WHY PARENTS CHOOSE TO OPEN ENROLL CHILDREN

INTO A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

A dissertation submitted to Edgewood College Doctor of Education degree program in Educational Leadership in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree,

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Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine considerations that a sample of parents identified as influential when deciding to open enroll their children into a specific Wisconsin school district. Under Wisconsin Act 27, parents have the right to choose their children's public school through so-called *open enrollment*. This act also provides for state funding of public schools based in part on student enrollment. If a public school district's student enrollment increases, state funding increases. In recent years the district in this study experienced significant net loss in student enrollment and funding. As a result, programming, salaries, curriculum, facilities, and more were adversely affected. A survey was administered to a convenience sample of 64 families out of a target population of 117. Results indicated school culture and relationships were reportedly primary influences on parents' decisions to open enroll into the study district. Additionally, quality of academics was reported as an influential consideration. Stakeholders may incorporate these considerations when planning marketing and public relations strategies. Findings from this study may provide stakeholders with ways to attract and maintain students in the study district, and may also assist policymakers.

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I extend special thanks to Dr. Henry St. Maurice as my editor. Henry's experience not only as an editor but also as a scholar was increasingly appreciated along this journey. He is extremely gifted as an editor and I will forever appreciate his advice. A special thank you is extended to Dr. Sara Jimenez-Soffa. Her expertise in Qualtrics, SSPS, and statistical analysis is immense. She is gifted with patience and a natural ability to explain highly complex statistical information to first time users such as myself. I also thank my liaison, Dr. Tom Evert, particularly at the junctures of various milestones such as proposal and preparation for defense.

I would also like to thank the School District of Jefferson Board of Education for believing in me not only as an educational leader, but also as a candidate for a doctoral program. I only hope that my research on the topic of open enrollment will pay dividends to our school district and community for many years to come.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my bride, Ann. After 30 years of marriage our friendship has grown to reflect the type of marriage that God intends it to be. Our grounded relationship with each other is strong due to our deep love of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

I remember coming to you, Ann, and our two children Ashley (26) and Mitch (19) to seek permission for me to be consumed by this doctoral program course work and dissertation writing for four years. You understood that this was during my "more than full time" job as a high school principal. The family support from you, our two children, our granddaughter, and my dad and mom (Chuck and Donna) was evident throughout this journey.

For 30 years we have planned for a trip to Europe- just the two of us! Instead, we wisely changed our plans and simplified things to include our children. It was through camping, hiking, canoeing in the boundary waters, and trips to Northern Wisconsin, during which memories were made. The simplicity of "time spent" helped to lay a foundation for our kids. Maybe now, it is Ireland, Switzerland, Germany….

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Chapter 1. Introduction to the Study

Wisconsin Act 27 created the first statewide inter-district open-enrollment program in 1998 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [WI DPI], 2007). Open enrollment is one form of school choice. In 2013, the concept and practice of school choice in Wisconsin included not only inter-district open enrollment, but school vouchers, home school options, virtual schools and charter schools as well as the traditional options of parochial and private schools. Parents as customers and students as consumers have many more options in school choice today than they did only a few decades ago. These choices resulted in new opportunities, problems, and issues for school districts.

In this system of school choice through open enrollment, the money via state funding follows student enrollment. As a result, school officials pay close attention to student school choice enrollment trends. In other words, public schools with open enrollments experiencing net gains or net losses consequently experience respective growth or loss in school funding. In turn, the overall funding ultimately affects facilities and academic and co-curricular programs, which is why open enrollment is so important to individual school districts.

In the context of school choice via open enrollment, "schools need to attract sufficient numbers of students (and the funding that accompanies them) to survive and succeed" (Lubienski, 2007, p. 119). As a result, school leaders are faced with a new set of challenges to shape and guide their decisions on school management. Schools in competitive climates are increasing their efforts in promotion and marketing. Marketing, advertising, and public relations become necessary skill sets, which most school leaders have minimal formal training. In 2013 and 2014 there is a new practice observed by several public school districts in Wisconsin. This

new practice incorporates hiring public relations and marketing experts. Tax dollars spent on these positions are intended to come back to districts as enrollment revenue.

In some instances, school officials who historically worked with each other for the betterment of children end up in competition with each other in order to increase student enrollment. One principal shared earlier in his tenure that neighboring school district leaders were comrades in a wonderfully designed collaborative effort focused on students. Today, this same principal feels he must not communicate or share ideas because "… we are competing with our neighboring schools like McDonald's versus Burger King" (P. Christiansen, personal communication, May, 2013).

To provide high-quality education, school officials now need to market effectively. In order to increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts, school leaders will need to know why parents choose to leave a school district through open enrollment and why they choose to attend a particular school district through open enrollment. In general, there has been little research conducted in Wisconsin addressing why parents select specific schools to open enroll their children in or out.

Student Enrollment Impact on Dollars in Wisconsin

There were approximately 66,066,000 children aged five through eighteen in the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010). This number equals about 21% of the American population. Approximately 80% of those students attend public schools, with the remaining 20% attend private, parochial, or home-based schools. Because this number is finite, schools are competing for the same students.

In Wisconsin, parental choice on the subject of school attendance was limited until the 1998 to 1999 school year (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [WI DPI], 2013). Prior

to the 1998 to1999 school year, elementary through secondary school attendance options were limited to choosing public, parochial, or private schools. In other words, public school districts in Wisconsin had imaginary fences around them. If a family resided inside this fence, the children attended the designated public school. If parents decided to send children to private or parochial schools, tuition was paid for school attendance. In order to choose another public school, parents needed to move their primary residences or pay tuition to non-resident public school districts.

WI DPI data (Table 1) show increased participation in open enrollment since the implementation of the Wisconsin open enrollment law in 1998.

Table 1. Wisconsin Open Enrollment Applications & Transfers, 1998 to 2013

Year	School Year	Transfers
1	1998 to 1999	2,464
2	1999 to 2000	4,858
3	2000 to 2001	7,213
4	2001 to 2002	9,603
5	2002 to 2003	12,378
6	2003 to 2004	15,413
7	2004 to 2005	18,210
8	2005 to 2006	21,025
9	2006 to 2007	23,406
10	2007 to 2008	25,898
11	2008 to 2009	28,028
12	2009 to 2010	31,916
13	2010 to 2011	34,498
14	2011 to 2012	37,247

Since the passage of Wisconsin Act 27 (Wis. Stat. §118.51(1997), the number of parents choosing open enrollment for their children has increased annually (WI DPI, 2013). Student transfer due to open enrollment for the 1998 to 1999 school year was 2,464 students. In 2011 to 2012, there were 15 times more Wisconsin public school students open-enrolled since the first

year of open enrollment. These numbers do not include other forms of school choice such as voucher schools, home schools, virtual schools, or charter schools. Virtual charter schools have compounded the issue for public school educators, because participation in virtual charter schools has increased since 2002 from 247 students to 4,857 in the tenth year (Appendix A).

Wisconsin's growth in students participating in open enrollment is similar to other states. A joint legislative audit revealed the rate of statewide open-enrollment program participation was comparable with the rate of other mid-western states over the other states' first four years of open-enrollment implementation (WI DPI, 2002). Results of the DPI and legislature study and joint audit provided a degree of reliability the increase in student participation through open enrollment is consistent and thereby predictable from state to state.

In Wisconsin, state financial aids to public schools are largely based upon student enrollments. Table 2 depicts Wisconsin open-enrollment dollars transferred throughout the state from 1998 through 2011.

Table 2. Wisconsin Open-enrollment Dollars, 1998 through 2011

School Year	$ Millions Transferred in	% Change
1998 to 1999	$ 9.6 m	-
1999 to 2000	$ 19.6 m	104%
2000 to 2001	$ 30.5 m	56%
2001 to 2002	$ 42.5 m	39%
2002 to 2003	$ 57.4 m	35%
2003 to 2004	$ 73.9 m	29%
2004 to 2005	$ 88.0 m	19%
2005 to 2006	$104.0 m	18%
2006 to 2007	$118.7 m	14%
2007 to 2008	$135.1 m	14%
2008 to 2009	$151. 2m	12%
2009 to 2010	$178.4 m	18%
2010 to 2011	$196.2 m	10%
2011 to 2012	$217.5 m	11%

According to WI DPI, dollars transferred from one Wisconsin school district to another has increased 22 times in the first 14 years of Act 27. In the 2011 to 2012 school year Wisconsin public schools experienced $217,500,000 transferring from one school district to another through open enrollment. This increase clearly indicates parents as customers and students as consumers are taking advantage of open enrollment as a viable school choice option. This increase also assumes a significant negative shortfall for the districts on the losing end of this flow of revenue.

For example, in the 2010 to 2011 school year one large school district in southern Wisconsin with a pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade enrollment of over 4,400 students experienced a net loss of students due to open enrollment resulting in a net loss of $106,000. This particular school district has a rich tax base. This dollar amount represents 2.2% of the total annual budget for this larger district. In this same year another school district in Southern Wisconsin with a prekindergarten through twelfth-grade student enrollment of less than 900 students, also experienced a net loss of students due to open enrollment. For this smaller district this resulted in a net loss of funding of $95,800, or 7.8% of the district's budget. These two school districts ranked ninth and tenth in Wisconsin, with the greatest negative dollar impact to local taxpayers due to a net loss of students due to open enrollment during the 2010 to 2011 school year.

Another consideration is the percentage of revenue transferred from one district to another per student enrolled in or out. Appendix A provides information about the dollar amount tied to a student enrolled in or out upon a school transfer and compares it to the average revenue per membership student in the state.

The Wisconsin student open-enrollment dollar-aid transfer amount per student has changed from the 1998 to 1999 school year through the 2012 to 2013 school year. In other

words, public schools are provided a dollar value per member student. If a resident student enrolls into another district, the resident district must send about 66% of the funding allotted for the student to the receiving district. The sending district retains about 34% of the funding and no longer has to provide an education for the student. There is a financial impact on both the sending and receiving school districts affected by school choice through open enrollment. In this system, where the funding follows student enrollment, school officials pay close attention to student school choice enrollment trends.

