritize parents/guardians’ involvement in schools by requiring low-income school districts to utilize parent/family engagement strategies. These provisions are based on traditional parent/family engagement strategies that assume all parents/guardians have the resources, means, and desire to engage with schools (Nakagawa, 2000).
Oftentimes, parents/guardians living in poverty or experience discrimination have the desire to engage with their children’s schools, but require additional supports to do so (Teske & Schneider, 2001; Ward et al., 2006). Criticisms of traditional parent/family engagement strategies suggest that policy expand the notion of parent/family engagement to include broader types of school-family engagement that is more responsive to parents/guardians needs (Ward, Anderson-Butcher, & Kwiatkowski, 2006). Additionally, Nakagawa (2000) argues that parent/guardian involvement discourse, largely evident in current policy, further limits the potential of parent-school relationships, oftentimes blaming parents for students’ poor academic performance while simultaneously heralding them as change agents. Undeniably, parents are not all the same. This study, along with the growing body of research on school choice, highlights the need for policies to consider a diversity of parent/guardian needs and a richer understanding of family-school relationships.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This study holds implications for social work practice as well, specifically in relation to school social work. First, the P/GES offers a useful measure of parent/guardian empowerment in school settings that practitioners can utilize for a variety of purposes. Second, the findings of this study may guide the parent/family engagement strategies that school social workers utilize in schools and districts. More details follow.

The findings of this study inform parent/family engagement strategies related to school choice. In this study, Parent/Guardian Knowledge was a significant and positive predictor of Parent/Guardian Satisfaction with School Quality, but was not a significant predictor of Academic Rigor. Numerous studies emphasize that parent/guardian
knowledge of their children’s schooling is often limited, especially in relation to school choice (Kisida & Wolf, 2010; van Dunk & Dickman, 2002). For example, Kisida and Wolf (2010) found that parents/guardians who choose to use school vouchers had more knowledge of their children’s schools than parents/guardians who do not use vouchers. In addition, Andre-Bechely’s (2005) and Cooper’s (2007) qualitative analyses note that parents/guardians may have little knowledge of the school choice process and experience difficulty understanding the intricacies of education in their communities. As such, increasing emphasis on parent/guardian knowledge in relation to school choice holds the potential to positively impact children’s outcomes.

School social workers may also utilize the findings of this study to improve their practice in relation to parent/guardian empowerment. This study provides evidence that the P/GES is a psychometrically sound measure of Parent/Guardian Knowledge and Perceived Competence as they relate to Parent/Guardian Empowerment in schools. It is a useful tool that can assist school social workers in engaging parents/guardians in schools. The P/GES provides a snapshot measure of Parent/Guardian Empowerment in schools that social workers can use to improve their understanding of the parents/guardians and families that they serve. The information gleaned from the P/GES can be used individually or in aggregate form within needs assessments and to monitor parent/guardian empowerment over time. In addition, school social workers can use the P/GES to assist in their evaluation of practice, as parent/guardian empowerment may be an important indicator of successful school social work intervention in schools.

While school social work practice includes a wide range of activities and approaches, school social work primarily focuses on school-family connections, as
practitioners frequently serve as the links across systems. School social workers are poised to further bridge schools and families by implementing strategies that increase parent/guardian knowledge of schooling, with particular emphasis on the prioritization of various school characteristics. School social workers might begin by identifying parents/guardians’ levels of satisfaction with the quality of their schools and further distilling information about parents/guardians’ priorities in school choice. In addition, school social workers might disseminate and translate information about schooling to parents/guardians that will allow them to make informed school choice decisions. For instance, existing research demonstrates that parents/guardians may be more attuned to information that is disseminated via interpersonal networks or the internet (Buckley & Schneider, 2007). This is especially important for low-income and racial and ethnic minority parents/guardians who were historically segregated and marginalized within the broader educational system. These parents/guardians may be unaware of the inequities in education (Vernez & Li, 2009) and may benefit the most from increased knowledge (Gutierrez, 1998). In fact, Hastings and Weinstein (2008) indicate that parents/guardians who receive objective and concise information about their children’s schools choose schools that are more academically rigorous. Ultimately, school social workers may utilize the findings of this study to increase parent/guardian empowerment and mobilize communities for change.