Some studies support the idea that school choice can lead to school reform and improvement (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994). The general premise from advocates of this business model of school choice is if student enrollment decreases, then funding will decrease, and if funding decreases school leaders will improve education and practices in order to alleviate the budgetary strain. However, the problem is the school districts experiencing a net loss of students also experience a net loss in funding. This loss of funding often results in a loss of programming as opposed to reform. The reduction of academic and co-curricular programming results in a loss of more students. The financial shortcomings impacting loss of student-centered programming could create a cycle of decline in instructional quality rather than facilitating instructional improvement.

Study District

The south-central Wisconsin rural school district in this study is referred to as the study district. During the 2012 to 2013 school year there were 184 students who enrolled out of the study district and into non-resident districts through Wisconsin public school open enrollment. This number meant that 9.6% of the study district's student body left the district. However, there were 81 students, or 4.3% of student enrollment, who enrolled into the study district from non-

resident districts through open enrollment. The 184 students leaving the study district minus the 81 students coming into the study district resulted in a 103 student net loss, or 5.3% of student enrollment. This equates to approximately $500,000 in lost revenue, which is approximately 2.5% of the district's annual budget of about $20 million.

Since the onset of Wisconsin open enrollment in 1998, the study district has had a net loss of 445 students. This number counts some students multiple times if they enrolled in or out of the study district for multiple years. The net loss of 445 enrolled students equates to approximately $1.9 million of lost revenue from 1998 through 2013. This lost revenue negatively and significantly impacts the study district's budget.

If this cycle continues, the study district could be severely impacted financially in the future. This financial impact could negatively impact education, programming, facilities, curriculum, and teacher recruitment and retention. Efforts to determine considerations influencing parent decisions to leave the study district through Wisconsin public-school open enrollment have already been studied.

When considering the potential and predictable budgetary shortfalls in this study district and the negative impact on facilities, programming, and student access to quality schools, research in this area is necessary. In an effort to reverse the net loss of students through open enrollment, this researcher sought to utilize the findings of this study to help determine considerations why parents choose the study school district.

Purpose of the Study

This study focused on determining considerations influencing parent decisions to open enroll their children into the study district. Additionally, this study provided data for the leaders of the study district to guide decisions toward effective changes that will positively impact open

enrollment into the study district. Few studies exist on the subject of open enrollment as it pertains to Wisconsin public school district issues of public relations, marketing, and school competition for students.

School communities experiencing net losses of students due to open enrollment may benefit from this study. Learning why students enroll in or out of a district may help leaders implement the necessary adjustments to change the outward migration. An additional benefit of this study may be to help Wisconsin policy makers, politicians, local elected officials, and school leaders understand parental school choice decisions.

Research Question

This study addressed the following question: "What considerations do parents report as having influenced their decisions to open enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district?" This study analyzed considerations that reportedly influenced parents in deciding to enroll students into the study district.

Hypothesis

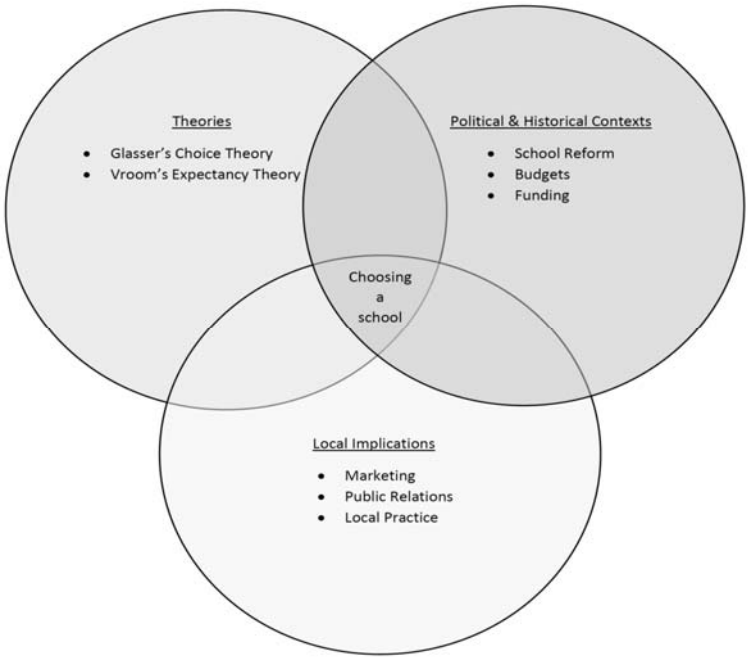
The researcher hypothesized that the most common considerations for parents who open enrolled their children into the study school district were the same considerations parents chose to open enroll children out of the study school district. Specifically, these considerations are related to Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings, college preparation, academic excellence, teacher quality, student discipline, student friendships, and reductions in bullying.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model is adapted from Glasser's theory on choice (1998) and Vroom's expectancy theory (1964) and focuses on choice and motivation used in decision making.

Political contexts, historical contexts, and local implications influencing personal choice concerning open enrollment are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of School Choice.



Depicted in the conceptual model are three overlapping circles, the first one representing Glasser's choice theory, and Vroom's expectancy theory. The second circle represents political and historical contexts such as school reform, budgets, and funding. The third overlapping circle represents local implications, which may influence parents' decisions to open enroll.

Glasser's theory of choice contends that all fundamental sources of human motivation are internal (Smith, Kenney, Sessoms, & Labrie, 2011). Glasser theorized five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun are the driving forces behind our choices (Glasser, 1998). This premise of five basic needs is important because parents may enroll their children for the purposes of friendships, socialization, and a sense of belonging.

The first axiom of Glasser's choice theory is "the only person whose behavior we can control is our own" (p. 332). More notable however, Glasser makes strong claims arguing humans can choose their own emotions. Rather than depression being something happening to you, Glasser's choice theory attributes successes or failures based on our choice of actions, which may result in depression (Perkins & Parish, 2011). This premise can be extrapolated to choices parents make when choosing a school through a school choice program such as open enrollment. Bullying, peer influences, and school culture have inherent emotions at their core. These emotions may be at the core of parental school enrollment choices according to Glasser's theory. This choice is broader in scope when offered the opportunity to choose a school through open enrollment.

A second theory in this model is Vroom's expectancy theory. Vroom (1964) theorized that outcomes of choices affecting human motivation influence choices we make (*passim.*), Van Eerde and Thierry (1996) said, "Vroom defined expectancy as a subjective probability of an action or effort (e) leading to an outcome or performance (p) expressed as e→p," (p. 576). In practice, expectancy has also been measured as the perceived relation between an action and an outcome. This study regarding open-enrollment choices recognized a connection in this perceived relation between an action and an outcome. For example, the action of choosing to attend a new school through open enrollment may have a perceived or desired emotional outcome. These emotional outcomes may be achieved through consideration such as student friendships, caring teachers, reduced bullying, and school safety.

The conceptual model incorporates Glasser's choice theory and Vroom's expectancy theory to address school choice as a subset of choices. Through choice theory, the researcher framed questions for the survey instrument and interpreted results.

In Figure 1, a second circle is used to represent causes such as historical and political considerations influencing education and specifically school choice. This would include considerations such as school reform, state funding, global competitiveness, and local budgets. School reform advocates support the notion of using a competitive business model to improve academics outcomes. Policy makers support this business model approach and endorse the measurement of success or failure through standardized test scores. Based on these premises, one can reasonably assume parents will choose schools based upon high test scores.

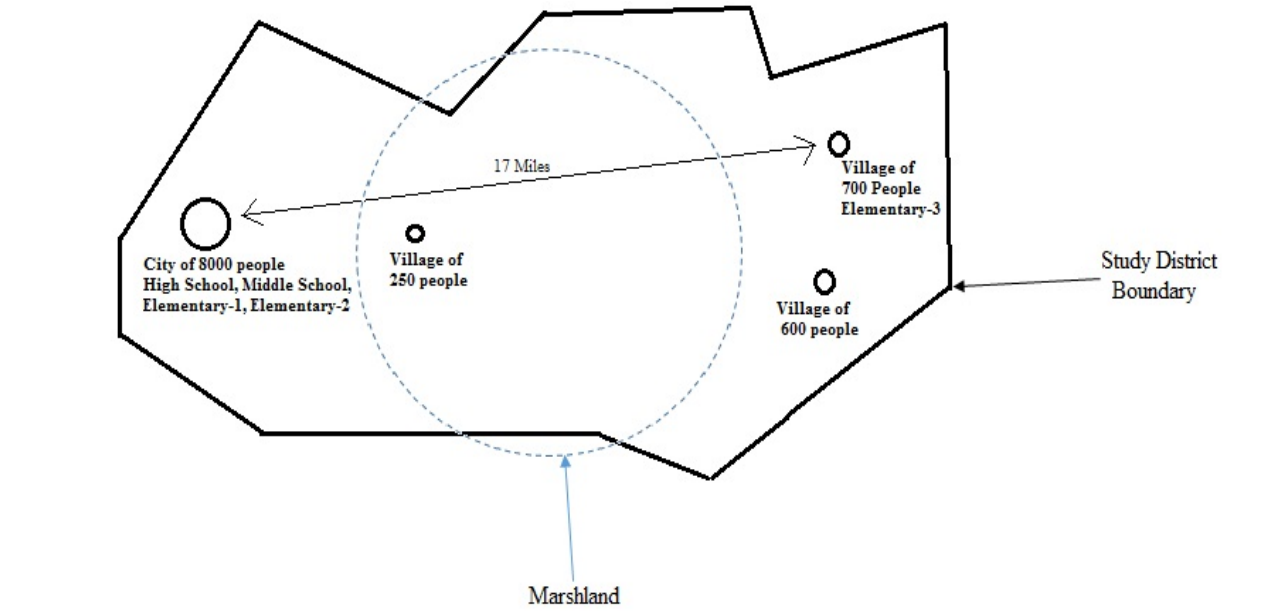
Finally, a third subset represented by a third circle includes various local aspects, which may impact parental decisions to enroll their children into or out of a school district. These aspects include elements such as marketing, public relations, and local practices. (Harris & Larsen, 2015) studied the considerations influencing school choice in New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans revamped the educational system providing increased school choice options. Studies determined that test scores were not influential in parent's decision making. Harris and Larsen concluded that higher income families valued academics and extra-curricular opportunities (e.g., football and band) as equally influential. They found that these same parents were also willing to travel further for these opportunities. They also found that families with lower incomes placed less value on academic opportunities and gave greater influence on travel distance to after-school day-care programs.

The three circles in the model intersect, creating a subset of all three. In Figure 1, this area is identified as "Choosing a School." The conceptual model recognizes all three sets, or circles, as overlapping and influential in processes of making school choice decisions.

Contextual Orientation

The study district is a rural school district in south-central Wisconsin. The study district is comprised of four municipalities. One municipality is located on the far west side of the school district's boundaries. This municipality has a population of nearly 8,000 people. In the center of this long and narrow school district is a small, unincorporated town with a population of 249. On the eastern border of the school district's boundaries are two more very small villages of 672 and 689 citizens each (Figure 2).

Figure 2. District Map



The study district comprised three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. One of the elementary schools was located in one of the two villages on the eastern-most border of the district. This satellite school enrolled 181 students. The other two elementary schools were located in the city and these elementary schools enrolled 357 and 411, respectively. The middle school and the high school were also located in the primary city and enrolled 410 and 640, respectively.

For over a decade, a net loss of students to open enrollment has negatively impacted the study district. Over the past three school years (i.e., 2010 to 2011, 2011 to 2012, & 2012 to 2013), net losses of 73, 49, and 84 students respectively has resulted in significantly less funding to the study district. In 2012, this rural school district experienced the greatest loss of students due to open enrollment in the district's history of the open-enrollment program. The result was a net loss of 103 students.

The geographic shape of this school district is unique and may influence considerations for parents when enrolling their students into or out of the study district. Specifically, the school district is long and narrow with population densities existing at both ends with considerable marshland in between. The extensive area of marshland is significant because the marshland does not allow for residential or commercial growth. There is some farmland, but the farmland and respective residences borders the large marshes.

Located five miles north of the primary city of the study district is another district comprised of a high school, middle school, and elementary school. Located five miles south of the primary city of the study district is another school district comprised of a high school, middle school, and four elementary schools. This close proximity may also influence parents when considering open-enrolling their children.

A satellite elementary school, which is part of the study district, is located on the eastern boundary of the study district. The satellite elementary school is closer in mileage to two other high schools and two other middle schools then it is to the study district's middle and high schools. This geography is unique to the study district in comparison to urban districts and may play a role in parental decisions about school choice options.

In an interview, the business manager of the study district shared the financial woes school officials face when open enrollment is trending with net losses. The business manager reviewed a detailed list of facility related repairs such as roof replacement, heating and ventilation repairs, parking lot repairs, and replacement of a 40-year-old truck and plow. There are many considerations influencing public school funding through the state budget, therefore there are many considerations influencing facility repairs, but open enrollment in the study district is determined to be a significant consideration. The business manager stated these facility requests were necessities.

In addition to less funding allocated to facility and equipment budgets, various programs and curricular areas also received less funding. The business manager shared the necessity of new technologies, curriculum, and assessment in order to stay on track with federal and state mandates making the need for more dollars even more critical. For example, recent federal and state mandates requires the ACT test and the ACT-Aspire test be administered to all ninth, tenth, and eleventh graders in public schools. The ninth- and tenth-grade Aspire test is to be taken online. The purchase of computers and proper bandwidth may be financially problematic for some districts.

A second example is a state mandate. Wisconsin Senate Bill 51 requires an increase in math and science credits for public-high-school graduation. This increase may impact hiring, purchasing of additional curriculum, technologies, and textbooks. Also problematic is the need for additional course offerings that may negatively impact student enrollment in elective courses. The elective courses in agriculture, automotive, and technology education are often found to be positively influential for students seeking post-secondary options and career paths. This mandate for math and science credits may also burden districts with significantly greater financial strains.

In order to present a balanced budget to the local taxpayers, salary freezes, reduction of employee's benefits, and layoffs have been utilized along with budget reductions being designated for curriculum, technology, and maintenance. Outflow of students due to open enrollment contributed to the financial deficit resulting in budget items the district leaders determined as necessary needs, as unfulfilled.

In 2012, the study district outsourced a firm called School Perceptions to survey parents of students who enrolled their students out of the study district. These respondents (n = 80) had their children leave the study school district sometime over the three school years leading up to the summer of 2012. The study-district superintendent granted permission for the researcher to use the results of this study as a basis (Appendix B).

This basis survey provided district officials information indicating the top five considerations. In rank order, respondents reported the following reasons they chose to enroll their children out of the study district:

- Advanced placement (AP) course offerings;
- Gifted & talented program;
- Socioeconomics & community culture;
- Discipline, safety, & bullying;
- Preparation for technical school or college.

Since the time of the basis survey in 2012, the study district has placed a tremendous amount of focus, energy, and resources into addressing these considerations for leaving the district. The school board, administrative team, and employees set annual goals to improve upon the items influencing parents' decisions. In some cases, the efforts surrounded changing community perceptions. For example, the primary consideration to exit the study district as

identified by respondents to the basis survey was a lack of Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered at the study district high school. By 2012, the study district already had equal or more AP courses than any area high school. By 2014, the study district has more AP courses than any high school the study district competes with for open-enrolled students. These increases in AP course offerings appear to be relatively unknown to surrounding community members.

Researcher Disclosure

The researcher is an employee of the study district. This study district is a rural school district in south-central Wisconsin. In 1989, he taught high school science and coached sports for seven years in the study district. A short time thereafter he was hired in this same study school district as the high school associate principal for three years, then the high school principal for three years, followed by nine years in this same rural school district as middle school principal. During the time of this study he accepted a position in the study district as the high school principal making this position his second experience as the high school principal of this same school district. He has been in public education in Wisconsin for twenty-five years, and has worked for the study district for twenty-four years.

Definition of Terms

- **Basis survey:** the study district utilized a survey in 2012 through School Perceptions to determine considerations influencing parents to open enroll out of the study district. This study used the results of this survey as a basis.
- **Charter school:** public, non-religious and tuition free schools, which have independence so they can be more innovative in their curriculum offerings, yet still provide a structured, disciplined learning environment and be held accountable for improved student achievement (Wisconsin Charter School Association [WCSA], 2012);

- **Construct:** an attribute or characteristic expressed in an abstract, general way (Creswell, 2009). In this study there were four constructs, quality of academic excellence (Q), school culture (S), variety of course offerings (V), and convenience of school or community (C);
- **Families:** both parents and guardians;
- **Homeschool**: "instruction in a home-based private educational program meeting all of the criteria under s. 118.16 may be substituted for attendance at a public or private school." [Wis. Stats. § 118.16];
- **Nonresident school district:** A Wisconsin public school district, other than a student's resident school district a student is attending or has applied to attend. [Wis. Stats. § 118.51];
- **Open enrollment:** Wisconsin's full-time inter-district public school program, which allows parents to apply for their children to attend school in a school district other than the one in, which they reside. [Wis. Stats. § 118.51] ;
- **Resident school district:** a geographical school district in, which a student resides. [Wis. Stats. § 118.51] ;
- **Rural school district:** a school district with student enrollment less than 2,500 students;
- **School choice:** a form of school choice for any student who resides in a school district, but attends a school in or out of that district other than the public school designated by The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for that residency. Examples in Wisconsin include but are not limited to: open enrollment to a brick-and-mortar school, open enrollment to a virtual school, charter school, home school, parochial school, private school or a voucher school.

- **Significant net gain or loss through open enrollment:** gain or loss of ten or more students from another school district in any one school year. A school district could have a significant net gain to one school district, but a significant net loss to another.
- **Virtual school:** a charter school under contract with a school board under Wisconsin State Statute 118.40 in which all or a portion of the instruction is provided through means of the Internet, and students enrolled in and instructional staff employed by the school are geographically remote from each other;
- **Vouchers:** state-funded scholarships, which pay for students to attend private school rather than public school. Also referred to as opportunity scholarships. (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013).

Summary

This study addressed the following question: "What considerations do parents report as having influenced their decisions to open enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district?" This study examined various considerations influencing parental decisions to open enroll students into the study district. This particular south-central Wisconsin school district has experienced a significant net loss of students due to Wisconsin open enrollment, Act 27. This net loss has negatively and adversely affected funding, which results in loss of programs. School choice is a choice in and of itself and thus one subset of choices within choice theory, a focus of Chapter 2.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

In an effort to reduce net loss of students through open enrollment, this study sought to discover why parents choose to enroll into the study school district, a rural school district in south-central Wisconsin. This literature review is intended to provide the reader with an overview of two theories impacting choice and motivation. Additionally, it provides a summary of school reform through school-choice policies.

Research Question

This project addressed the following question: "What considerations do parents report as having influenced their decisions to open enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district?" This study examined various considerations influencing parent decisions to open enroll students into the study district.

Choice Theories

A choice theory developed suggests parents, educators, and the community at large can promote environments encouraging others to develop "quality world" pictures, which allow them to satisfy their needs responsibly (Glasser, 1998). This theory suggests that people make decisions for a wide variety of considerations that depend upon individuals, their past experiences, and their current needs. Essentially Glasser believes we perceive the world looking for people or things that will satisfy what we want. This is the essence of what Glasser describes as our picture of a *quality world*.

Choice theory in broader perspective includes choices in spouses, clothing, food, travel, employment, spending, education, risky behaviors, attitude, religion, and much more. This theory of decision-making through the lens of Glasser's choices is relevant to this study because parents in Wisconsin have a right to choose a school through a variety of school choice options.

One of those options is public school open enrollment. Through the option of school choice parents satisfy a need or a want for their children. These desires may be connected to an unfulfilled emotional outcome such as friends, reduced bullying, or caring teachers.

Glasser also theorizes people choose their own emotions. In other words, for example, we choose to be optimistic, depressed, hopeful, or bitter and a host of other emotions. This concept is applicable because much emotion can be manifested while making a decision to attend or not to attend a particular school. Travel expenses, student friendships, preparation for college, and scholarship opportunities are responses to important and sometimes intense emotional outcomes influencing school choice considerations.

Choice theory attributes our life successes and failures purely to our own choices and actions. If the result is emotionally negative, this theory indicates remediation is more likely by making better choices. Under the umbrella of Glasser's choice theory, Perkins and Parish (2011) expanded on Glasser's theory to imply that emotional outcomes are impacted by our choices.