This study also may inform school social work practice as a sub-specialty of social work that operates within a host setting. Given the study findings, it might be important for school social workers to engage educational leadership and create settings that foster parent/guardian empowerment in schools. Discrimination, oppression, and a
negative school culture have been identified as causes of concentrated underachievement in cities or other regions serving minority families (Payne & Kaba, 2001). Other aspects of schools’ culture may impact parent/family engagement as well, such as assumptions that parents/guardians are uninterested in their children’s education or do not place high value on education (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noguera, 2001). As essential links between schools and families, school social workers have the potential (and obligation) to create systems of education that serve both schools and families. School social workers may utilize their strengths-based, person-in-environment perspectives to support children and families and advocate for changes within school systems.

Likewise, community-based social work practice also may be informed by the findings in this study related to parent/guardian knowledge. As school social workers may inform both parents/guardians and educational leadership, community-based social workers hold the potential to inform parents/guardians and other stakeholders in relation to children’s schooling. Community social workers are situated within community organizations and often provide residents with important information regarding available resources and opportunities for community engagement. One such area of engagement is in the schools. Community social workers may also disseminate and translate information to parents/guardians using interpersonal and informal networks as well.

School social workers need to be attuned to parents/guardians priorities in school choice decision-making. As this study notes, some parents/guardians prioritize academics and these priorities, along with empowerment, may be related to the quality of the schools they choose. Additional advocacy within schools and communities may improve parents/guardians’ access to information and empower parents/guardians to actively
participate in decision-making within their communities. School choice policies and parent/guardian decision-making are complex and multi-faceted, but school social workers can begin by focusing on parent/guardian empowerment and priorities in school choice. In turn, school social workers may enhance academic outcomes for students and promote social justice.

Social justice is a priority for all social workers, and educational justice is of great concern for school social workers. The disparities evident in U.S. schools today pose considerable implications for low-income and racial and ethnic minority children, families, and communities. The disproportionately negative outcomes of poor-performing schools pose substantial implications for specific subgroups, especially as students suffer in relation to academic outcomes, rigorous curricula, and future earning potential. As such, educational disparities are significant social welfare issues that school social workers must address. In fact, social workers are responsible for enhancing human well-being and meeting the basic needs of vulnerable populations. As primary caregivers, parents/guardians have a right to the necessary information and knowledge that empowers them to choose high quality schools for their children. School social workers already provide invaluable supports to parents/guardians and families. More emphasis is needed in relation to empowerment and school choice, particularly in communities characterized by marginalization, concentrated poverty, and poor-performing schools.

Conclusions

To summarize, this study establishes a measure of parent/guardian empowerment that includes two subscales assessing domains of parent/guardian empowerment in schools. The first is knowledge, defined as parents/guardians’ understanding of their
children’s education, local school system, and potential roles and responsibilities parents/guardians might have in relation to schooling. The second is perceived competence, defined as parents/guardians’ perceptions of their abilities and actions related to making decisions for their children’s education.

Several predictors of the quality of parent/guardian schools of choice, including parent/guardian knowledge of the schooling system, prioritization of academic factors, and prioritization of nonacademic factors, were also examined. The canonical correlation analysis supported elements of multiple decision-making theories, as both parent/guardian prioritization of academic factors and prioritization of nonacademic factors were relevant variables in the predictor set. Additionally, the regression analyses allowed for tests of moderation, indicating that only parent/guardian prioritization of academic factors was a significant moderator in the relationship between parent/guardian knowledge and satisfaction with school quality. While prioritization of nonacademic factors may be a relevant variable in this school choice decision-making process, Parent/guardian prioritization of academic factors may be more meaningful in understanding the relationships between parent/guardian empowerment and the quality of schools of choice. It may be that parents/guardians consider academics a greater priority than other factors and that, although several other factors are important to them, academic factors are those most important when considering the quality of their school choice outcome. Moreover, the moderating effect of prioritization of academic factors suggests that parent/guardian knowledge and prioritization of academic factors are important aspects of school choice decision-making that contribute to the quality of parents/guardians’ schools of choice. Study findings may guide future efforts to engage
parents/guardians in school choice and improve academic outcomes for all students. The literature is clear that parents/guardians hold essential roles in the academic and social-emotional development of children (Yun & Kusum, 2008). This study provides an improved understanding of parent/guardian decision-making in relation to school choice policies, a method of addressing academic disparities that is increasingly evident throughout the country.