In his choice theory, Glasser (1998) sought to explain human behavior and motivation. According to his theory, human behavior is driven by five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Counselors need to understand the five basic needs and focus on them as they guide people through their choices. As an example, a bully may have the need for power. The fulfillment of this need may come through the act of bullying. If the need for power can be replaced through other choices than the act of bullying, it can be surmised the behavior can change (Beebe & Robey, 2011). If a parent desires emotional outcomes for their children such as positive friendships, reduced bullying, or success through increased academic course offerings; Glasser's theory suggests these outcomes may be fulfilled through choosing a school.

Results from decades of psychological research suggest all groups of people (e.g. workers, the elderly, children), but students in particular, may feel more competent, more in control, more motivated, and perform better when they are able to express their preferences and make choices (Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010). Although it is the parent that ultimately makes the legal decision to open enroll their child into or out of a school district, it can be presumed that children may influence this decision. Teenage children may be even more influential with their parents simply due to their knowledge and communication skills concerning the outcomes of a school choice decision.

Robey, Grant, Davis, Mercherson, and Price (2011) researched considerations influencing choice and motivation when working with students. One student in this study indicated "…making choices in life is not easy. Even Jesus had a choice to make when He was about to be crucified. Instead of choosing to save Himself, He submitted to the almighty God. What is your choice today, to live and submit to keep yourself together or to stay in a state of disarray?" The comment from this student utilizes the concepts of Glasser's choice theory as well as focusing on outcomes.

Vroom (1964) introduced expectancy theory to organize and integrate existing knowledge in the field of vocational psychology and motivation. He defined valence as "affective orientations toward particular outcomes" (p. 15). According to Vroom, "an outcome is positively valent when the person prefers attaining it to not attaining it" and "an outcome has a valence of zero when the person is indifferent to attaining or not attaining it, and it is negatively valent when he prefers not attaining it to attaining it" (p. 15). To make this theory relative to school choice, if the desired outcome from public school open enrollment exists for a parent, the outcome is positively valent according to Vroom. This would then increase the likelihood a

parent would leave one school district and enroll in another through Wisconsin public school open enrollment law. Vroom defined expectancy as a subjective probability of an action or effort (e) leading to an outcome or performance (p) expressed as e→p. Expectancy has also been measured as the perceived relation between an action and an outcome.

Vroom's expectancy theory may suggest the key to improving the prediction of the expectancy model might lie in the variables such as the number of outcomes, and the particular dependent variable chosen for the study (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). School officials may have to realize schools must offer as many possible positive outcomes to as many possible customers and consumers in order maximize student enrollment.

The premise of Vroom helps to answer the question of motivation in decision-making processes. The premise of Glasser helps to answer the question of choice and outcomes.

Glasser's choice theory covers choices, which are wide in scope. This study is specific to choosing a school. School choice is just one field of choices available to people. For the purposes of this study, parents' school choice to open enroll in a specific school district are being considered through a lens combining Glasser's choice theory and Vroom's expectancy theory. Choosing a school may be due to personal considerations which may also be wide in scope. Some may be based on education, academic, or school culture, such as test scores, advanced placement offerings, graduation rates, and student behavior. Others may be based on convenience such as location to home, proximity to day care, or the appearance of the facility. Determining these influential considerations is the purpose of this study.

Parental choice has become a cornerstone of school restructuring, or a centerpiece of school reform. Open enrollment is not a likely panacea for educational ills, rather one of the

responses or solutions to the changing family and educational needs of contemporary society (Backes & Slotsve, 1996).

States have adopted open enrollment laws and statutes in effort to improve student and school achievement and increase parental convenience by employing the business model of utilizing the spirit of competition. When treating parents as customers and students as consumers, school districts allow parents to choose their districts' curriculum, athletic programs, facilities, teachers, and other aspects of their children's education. It is likely principals will need to expand their knowledge of marketing. Hoerr (2005) stated:

> This is why we must use the halls not just to decorate, but also to educate. It is why we must put such emphasis on encouraging our parents to enter the building and linger with us. It is consideration we must expend considerable efforts on parent education and communication. When we maintain good communication with our consumers (our students) and our customers (our parents), everyone benefits. (p. 185)

Denmark has the world's oldest school choice program (Salisbury & Tooley, 2005). Demark allowed students to choose between public and private schools at tax payers' expense for over a century and a half when in 1915 Denmark made school choice a part of its constitution. It was not until 1969 that special-education students were allowed to choose a private school at taxpayers' expense in Denmark.

In 1988, Minnesota was the first state to adopt legislation allowing for student transfers in public school districts. Wisconsin was the second state to adopt such legislation in 1990 for the Milwaukee Public Schools and in 1998 for the entire state of Wisconsin.

National Trends in School Choice

From 1993 to 2007, the percentage of children attending a chosen public school (i.e., a public school other than their assigned public school) increased from 11 to 16%, but the percentage of children attending an assigned public school decreased from 80 to 73%. The percentages of children attending private schools also increased between 1993 and 2007 (from eight to nine percent for private church-related schools and from two to three percent for private not church-related schools) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

According to the Friedman Foundation (2014), 22 states have inter-district school choice open-enrollment policies with no limitations. There are 10 states with inter-district school choice open-enrollment policies with limitations, and 18 states that do not allow for inter-district school choice through open enrollment.

Wisconsin History of School Choice Policy Decisions

Nelsen (2012) provided a chronological overview of major adjustments to Wisconsin law, policy, and decisions:

- 1990- The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) is the nation's first and largest urban school choice program. The program began with seven non-sectarian schools and just over 300 students.
- 1995- Lawmakers passed legislation increasing the enrollment cap from 1,500 students to 15% of Milwaukee Public Schools enrollment. The legislation also allowed religious schools to participate. Shortly thereafter a court case ensued. Religious schools were prevented from participating in the program.

- 1998- Wisconsin Supreme Court determined religious schools could participate in the program with the understanding parents could choose to have their children opt out of religious activities.
- 1998- Wisconsin Act 27 created the first statewide inter-district open enrollment program.
- 2005- MPCP reached its 15,000-student enrollment cap. A grassroots effort led to bipartisan legislation increasing the enrollment cap to 22,500 and introduced standardized testing and accreditation requirements for schools.
- 2011- Wisconsin legislature and governor passed the 2011 to 2013 state budget, which included several provisions to expand school choice and improve the regulation of the program. Some of these provisions included eliminating the enrollment cap on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, increasing the income eligibility threshold to 300% of the federal poverty level, expanding the program to include any eligible private school in Wisconsin, and creating a parent choice program in Racine.
- 2013- The three month window for application for open enrollment was extended to 12 months.
- 2013- School Vouchers were expanded to include parochial and private schools state wide.
- 2014- 110 schools enroll 25,820 students in the MPCP with a maximum per-pupil payment of $6,442.

School Choice and School Reform Advocates.

Education reformists typically agree when school choice is an available option parents will exercise their right through school choice and send their children to higher performing

schools (Backes & Slotsve, 1996; Carpenter, 2011; Gorard, 2003; Lubienski, 2005). Additionally, education reformists tend to also agree competition among schools for student enrollment will force the school with an outflow of students to recognize the financial impact and thereby improve practices resulting in greater student achievement (Bierlein, 1993; Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Howe, Eisenhart, & Betebenner, 2002; Jimerson, 2002; Ledwith, 2010; Salisbury & Tooley, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Viteritti, 2002). This theory has been compelling enough for many states and countries to adopt laws establishing and implementing school choice programs. These school choice programs in most states falls under a school choice subset called open enrollment. Also cited is a notion that market forces will improve schools by introducing competition into public education (Bierlein, 1993).

There is some evidence indicating school choice programs such as vouchers were created to promote racial integration in the 1980s and 1990s (Fuller & Elmore, 1996). School vouchers, also referred to as opportunity scholarships, are state-funded scholarships paying for students to attend private school rather than public school, (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013). For advocates, a school voucher is less an instrument for market discipline and more means for enhancing education opportunity and equity (Viteritti, 2002).

According to Bierlein (1993), as far back as Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1793) and Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791/1894) there were concerns individuals compensated with tax dollars would lack motivation for performance compared to what can be seen in private practices. Supporters' of this notion felt introducing public school competition was essential to improve schools.

According to Bierlein (1993), advocates of school choice generally say school choice is a way to achieve equal educational opportunities for poor and minority youngsters;

1. Rescue children from bad schools;
2. Allow for schools to compete for students and money thus forcing schools to improve and be more accountable;
3. Allow for children with unique learning needs to access teaching and learning options;
4. Garner more parental support of school due to the fact parents choose their children's school;
5. Promote voluntary desegregation;
6. Force schools & districts to streamline bureaucracies;
7. Lead to a higher level of professionalism and expertise among teachers;
8. Provide a variety of options for parents, including the ability to use state funds for private and religious schools (p. 38).

Today's school officials and policy makers can learn from the United Kingdom's school choice experiment. The United Kingdom instituted school competition with public schools through a school choice model in the 1980s. New insights into understanding recent trends in social segregation in schools can be gleaned from research by Taylor, (2009). The first large-scale study to examine the changing socioeconomic composition of student enrollment in two countries of the United Kingdom, England and Wales, found contrasting outcomes (Gorard, 2003). Taylor references Gorard's work and several other studies to conclude there are clear winners and losers in the education market through school choice. These winning schools are increasingly becoming more mixed in their socioeconomic compositions.

When considering the United Kingdom, including England and Wales, identifies with a broad range of socioeconomics, demographic profiles, and geographical influences the conclusion by Gorard is relevant to this research. Similar to the United Kingdom, Wisconsin

also has large urban school districts and rural school districts. Wisconsin also has communities with wealthy tax bases and successful business and industry as well as communities suffering from low income and a weak economy. This is important because winning and losing in the United Kingdom might be comparable to Wisconsin.

School Choice and School Reform Critics

United Kingdom.

Taylor (2009), as cited above by the advocates of school choice in the United Kingdom, found that hierarchies of choice and competition produced clear winners and losers in the education market. The socioeconomically polarized educational system has been a byproduct of many decades of open enrollment in the United Kingdom. Opponents to school choice use the same studies in the United Kingdom to stake a claim that the schools on the losing end of school choice student enrollments have a remaining core of students who are more likely to be eligible for free and reduced lunch, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and therefore becoming more "ghettoized" (p. 565).