Currently, parent/family engagement strategies are at the center of educational policies designed to address the academic disparities evident across student subgroups. School choice policies are one way that current education reform seeks to engage parents/guardians in children’s schooling. These policies grant parents/guardians with increasing control over their children’s education, and it is expected that parents/guardians will choose high quality schools and drive improvements across regions. This study finds that parents/guardians do not necessarily act in the ways that the policy expects. Findings point to important ways in which research, policy and practice might further enhance parent/guardian empowerment as they participate in school decision-making. In turn, improvements in school choice policy implementation may better support learning and development among children, especially those who are most vulnerable and living in poverty.
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U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 complete higher education at four-year institutions Use factfinder


Appendix A: Phase I Measure
Parent/Guardians & School Choice

This survey has been designed to help us get a sense of your opinions about your child’s education. This survey also has been designed to help us understand how you make decisions about your child’s school. Please answer the following questions as best as you can and from your point of view. Your answers are anonymous and cannot be connected to you. Thank you for your time.

Have you completed this survey before?  O Yes  O No

What is the current zip code where you live?

____________________________
### About You

1. **Please indicate your gender:**
   - 0 Male
   - 0 Female
   - 0 Other

2. **What is your age in years?**
   - ________ years

3. **What is your race/ethnicity?**
   - 0 African-American/Black
   - 0 Caucasian/White
   - 0 Asian/Pacific Islander
   - 0 Hispanic/Latino
   - 0 American Indian/Alaska Native
   - 0 Other: ________________

4. **How much school did you complete? (Choose one)**
   - 0 High School/GED
   - 0 Vocational/Trade School
   - 0 Associate’s Degree
   - 0 4-year College Degree (BA/BS)
   - 0 Graduate courses, no degree
   - 0 Graduate/Professional Degree
   - 0 PhD/MD/JD
   - 0 Other

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5. Are your children eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch?
O Yes  O No

6. What is your *yearly* household income?
   O Less than $24,000
   O $25,000 to $49,000
   O $50,000 to $74,999
   O $75,000 to $99,999
   O Greater than or equal to $100,000

7. How many persons under the age of 18 live in your household?
   ________ persons

*About Your Child*

*Please choose your child with the soonest upcoming birthday to answer the following questions:*

8. What is the age of the child in years?  ________ years

9. What is the child’s gender?
   O Male  O Female  O Other
10. What is the race/ethnicity of the child?

0    African-American/Black
0    Caucasian/White
0    Asian/Pacific Islander
0    Hispanic/Latino
0    American Indian/Alaska Native
0    Other:

11. What is your relationship to the child?

0    Mother or Father
0    Foster Mother or Father
0    Sister or Brother
0    Aunt or Uncle
0    Grandmother or Grandfather
0    Cousin
0    Other relative
0    Other nonrelative

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12. Are you a legal guardian for the child?
   O Yes          O No

13. Do you live in the same household as the child for most of the week?
   O Yes          O No

About Your Child’s School

Please consider your child with the soonest upcoming birthday and answer the questions below for that child’s current school.

14. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your child’s current school?

   | Very Dissatisfied | Somewhat Dissatisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Very Satisfied |
---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------|

   a. The school overall 0 0 0 0
   b. The teachers 0 0 0 0
   c. The academic standards 0 0 0 0
   d. The order and discipline the school maintains 0 0 0 0
### Parent/Guardian Empowerment

For each of the following statements please darken the ONE circle that best represents your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all true</th>
<th>Somewhat true</th>
<th>Very true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I understand how the school system in my community is organized.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I know the steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving a poor education.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I know what the rights of parents and children are in my community’s school system.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I have a good understanding of the school system that my child is involved in.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I am able to make good decisions about the education my child needs.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I know what to do when problems arise with my child in school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I am able to work with schools and educators to decide what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I make sure that educators understand my opinions about what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>I am able to get information to help me better understand my child’s needs in school.</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>I know what services my child needs in school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all true</td>
<td>Somewhat true</td>
<td>Very true</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>I feel confident in my ability to help my child grow and develop in school.</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>I make efforts to learn new ways to help my child grow and develop in school.</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>When faced with a problem involving my child in school, I decide what to do and then do it.</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>When I need help with my child’s problems in school, I am able to ask for help from others.</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>I tell professionals what I think about services being provided to my child at school.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>When necessary, I take the initiative in looking for school services for my child and family.</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>I feel that I have a right to approve all services my child receives in school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Somewhat true</td>
<td>Very true</td>
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<tr>
<td>38)</td>
<td>The information I have about schools in my community is accurate.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</table>
Appendix B: Phase I & Phase II Recruitment Materials
Phase I Recruitment

Organization Recruitment Letter for Online Survey

Hello:

As a doctoral student at The Ohio State University, I am conducting research to examine parents/guardians’ decision-making related to schools. More specifically, I am interested in understanding how parent/guardian empowerment may be related to the schools parents/guardians choose for their children.

This study includes a 5 minute online survey of parents/guardians measuring parent/guardian empowerment. I would like to ensure that this study fully explores the wide scope of parents/guardians’ perspectives. As such, I am asking you’re your assistance in recruiting parents/guardians participation.

As [title of person] with [organization name], would you be willing to forward the study’s recruitment email (below) to your parent listserv? [organization name]’s participation in this study will greatly contribute to our understanding of parent/guardian engagement in education. I want to thank you in advance for helping me gather this information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Annahita Ball
Online Survey Recruitment Email

Hello:

As a doctoral student at Ohio State University, I am interested in learning about how parents and guardians make decisions about their children’s schools. We want your help to find this out. If you agree to help us and you are a parent/guardian with a child enrolled in a public school, you will answer some questions on an online survey that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

You get to choose if you want to do this and you don’t have to answer any of the questions that you don’t want to. Or if you decide you don’t want to participate anymore, you can just stop responding to questions and close the survey window. There are no penalties for choosing not to participate.

Your response, if you choose to participate, will be completely anonymous. The responses you provide will be collected with online survey software that is designed to secure your responses and provide you with confidentiality. We don’t think there are any bad things that could happen to you because you answer these questions. One benefit, however, is that we will better understand how parents make decisions about their children’s schools.

If you are interested in participating in this survey, the survey can be accessed at the following web address:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FKRZ3BJ

Please complete the survey by [date three weeks after email sent date]. At that time, the survey will close. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Annahita Ball at ball.1776@osu.edu (614-292-6934) or Dawn Anderson-Butcher at anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu (614-292-8596). Thank you for your time!
Follow-Up Recruitment Email

Hello:

You received an email last week with a link to an online survey about parents’ and guardians’ decisions for their children’s schools. If you have already completed this survey, we thank you for your time. If you have not yet completed the survey, please visit the link below to share your perspective with us.

If you are interested in participating in this survey, the survey can be accessed at the following web address: [weblink here]

You get to choose if you want to do this and you don’t have to answer any of the questions that you don’t want to. Or if you decide you don’t want to participate anymore, you can just stop responding to questions and close the survey window. There are no penalties for choosing not to participate.

Your response, if you choose to participate, will be completely anonymous. The responses you provide will be collected with online survey software that is designed to secure your responses and provide you with confidentiality. We don’t think there are any bad things that could happen to you because you answer these questions. One benefit, however, is that we will better understand how parents make decisions about their children’s schools.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Annahita Ball at ball.1776@osu.edu (614-292-6934) or Dawn Anderson-Butcher at anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu (614-292-8596).