Michigan.

Analysis of Michigan's charter school and inter-district choice policies indicates the academic performance of public schools in students' districts of residence has virtually no systematic influence in choice participation. Choice activity, on the other hand, is significantly influenced by the socioeconomic characteristics of students' assigned public schools (Ni & Arsen, 2011). Ni and Arsen's findings noted students taking advantage of open enrollment in Michigan, but overall the movement of students found low income families in the inner city schools resulting in greater segregation and disparity between schools.

Similar to Wisconsin law, Michigan provides greater funding to schools with greater enrollment. The public school districts in Michigan with decreasing student enrollments experience less in state funding. These school districts were the very districts appearing to have the greatest socio-economic needs and increased minority segregation. Ultimately, Detroit had many schools close. These results in Michigan mirrored the findings from the United Kingdom in the 1980's. Ni and Arsen (2011) stated:

> The results indicated that school effectiveness has no systematic influence on participation rates for either choice policy, while the loss of students to choice options increases significantly in districts serving high concentrations of low-income students. Therefore, Michigan's school choice policies create financial pressures not on schools performing most poorly but rather on those facing the most difficult educational challenges. (p. 20)

Families in Michigan who can afford to transport their children to thriving suburban districts are doing so. Ni and Arsen noted that segregation is a result of remnants of students left in urban schools.

Boulder, Colorado.

Howe, Eisenhart, and Betebenner (2002) studied the impact of school choice on the Boulder Valley School District, in Colorado. The findings of this study concurred with those of a later study by Ni and Arsen (2011). In Boulder, like Michigan, the intent too was to afford parents the opportunity to send their children to higher achieving districts. The intended result was the competition would force all districts, including districts with an outflow of students due to school choice, to improve. Respondents reported, however, an increase in stratification of races and ethnicities.

Los Angeles, California.

Ledwith (2010) studied the influence of open enrollment on scholastic achievement in Los Angeles. Ledwith concluded that open enrollment led to reorganization of educationally disadvantaged rather than alleviation of segregation. His research found evidence of increased student achievement directly related to open enrollment. This increase was only evidenced in the school districts receiving students through open enrollment, not in districts with net losses in enrollment. A byproduct of open enrollment was that marginal students and those with fewer social and economic resources were in schools with less to offer. Schools with outward flow of students due to open enrollment experienced less funding, fewer resources, and greater percentages of students in poverty. These same trends have been noted in the study district.

Other Studies

Other social implications can be ascertained from a study through George Washington University (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser & Henig, 2005), which concluded that charter schools representing public school systems did not market toward the academically gifted, but conversely charter schools representing private organizations do indicate a positive correlation marketing to attract the cream of the crop students. Consequently, charter schools who marketed toward high achieving students contributed to creating a system of haves and have-nots.

Carpenter (2011) addressed questions about how public schools respond to market-based competition through school choice, and whether public schools become more or less efficient as a result of competition through school choice, as would be predicted through market theory for private business. His findings did not correspond with market theory. Rather than grow more efficient in the face of competition, school districts appeared to grow less efficient.

Lake (2010) found that, for public schools seeking change, state regulations sometimes tied the financial hands of districts by specifying how resources should be used per school or per district, without recognition of enrollment realities. A specific example in Wisconsin is newly requirement that all freshmen and sophomores take a test called the ACT Aspire on-line using a computer. School districts receiving less financial support per student from state aids still have the same requirements for internet bandwidth, computers, and support personnel as the richer school districts receiving more state aide.

Open enrollment Studies

Iowa.

Wendt (1999) studied perceptions of superintendents regarding the impact of open enrollment on public school districts in the state of Iowa. He found that Iowa superintendents reported that parents and students decided to open enroll for considerations unrelated to educational programming, and that open enrollment in Iowa caused financial inequities among districts. He concluded that open enrollment had no impact on school improvement and student achievement in the state of Iowa.

South Dakota.

Jaske (2006) assessed perceptions of South Dakota parents and educators who had experiences with open enrollment from 1999 through 2006. His study determined differences in parental and faculty knowledge of the open enrollment program under South Dakota law. He identified differences in parent and faculty perceptions open-enrollment options specific to academics, convenience, special services, activities, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates.

Jaske found teachers and parents generally agreed open-enrollment choices occurred due to academics, convenience, special programs, fine arts, and NCLB mandates. There were significant differences in how parents viewed athletics as more important than teachers when choosing whether or not to open enroll. Parents reportedly valued an increase in control over their decisions about educational programs much more than about their children's teachers. This value on control supported Vroom's expectancy theory and Glasser's choice theory.

Minnesota.

Williams (2005) researched the perceptions of superintendents about open enrollment. The first research question asked whether Minnesota public school superintendents perceive open enrollment has increased the opportunities for student participation in school sponsored extra-curricular activities in their district. His analysis indicated that Minnesota superintendents did not perceive open enrollment to have substantially impacted opportunities for student participation in school sponsored extra-curricular activities. This finding was true for schools with a net gain in students due to open enrollment as well as those schools with a net loss.

Williams's second research question sought to determine to what extent has open enrollment influenced or changed the leadership style of the Minnesota public school superintendents. The analysis of this portion of the study indicated the leadership style of superintendents was not influenced or changed by the introduction or effects of open enrollment options in Minnesota.

Williams's third question asked what Minnesota public school superintendents perceived as the primary considerations parents and students use in deciding whether to use open enrollment. Results indicated the top consideration was to avoid an interruption in the education process. In other words, if a child started his or her educational experience in a particular school

district, but subsequently the family moved their residence to a nearby school district, the parents would access open enrollment in order to have the child remain in their original school. The second consideration, which superintendents perceived as influencing parents' decisions to open enroll, was a matter of convenience. Convenience could be related to the proximity to home, daycare, relatives, or parent location of work. The superintendents did not perceive the quality of educational programming as a consideration. The responses to this question in this analysis were consistent amongst superintendents indicating no significant statistical difference in superintendent responses as relates to their years of experience as a superintendent.

Williams's fourth question asked what Minnesota public school superintendents perceived as the financial implications of open enrollment in their district? Superintendents of districts receiving students due to open enrollment perceive the districts losing students are able to reduce spending due to the reduction of students.

Williams's last question asked what impact the size of the school district, the experience of the superintendent, and whether a district had an open enrollment surplus or deficit have on the superintendent's perception of open enrollment. Williams's study concluded that size of a school district, experience of a superintendent, and whether or not a district had a net surplus or deficit had minimal impact on a superintendent's perceptions of open enrollment.

Nebraska.

Nebraska was a relatively new state to adopt school choice through open enrollment. Cunning (1991) studied why parents chose to access choice through open enrollment. The most prevalent response pointed to the need for students to have an expanded curriculum with more course offerings. This response identifies with the basis survey facilitated by the study district in 2012, as discussed further in this chapter and in Chapter 3.

The second highest response indicated parents in Nebraska in 1991 chose to open enroll for considerations of smaller class size. The third highest consideration to choose to open enroll was for matters of parent and student convenience. The fourth and fifth considerations provided by parents choosing to exercise their rights to open enroll their child were fine arts offerings and athletic programming respectively. It is interesting to note the quality of academics, teachers, or test scores were not a consideration. The basis survey facilitated by the study district in 2012 also showed that teachers and test scores were not a consideration. Academic course offerings however were a consideration.

Milwaukee Public Schools.

Nelsen (2012) did a comprehensive review of the choice program in the Milwaukee Public Schools. He concluded that open enrollment increased segregation by race and socioeconomic status there. This segregation may be due to the greater likelihood families with more money may also have greater means to transport their children from lower achieving schools in order to attend higher achieving schools. The outward flow of students from middle- to upper- class families resulted in more segregated schools and the richer and higher achieving schools received more tax dollars and higher quality students thus boosting student achievement.

The Future in Wisconsin

One study (Jimerson, 2002) concluded that "… the ultimate outcome of a downward spiral in many of these cases is consolidation or school closings" (p. 5). This spiral begins with a net loss of students in a school district under open enrollment that results in less funding from the state sources (e.g., Wisconsin). Reduced funding may then affect quality of programming and services. Loss in quality programming and services may in turn result in even greater outflow of

students to other schools via school choice. This spiral would end with a disenfranchised school district.

Principals' Roles

According to Clark (2000), principals need to become responsible for the survival of a school by creating a competitive edge over other schools. Robenstine (2000) clarified principals' new roles as follows:

> Market theory may redefine the role of the principal and how they change their responses to this changing role of school politics and management. With regard to focus, principals become responsible for the survival of their school - a concern requiring a number of key tasks. First, within the market framework, principals need to ensure their schools are responsive to consumers, that is, parents (or at least particular groups of parents). Second, principals become responsible for retaining- or even developing, if need be- a competitive edge over other schools. Third, they are responsible at the same time for managing the budget efficiently and cost-effectively, a task including making decisions about hiring, use, and dismissal of faculty and staff, as well as the purchase and use of physical resources. Fourth, principals face the task of managing and resolving any conflict arising out of their new roles. As the image and marketing of the school to maintain the competitive edge and cost-effective management of the budget aspect of their roles, there is a tendency for principals to become increasingly distanced from the work of teaching- and hence also from their faculty (p. 96).

These researchers suggested that a school needs to be consumer-responsive in order to survive. Administering a school similar to the practices of a business requires that competition between neighboring districts is accepted as routine.

Basis Study

The study district hired an outside third party vendor to conduct a survey of parents of students' who open-enrolled out of the study district and into other public school districts. This survey was conducted over the summer of 2012. Respondents were parents of students ranging from pre-Kindergarten to twelfth grade. This study asked parents participants two questions and asked them to rank their answers on a scale, where a score of a 4 equaled *extremely important*, 3 equaled *important*, 2 equaled *somewhat important*, and 1 equaled *not important*. Respondents to the survey (n = 80) represented 53% of the potential population of 152 eligible parents.

The first question on the basis survey asked participants who opted to enroll their children out of the study district, "When making decisions about your child's education, how important are the following programs to you?" Using the four-point Likert-type scale, responses indicated the most important considerations were:

1. Advanced placement (AP) course offerings;
2. Gifted and talented program;
3. Discipline,
4. Safety & bullying;
5. Math & science offerings;
6. Preparation for technical school or college.

The second item on the basis survey asked participants who chose to enroll their children out of the study district, "Please rate how well the school district you enrolled out of performs with the following programs."

In 2012, respondents rated the study district with high marks in the categories of attractive building and grounds, opportunities for community service and service learning, use of

technology in the classroom, class size, and communication through newspapers, newsletters, and the website. Respondents reported as weak the study district's Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings, gifted and talented program, socioeconomics and community culture, religious education, discipline, safety, bullying, and preparation for technical school or college (Appendix B).

The basis survey subtracted parent responses from Question 2 from Question 1, which provided a gap analysis comparing how important particular programs were to respondents as to their perceptions of how the study district performed in the same program. This gap analysis then provided direction for the study district, which areas to improve upon based upon the perception of participants who chose to enroll their children out of the study district.

The gap analysis showed the largest gaps in areas or programs the study district needed to focus on in order to reduce the number of students leaving the district through open enrollment. The gap analysis indicated the primary considerations participants chose to leave the study district through open enrollment were: Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings; gifted and talented program; socioeconomics and community culture; discipline, safety and bullying; and lastly, student preparation for technical school and college.

Summary

Theories of choice, decisions, motivation, and outcomes offer an array of viewpoints on why parents decide to leave or enroll their children in a particular school through school choice options. School reform advocates have pointed to school choice and the inherent ensuing competition as necessary. Studies point to school choice to assure students can leave poor performing schools. There is also research indicating the schools with an outflow of students due to open enrollment, which is one form of school choice, will change and improve.

Critics of school choice point to other considerations, which indicate the schools with an outflow of students due to open enrollment, retain a group of students who are lower in skill, socioeconomic assets, and parents who care. As such, these schools become higher demanding and now must operate with less money and less programming. Segregation is the result, according to many other studies. The consolidation and closing of schools has also been noted.

The study district has utilized a basis survey to determine why parents chose to leave the study district through Wisconsin Act 27 open-enrollment policies. There are a large number of parents who have opted to open enroll into the study district over the past few years. This study analyzed these considerations and collected data to inform and address marketing and public relations. Marketing efforts in the study district are based on the key findings of this study.

Chapter 3 outlines sample selection as well as the survey instrument. Additionally, it provides detailed descriptions of assurances of anonymity, survey process, data collection, and analysis.

Chapter 3. Research Design and Method

This study examined influences on parents who open-enrolled students into the study district. Additionally, this study provided data for leaders of the study district to guide decisions toward developing and implementing program changes to have a positive impact on open enrollment into the study district. This study was designed to add to literature to help school officials address relatively new issues surrounding public relations, marketing, and competition for students.

Overview of the Study District

The study district's overall student enrollment has generally increased over the past 16 years. This increase is due, in part, to the establishment of a pre-kindergarten program in 2008 to 2009. Generally speaking, the one elementary school on the east side of the district has a declining enrollment while the other two elementary schools have experienced increasing enrollment. Over this same 16-year period, the middle school and the high school have both experienced increases in enrollment.

Over the past 16 years, the study district has experienced slow but steady growth in student enrollment of an additional 194 students. Over this same time frame, the study district has recognized an increase in students choosing to open enroll into the study district from four students in the first school year, 1998 to 1999, to 81 students in 2012 to 2013, the last reported school year.

Conversely, the study district has also observed significant increases in the students choosing to open enroll out of the study district. In the first school year, 1998 to 1999, the number of students leaving the study district through open enrollment was nine students. The largest outward flow of students was 184 students in the 2012 to 2013 school year.

Data from the study district identified ten school districts with which the study district competes for open-enrolled students. Eight of the ten school districts border the study school district. These eight are the only districts bordering the study school district. One of the remaining two school districts offers a virtual school in which some students of the study school district open-enroll.

Compared to the ten school districts with which the study school district competes for open-enrolled students, the study district experiences a significant net loss of open-enrolled students to three of the competing school districts. A significant net loss of open-enrolled students is defined as ten or more students per school district per school year.

The study school district experiences a net loss of open-enrolled students to five of the competing school districts with losses less than ten students per district per school year. The study district experiences a net gain of open-enrolled students from two of the competing districts.

Rationale

Fink (2002) identified a self-administered survey as one of four types of data collections. The survey was self-administered and maintained respondent anonymity, with closed-ended items and two open-ended items.

This survey was administered to a convenience sample of parents of students who opted to the study school district through Wisconsin public school open enrollment law. Parents, as opposed to students, were selected as survey respondents because it is the parents who choose to enroll their children through open enrollment. The parents make this decision because their children are minors and as such children cannot legally make the decision to enroll in or out of a

school district. Because parents are decision makers on the subject of open enrollment, they were invited to participate in this study.

The consideration for a survey primarily consisting of closed-ended items with two open-ended items allowed for assurance of the anonymity of the respondents. This assurance eliminated perceived risks for parent respondents such as the principal's influence over grades, scholarships, and student discipline. This risk may have only been a perception of parents because the researcher was principal of the study district high school. The anonymity of the survey assured parents that those risks were unfounded.

This survey method allowed for an efficient means of survey administration. Additionally, this survey method proved to be less time consuming and efficient for the respondent. In order to get a wide range of input, participants were provided two open-ended items in order to allow for comments. The survey results, combined with the two open-ended items, allows for an opportunity to draw conclusions for this study. This study was intended to help the study district craft a marketing and public relations plan.

The survey instrument was economically advantageous reducing the cost for the study. The survey is a cross-sectional design, which allowed for a twenty-day window for the survey to be taken. This survey design provided for a rapid turnaround in responses allowing for quick access to the data.

Data Sources

The survey was used to collect data from parents of students who open enrolled a child or children into the study district. The study district is one school district in southern Wisconsin. The data is stratified by year allowing participants who open-enrolled children into the study district only during the school years of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, or 2013 to 2014.

The study district has access to the names and addresses of the families who choose to open enroll into the study district. This access helped provide for a simple process in offering the survey to a convenience sample. The option of an electronic survey or a paper survey also reduced the risk of making the survey only available to those who had or could afford the technology. This option reduced the risk of stratifying the survey to an implied socio-economic group. The Edgewood College Human Participants Review Board (HPRB) approved measures to reduce participant risk (Appendix C).

Targeted participants were volunteer adults whose participation in the survey was anonymous. The ethnicity and other demographical information of the participants were not collected. All participants were assumed to be in good health. There was no payment, gift, or coercion of the participants to participate. Survey data were aggregated to further assure participants' anonymity.

There were no direct benefits to the participants who took the survey. However, the data gathered from this survey were designed to benefit the study district board, superintendent, administrators, faculty, and community.

Participants submitted surveys anonymously. Those who chose to take an on-line survey did so anonymously. Those who chose to take a paper survey mailed the survey in a previously addressed and stamped envelope without a return address to the district office of the study district. The researcher did not know which of the 117 possible participants actually participated, or which surveys they submitted.

The data source was a population of parents or guardians who open enrolled into the study district during the three year window of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, and 2013 to 2014. The survey population represents 167 students coming from 117 families. A parent could take

the survey once per household with one or more open-enrolled children into the study district during the 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, or 2013 to 2014 school years. There were 33 potential participants who were unreachable via e-mail or postal mail. These parents open enrolled their children into the study district but subsequently moved to other districts and as such their addresses and contact information did not allow for researcher access. These potential participants never received an invitation to take the survey nor did they receive the survey. This reduced the potential participants to 84. Sixty-four participants completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 76%.

Instrumentation

The basis survey instrument from 2012 was useful for this research. The superintendent of the study district provided permission to use the basis survey (Appendix B).

The items in the study survey are to some extent based on the basis survey, but there are differences. The four constructs of the basis survey did not appear to be by design, but rather were identified by the researcher. In other words, the basis survey provided the participants to respond to 26 survey items. Each of these survey items were grouped independently of each other and not under a pre-determined construct. The basis survey of 2012 was used to identify four constructs. These four constructs helped to frame the items in the survey instrument for this 2014 research. The 2012 basis survey did not use four constructs. The 2014 study did use these four constructs, thus providing another key difference between the two surveys.

The specific survey items were different in both surveys. Most notably the basis survey items had groupings of considerations in individual survey items. This made it difficult to determine if the respondent was rating the item on the four-point Likert-type scale based upon one or more of the considerations within the survey item. As a result, the items were broken

down into individual and specific considerations. For example, the basis survey asked the participant to place a value on competent and caring teachers. These were split this into two items, competent teachers as one item, and caring teachers as another.

A second key difference each of survey items 7 through 82 were connected with one of four constructs. This allowed for statistical analysis of these survey items plus a richer reliability analysis using the four constructs.

A third key difference is the basis survey first asked the respondent to rate the importance of items. Then the basis survey asked the respondent to rate their perception of the study district concerning these same items. A gap analysis was then performed based upon these two ratings. This study did not utilize this approach or this gap analysis.

Fourthly, the basis survey was designed to determine influences parents consider to leave a specific school district. This study was on influences parents considered to open enroll into the study district.

It was desired to maintain some degree of similarity between the two surveys in order to draw comparisons and determine whether or not the study district is improving in identified areas as based on previously established district goals. The use of a four-point Likert-type scale allowed for simple comparisons to be made.

A four-point Likert-type scale forced survey participants to choose a response (Fink, 2002). In other words, there was no mid-point to select for a neutral response, so participants had to choose whether they were in favor or against a controversial topic by choosing a response on one side of the issue or the other. As Fink (2002) ascertained, respondents would be more thoughtful if they had to choose an option.

Qualtrics survey software was used to administer and analyze the survey. This tool allowed the researcher to create the survey using customized templates and then email the survey to the survey population. Qualtrics also allowed for the data to be coded and downloaded into a spreadsheet or database for simple analysis. Additionally, Qualtrics enabled for the creation of various graphs and charts for multiple views for data interpretation.