Thank you for your time!
Phase II Recruitment

Recruitment Script

We are interested in learning about how parents and guardians make decisions about their children’s schools. We want your help to find this out. If you agree to help us and you are a parent/guardian with a child enrolled in a public school, you will answer some questions on a survey that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

You get to choose if you want to do this but we need your permission to let you take the surveys. You don’t have to participate if you don’t want to. Also, you don’t have to answer any of the questions that you don’t want to. Or if you decide you don’t want to participate anymore, you can just hand the survey back in with no answers. Nothing bad will happen if you decide not to participate.

Also, anything you answer will not be tracked back to you specifically. What that means is that I can’t say “Mike said this or that.” The information will be put together so that when reported it will say something like “the parents said this or that.”

We don’t think there are any bad things that could happen to you because you answer these questions. One benefit, however, is that we will better understand how parents make decisions about their children’s schools. When you are finished with the survey, please put it in the dropbox near the recruitment table.
Appendix C: Phase II Consent Information
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Parents/Guardians & School Choice: Relationships among Empowerment, Priorities, and Academic Rigor

Researcher: Dawn Anderson-Butcher, PhD; Annahita Ball, MSW

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose: This study is designed to examine parents/guardians’ empowerment and priorities when they make decisions related to school choice. In addition, these relationships will be examined as they relate to the academic rigor of a school choice. You are being asked to participate in this research because your perspective as a parent/guardian is important to understanding school choice.

Procedures/Tasks: If you choose to participate, you will complete a survey that asks questions about your perceptions of empowerment and priorities when you make school choice decisions. It is estimated that it will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey.
You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Confidentiality:** Your name or other identifiable information will not be connected to the answers your provide on your survey. Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

**Incentives:** There are no incentives to participate in this research.

**Participant Rights:** You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.
If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By agreeing to participate, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

Contacts and Questions: For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Dawn Anderson-Butcher, Phd (Anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu; 614-292-6934) or Annahita Ball (ball.1776@osu.edu; 614-292-6934). For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Dawn Anderson-Butcher (anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu).
Appendix D: Phase II Measures
Parent/Guardians & School Choice

This survey has been designed to help us get a sense of your opinions about your child’s education. This survey also has been designed to help us understand how you make decisions about your child’s school. Please answer the following questions as best as you can and from your point of view. Your answers are anonymous and cannot be connected to you. Thank you for your time.

*Please fill in each circle completely using the following example:*

Like this: ● Not like this: ✔ × ☐

**Have you completed this survey before?**

O Yes  O No

**What is the current zip code where you live?**

________________________
About You

1. Please indicate your gender:  
   0 Male  0 Female  0 Other

2. What is your age in years?  __________ years

3. What is your race/ethnicity?
   0 African-American/Black
   0 Caucasian/White
   0 Asian/Pacific Islander
   0 Hispanic/Latino
   0 American Indian/Alaska Native
   0 Other: ____________________________

4. How much school did you complete? (Choose one)
   0 High School/GED
   0 Vocational/Trade School
   0 Associate's Degree
   0 4-year College Degree (BA/BS)
   0 Graduate courses, no degree
   0 Graduate/Professional Degree
   0 PhD/MD/JD
   0 Other

196
5. Are your children eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch?
   O Yes       O No

6. What is your *yearly* household income?
   O Less than $24,000
   O $25,000 to $49,000
   O $50,000 to $74,999
   O $75,000 to $99,999
   O Greater than or equal to $100,000

7. How many persons under the age of 18 live in your household?
   _______ persons

*About Your Child*

*Please choose your child with the soonest upcoming birthday to answer the following questions:*

8. What is the age of the child in years?       _______ years

9. What is the child’s gender?
   O Male       O Female       O Other
10. What is the race/ethnicity of the child?

0  African-American/Black
0  Caucasian/White
0  Asian/Pacific Islander
0  Hispanic/Latino
0  American Indian/Alaska Native

0  Other:

11. What is your relationship to the child?

0  Mother or Father
0  Foster Mother or Father
0  Sister or Brother
0  Aunt or Uncle
0  Grandmother or Grandfather
0  Cousin
0  Other relative
0  Other nonrelative
12. Are you a legal guardian for the child?