Survey Content

The survey asked the respondents to rate the degree, which various considerations or programs influenced their decision to open enroll in the study school district (Appendix D). Each question was tied to one of four constructs, which were used to draw conclusions. The four constructs were as follows:

- **Quality of Academic Excellence (Q)**: Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings, gifted and talented program, preparation for college and technical school, preparation for life after school, student achievement, test scores, competent employees, use of technology, and quality of programs such as clubs and athletics.
- **Variety of Course Offerings (V):** math, science, English, social studies, foreign language, technology & engineering, art, physical education, special education, ESL, business education, family and consumer education, and agriculture education.
- **School Culture (S):** student discipline, safety, bullying, caring employees, quality athletics programs, quality clubs and co-curricular studies, student friendships, friendly student body, class size, community service, character education, quality facilities, a negative experience at a previous school district, and school communications.

- **Convenience & Community (C)**: community culture, proximity of school to home, work, or daycare, socio-economics of the community, and what is heard from others about the district.

Pilot Study

A pilot was designed to test logistics and gather information prior to a larger study. The pilot is intended to improve the quality and efficiency of the actual survey by revealing any deficiencies or confusion in the design of the proposed survey or survey instruction. These deficiencies can then be addressed before the survey is administered (Creswell, 2009).

The pilot was administered to eight people: two principals, two parents of students who are not open-enrolled, one graduate student, one superintendent, and two teachers. This pilot was administered about three weeks prior to the survey window. Feedback from the pilot was used to garner information about clarity of items, directions, and purposes of the survey.

The feedback from pilot participants was used to improve the survey. Three primary changes were made. First, the background color of the survey was changed in order to provide a higher quality contrast between the background and the survey items for easier viewing and effectiveness.

Second, although it was intended to address ambiguity in survey items, not all ambiguity was identified in advance. The pilot group feedback identified several survey items with multiple considerations. For example, one pilot survey participant suggested the survey item *competent and caring teachers* be broken down into two survey items of *competent teachers* and *caring teachers*. This suggestion was addressed with several items.

The third request was the cover letter should utilize the term *open enrollment* rather than *school choice*. This was suggested by three of the eight participants in the pilot group.

Data Collection

The parents of the students who open enrolled into the study district were invited to participate by taking the survey. This invitation to participate came via a cover letter sent through the United States Postal Service. In this cover letter, participants were informed if they choose to participate in the study they can complete the survey electronically or in a hard copy version. The cover letter explained the purpose of the survey, the dates of the survey window, participation is voluntary, and participant's responses are anonymous. Participants were informed in the cover letter, and in the directions of the survey, that participating and submitting the survey served as implied consent.

Otherwise stated, by completing and submitting the survey either electronically or by paper version, participants are implying their consent for the researcher to use the data collected. No formal consent was requested.

The cover letter was mailed approximately four days prior to the start of a twenty-day time window that was the same for the electronic survey as well as the paper survey.

On the sixth day, and again on the thirteenth day of the survey window, a post card reminder was mailed to each participant invited to participate in the survey. These reminders were sent to all invited participants even if some had already completed and submitted the survey because the researcher did not know who had or had not completed the survey.

The cover letter and the directions of the survey included the statement "Completing and returning this survey constitute your consent for the researcher to use the data." In order to assure the participants ~~are~~ fully consented to use this data, this statement was also shown at the beginning of the survey.

Additionally, the study district school board was provided a letter requesting their signature to give their consent for the study (Appendix E). The school board, as a representative of not only the school district, but the community and taxpayers they represent, carries the authority necessary to provide for such consent and support.

Data Analysis

Descriptive, comparative, and inferential statistics were computed to address the research question: What considerations do parents report as having influenced their decisions to enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district?

Data from measured reported influences the participants considered when deciding to open enroll their child into the study district. Survey data were assigned numerical values on a four-point Likert-type scale.

As Burke (2009) said "Reliability in research is the dependability or accuracy of the results," (p. 55). Otherwise stated, reliability provides evidence of the internal consistency of the survey instrument. In order to keep the variance in the measured results to a minimum, Burke (2009) suggests the use of statistical tests.

The first statistical test used to check for reliability was Cronbach's *alpha*. Computing Cronbach's *alpha* can be used to assess the reliability of a survey instrument. Cronbach's *alpha* values above 0.7 are considered acceptable; however, values above 0.8 are preferable.

Secondly, in order to further measure the reliability of the survey instrument, a factor analysis test using SPSS was utilized. Specifically, confirmatory factor analysis was performed in order to determine whether constructs used in the survey instrument demonstrated common trends, or factors.

Data were coded under the following constructs:

- Quality of academic excellence (Q);
- Variety of course offerings (V);
- School culture (S);
- Convenience of school & community (C).

Reliability scores for each construct were calculated with Cronbach's *alpha.* Each individual survey item within each construct was analyzed by exploring correlates. Partial correlation allowed for the exploration of the relationship between two constructs. This allowed for the identification of contamination of any constructs in the relationship.

Each general category was then transformed into a construct, one each for Q, V, S, and C. Statistical analysis of each of these constructs yielded frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations.

Additionally, a one-sample *t test* was used to compare mean scores to a predetermined scale score value of 2.5 based on a four-point Likert-type scale. "The *t* test measures the difference between two mean values in a data set. The higher the *t* score, the more likely it is that a significant difference exists between the means score, or between the mean value and the selected scale-score value" (Burke, 2009 p. 107). All inferential statistics used 95% confidence levels.

This data collected allowed the analysis to be narrowed to specific items within each construct. This offered richer detail for the study district leaders while developing marketing and public-relations plans.

Limitations

This study used a convenience sample and was not a replication of the basis study of 2012. This study was specific to one district and as such is not generalizable to other school

districts. The geography, location, and shape, combined with the socioeconomic makeup of the study district reduced generalizations. The ethnic composition of the study district provided limited comparisons to other districts. Another limitation was the study school district had already initiated efforts attempting to change community perceptions. These efforts may have impacted this study.

The survey was on-line and internet-based. Hard copies of the survey were provided to families without internet access, but additional steps were necessary for these families to access the survey. The survey was not provided in Spanish. There are very few Spanish-speaking families who open enroll into the study district, but these two decisions provided additional limitations. This was a time-bound survey for open-enrollment participants during the school years of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, and 2013 to 2014. This study did not provide longitudinal results.

Summary

This study examined various considerations influencing parent decisions to open enroll students into the study district. The study district is a rural school district in south-central Wisconsin. For several years, the study district has experienced a significant net loss of students due to open enrollment. This net loss has resulted in reduced state funding.

This quantitative study gathered data from a convenience sample with a closed-method, self-administered survey. A pilot survey was utilized in order to provide better understanding for the participants. Each of the 80 survey items was matched with one of four constructs.

The reliability of the survey instrument was provided through factor analysis and calculation of Cronbach's *alpha*. Statistical analyses including frequencies, mean scores, standard deviations, and *t* tests were provided.

Chapter 4. Results

The intent of this study was to determine considerations influencing parents to open enroll students into the study district. Additionally, this study provided data for the leaders of the study district to guide decisions toward effective program changes designed to have a positive impact on open enrollment into the study district. This quantitative study sought to add to the literature helping school officials address relatively new issues surrounding public relations, marketing, and school competition for students.

The research question that guided this study was as follows: "What considerations do parents report as having influenced their decisions to open enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district?"

Review of Procedures

The data source was a convenience sample of 64 respondents drawn from a population of 84 parents who enrolled their children into the study district during the three-year window of 2011to 2012, 2012 to 2013, or 2013 to 2014. Survey items one and two requested information on participant demographics. A four-point Likert-type scale was used for survey items 3 through 82. Lastly, participants provided responses to two open-ended questions in order to allow for further elaboration on details they considered when deciding to open enroll into the study district.

Demographics

The first demographic item asked, "How many children did you enroll into the study district?" There were 26 families who open enrolled one child, representing 42.6% of the participants. There were 21 families who open enrolled two children, representing 34.4% of the participants. There were 11 families who open enrolled three children, representing 18 % of the

families. There were three families who open enrolled four or more children into the study district, representing 5% of the participants.

The second demographic item was "The first student I enrolled into the study district started in the _____ grade level." There were 29 families who first open enrolled children into the study district while the children were in elementary school, representing 47.5% of participants. There were seven families who first open enrolled children into the study district while the children were in middle school, representing 11.5% of participants. There were 25 families who first open enrolled children into the study district while the children were in high school, representing 41% of participants.

Reliability

Computing Cronbach's *alpha* provided a measure of reliability for the survey instrument. Cronbach's *alpha* values above 0.7 are considered acceptable, and values above 0.8 are preferable (Burke, 2009). The survey instrument in this study was determined to be very reliable with a Cronbach's *alpha* score of 0.97 ($n = 80$).

In order to further measure the reliability of the survey instrument, confirmatory factor analysis was used to determine whether the constructs used to analyze survey data demonstrated common trends. Confirmatory factor analysis was also used to determine whether the construct of the survey instrument proved to be consistent with the category labels, which were derived from the previous research via the basis study. These category labels, or constructs, were: *quality of academic excellence* (Q); *variety of course offerings* (V); *school culture* (S); and *convenience of school & community* (C).

Factor analysis of Items 3 through 82 ($n = 80$) revealed 18 factors with trends identified in Factors 1 through 11. The trends identified provided further assurance of the reliability of the

survey instrument. Specifically, the factor analysis results provided below substantiated the theory behind the survey, that parents were able to communicate attitudes about open enrollment according to predetermined items in each construct.

Factor 1 showed trends in all items with the Constructs Q, V, and S, but no items connected with Construct C. The fact that none of the survey items in Construct C, *convenience of school & community*, were identified in Factor 1 showed that items in Construct C were proper.

Some survey items had commonalities: *district office staff*, and *building office clerical staff*; were similar. Likewise, survey items *competent counselors*, and *caring counselors* had a common characteristic of school counselors, even though *competent counselors* identifies with Construct Q, and *caring counselors* identifies with Construct S.

Survey participants' responses identified trends with *district office staff* and *building office clerical staff* survey items. Similarly, survey participants' responses identified trends with *competent counselors* and *caring counselors*. These trends were noted in Factor 2. This same approach, drawing inferences, based upon the factor analysis, can be applied to each of the trends identified in the factors delineated below. These trends are identified with constructs as well as survey items.