   O Yes                          O No

13. Do you live in the same household as the child for most of the week?

   O Yes                          O No

14. What is the name of the school your child currently attends?

________________________________________________________________________________

15. What is the name of the street that your child’s current school is located on?

________________________________________________________________________________

About Your Child’s School

Please consider your child with the soonest upcoming birthday and answer the questions below for that child’s current school.

17. Please choose one statement below that best describes your child’s school (the one you named in question #14):

   O My child’s current school is his or her regularly assigned school .
   O My child’s current school is a school I chose and is not my child’s regularly assigned school.
   O I don’t know if my child’s current school is his or her regularly assigned school.

199
18. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your child’s current school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e. The school overall</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. The teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. The academic standards</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. The order and discipline the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>maintains</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. When deciding where to send your child to school, was this school your first, second, or third choice? (Choose one)

- 0 First choice
- 0 Second choice
- 0 Third choice
- 0 Other: (please explain)

20. Did you choose where to live so that your child could attend his or her current school?

- 0 Yes
- 0 No
- 0 Don’t Know

21. Did you participate in the lottery for the current school year?

- 0 Yes
- 0 No
- 0 Don’t Know
22. In general, what grade would you give your child’s current school based on its academic quality? (Circle one letter grade below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Low Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

23. This year, which best represents the grades your child receives? (choose one option)

- O Mostly A's
- O A's and B's
- O Mostly B's
- O B's and C's
- O Mostly C's
- O C's and D's
- O Mostly D's
- O D's, E's, and F's
**Parent/Guardian Empowerment**

For each of the following statements please darken the ONE circle that best represents your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at all true</th>
<th>Somewhat true</th>
<th>Very true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. I understand how the school system in my community is organized.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I know the steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving a poor education.</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>41. When I need help with my child’s problems in school, I am able to ask for help from others</td>
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46. I make sure I stay in regular contact with educators who are providing services to my child in school.

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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47. The information I have about schools in my community is accurate.

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<tbody>
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<td>0</td>
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</table>

48. The information I have about schools in my community is adequate to allow me to make a decision about my child’s school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all true</th>
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</table>

**Priorities for School**

Consider the school your child currently attends and shade the circle next to the statements below that best answer the question:

**Why did you enroll your child in this school? (Mark all that apply.)**

0 My child has special needs that were not met at his or her previous school.

0 The location of the school is close to my home, job, or child care.

0 My child's friends attend the school.

0 The school’s strong academic reputation.

0 The principal of the school.

0 Good teachers.
Why did you enroll your child in this school? (Mark all that apply.)

- I prefer a private school but could not afford it.
- My child was performing poorly at his or her previous school.
- The charter school's focus, theme, or mission.
- Students get more individual help at the school.
- High test scores of students attending the school.
- Special programs such as the arts, science, technology.
- This school has good physical facilities.
- The racial/ethnic mix at the school.
- Smaller class sizes at the school.
- The teaching style of the school.
- Before and/or after school child care available at the school.
- Discipline.
- Opportunities for parental involvement.
- The school is safe.
Why did you enroll your child in this school? (Mark all that apply.)

0 My child wanted to attend this school.

0 My interest in being involved in an educational reform effort.

0 The school teaches values that my child’s previous school did not.

0 I have another child in the same school.

0 I was unhappy with the curriculum at my child’s previous school.

0 I was unhappy with the instruction at my child’s previous school.

0 A teacher or official at my child’s previous school recommended this school.

0 My other children already attended this school.

0 More challenging learning environment.

0 I wanted to support my neighborhood school.

0 School uniforms are required.

0 Other: ________________________________

Thank you for your time!