Factor 2 showed trends with all items connected with Construct C. Additional trends with music and art were identified. Factor 2 also reported a trend with both competent and caring counselors. Another trend about elementary curriculum was identified with both elementary reading and math. A trend regarding the proximity of school to home, work, day care, and relatives was reported. The culture and convenience of the communities was noted. Lastly, a trend was identified with the staff of the district and building offices.

Factor 3 showed trends with technology education, business education, family and consumer education, foreign language, physical education, and health. It is noteworthy each of these course areas fall within the categories most schools generally agree upon as elective departments.

Factor 4 revealed trends in physical education and health classes. Factor 4 also reported trends with both competent and caring counselors. Lastly a trend was identified with character education and service learning. It can be generally agreed upon that character education and service learning share a common trait.

Factor 5 showed trends for every item connected with Construct C, *convenience*. Additionally elementary and middle school reading trended in this factor. Lastly, elementary and middle school math trended in this factor.

Factor 6 revealed trends in the areas of student friendships, friendly students, student safety, and bullying. Each of these survey items shares a common trait concerning friendships and safety. Factor 7 did not identify any trends.

Factor 8 showed trends in the areas of school communications particularly on the topic of school websites and newsletters. Factor 9 identified trends in the areas of quality of overall athletics as well as a specific sports program. Factor 10 did not identify any trends. Factor eleven identified trends with the staff of the building offices as well as the district office employees.

Consistency in particular responses provided for increased assurance in the reliability of the survey instrument. For example, it is generally agreed upon that physical education and health education are identified in the same departments in most high schools. These two items trended together in factor analysis. Another example identified trends with survey items

regarding friendships, friendly students, school safety, and reduced bullying. It is reasonable to recognize each of these items have similar qualities.

The consistency in participant responses as demonstrated through the factor analysis combined with the Cronbach's *alpha* score of 0.97, demonstrated reliability in the survey instrument.

Analyses

The data analyses for this study were organized under four constructs: *quality of academic excellence* (Q), *variety of course offerings* (V), *school culture* (S), and *convenience of school & community* (C). Survey Items 3 through 82 served to determine specific considerations influencing respondent's decisions to enroll their children into the study district. Each of the survey items were pre-determined to connect with one of the four constructs.

The reliability of each construct was analyzed using Cronbach's *alpha*. Each individual survey item within each construct was analyzed by exploring correlates. Partial correlation allowed for the exploration of the relationship between the two constructs. The analysis of these correlations allowed for the identification of contamination of any constructs in the relationship. In other words, if survey items without common traits were found to have correlation in common factors, it may indicate contamination of the survey instrument.

Correlates did not show contamination between the construct relationships. Items 3 through 82 were identified with each of the four Constructs, Q, V, S, and C. The Cronbach's *alpha* scores are identified in Table 3.

Table 3. Cronbach's *alpha*

Construct	*Alpha*	*n*
S	0.95	28
Q	0.94	25
V	0.93	18
C	0.76	9

Construct S, *school culture*, reported the highest Cronbach's *alpha* score, 0.95. Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence*, also reported a high Cronbach's *alpha* score, 0.93. Construct V, *variety of course offerings*, also reported a high Cronbach's *alpha* score, 0.93. Construct C, *convenience of school & community*, reported the lowest Cronbach's *alpha* score at 0.76, but still above the generally accepted level of 0.7 to assure reliability with the construct.

Statistical analysis of each of these constructs yielded information including frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations. Table 4 shows descriptive statistics for each construct.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	*n*	*M*	*SD*
S	28	2.46	0.78
Q	25	2.43	0.77
V	18	2.21	0.72
C	9	2.09	0.79

Construct S, *school culture*, showed the highest mean score (M = 2.46). Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence* showed a mean score of (M = 2.43). Construct V, *variety of course offerings* showed a mean score of (M = 2.21), and Construct C, *convenience of school & community* showed a mean score of (M = 2.09).

Items 3 through 82 addressed specific considerations that may have influenced parents' decisions to open enroll their children into the study district. Descriptive statistics are shown in Appendix F for these 80 items represented in the four constructs.

School culture.

Construct S was reported as the most influential of the four Constructs. Considerations parents reported as most influential in Construct S are identified in Table 5. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential. Appendix F shows data for all items in Construct S.

Table 5. Most Influential Items for Construct S

Item	*M*	Item	%*
Caring teachers	3.25	Caring teachers	77%
Student safety	3.13	Student safety	76%
Safety and security	3.07	Safety and security	74%
Caring principals	3.02	Friendly student body	72%
Friendly student body	2.96	Caring principals	70%
Student friendships	2.96	Student friendships	70%
Low frequency of bullying	2.84	Low frequency of bullying	68%
Quality of facilities	2.82	Student discipline	65%
Student discipline	2.77	Character education	65%
Character education	2.70	Quality of facilities	63%
Class size	2.61	Class size	57%
What I heard about the district from others	2.51	What I heard about the district from others	56%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

In Construct S, the top three ranked survey items participants reported were *caring teachers*, *student safety*, and *safety & security*. Survey Item 24, *caring teachers*, ranked highest in mean (M = 3.25) and in percent rating with over three fourths of participants (77%) responded *caring teachers* in the study district either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district.

Survey Item 45, *student safety*, ranked with the second highest mean (*M* = 3.13). This item also ranked second in percent rating with over three fourths of participants, (76%) responded student safety either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district.

Item 49, *safety and security*, ranked the third highest in mean (*M* =3.07). About three fourths of participants (74%) responded safety and security either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district.

Considerations parents reported as least influential in Construct S are identified in Table 6. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential.

Table 6. Least Influential Items for Construct S

Item	*M*	Item	%*
Communications from web site	1.80	District office staff	24%
Communication from newspapers	1.76	Communication from web site	22%
Communication from newsletters	1.76	Communication from newspapers	22%
District office staff	1.73	Communication from newsletters	22%
Presentation by a school employee	1.56	Presentation by a school employee	18%
Personal invitation or tour	1.51	Personal invitation or tour	16%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

In Construct S, the lowest ranked survey items participants reported were *a personal invitation or tour* and *a presentation by a school employee.* These two survey items report mean scores of *M* = 1.51 and *M* = 1.56 respectively. The percentage of responses indicating these items influenced or significantly influenced respondents' decisions to enroll into the study district, ranged from 16% to 18%.

Quality of academic excellence.

Considerations respondents reported as most influential under Construct Q are identified in Table 7. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential. Appendix F shows the entire listing of all items for Construct Q.

Table 7. Most Influential Items for Construct Q

Item	*M*	Item	%*
Competent teachers	3.2	Quality of core curriculum	74%
Competent principals	3	Competent teachers	72%
Quality of core curriculum	3	Competent principals	72%
Preparation for college	2.9	Available technology	66%
Available technology	2.8	Preparation for college	64%
Competent school board	2.6	Competent school board	62%
Quality of elective courses	2.6	Quality of elective courses	62%
AP courses	2.6	AP courses	55%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

In Construct Q, the top three ranked survey items participants reported were *competent teachers*, *competent principals*, and *quality of core curriculum*. Survey Item 23, *competent teachers*, had the highest mean score (*M* = 3.16). About three fourths of participants (72%) responded competent teachers either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district.

Survey Item 27, *competent principals*, had the second highest mean score (*M* = 3.04). About three fourths of participants (72%) responded competent principals either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district.

Survey Item 7, *quality of core curriculum*, reported the third highest mean score (*M* = 2.95). About three fourths of participants (74%) responded the quality of the core curriculum

either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district. It noteworthy that the survey item, *caring teachers*, was reported by respondents as the most influential in Construct S and the survey item, *competent teachers*, was reported by respondents as the most influential in Construct Q.

The considerations respondents identified as least influential under Construct Q are identified in Table 8. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential.

Table 8. Least Influential Items for Construct Q

Item	*M*	Item	%*
Quality of co-curriculars	1.98	A specific employee	30%
A specific employee	1.94	A specific sports program	29%
Middle school math program	1.88	Middle school math program	29%
Middle school reading program	1.80	Middle school reading program	25%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Respondents reported *middle school reading programs*, and *middle school math programs*, as the least influential (means ranged from $M = 1.80$ to $M = 1.88$). The percentage of responses that these items influenced or significantly influenced respondents decisions to enroll into the study district, ranged from 25% to 29%.

Variety of course offerings.

Construct V was reported as the third most influential of the four constructs. The considerations respondents reported as most influential under Construct V are identified in Table 9. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential. Appendix F shows the entire listing of all items under Construct V.

Table 9. Most Influential Items for Construct V

Item	*M*	Item	%*
More opportunities in the study district	2.91	English course offerings	68%
Opportunities for college credit	2.69	More opportunities in the study district	66%
English course offerings	2.68	Math course offerings	64%
Math course offerings	2.66	Science course offerings	64%
Science course offerings	2.62	Social studies course offerings	60%
Social Studies course offerings	2.51	Opportunities for college credit	57%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Survey Item 64, *more opportunities in the study district than other districts,* ranked highest in mean score (*M* = 2.91). Two thirds of participants (66%) reported more opportunities in the study district either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district.

Survey Item 41, *opportunities for college credit while still in high school,* ranked second highest in mean score (*M* = 2.69). However only (57%) of participants responded that an opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district.

The considerations respondents identified as least influential under Construct V are identified in Table 10. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential.

Table 10. Least Influential Items for Construct V

Item	*M*	Item	%*
Physical education courses	1.84	Physical education courses	26%
FACE Courses	1.84	Health Education Courses	26%
Health education courses	1.81	FACE courses	25%
Special education	1.77	Special education	23%
ESL	1.37	ESL	9%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Respondents reported *special education programs*, and *the ESL program* as the least influential (means ranged from $M = 1.37$ to $M = 1.77$). The percentage of responses that these items influenced or significantly influenced respondents decisions to enroll into the study district, ranged from 9% to 23%.

Convenience of school & community

Construct C was reported as the least influential of the four Constructs. The considerations respondents identified as most influential in Construct C are identified in Table 11. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential. There are no survey items in Construct C identified as significantly influencing respondents' decision to open enroll their children into the study district. Appendix F shows data for Construct C.

Table 11. Most Influential Items for Construct C

Item	*M*	Item	%*
Proximity of school to home	2.43	Proximity of school to home	50%
Proximity of school to work	2.35	Proximity of school to work	47%
Culture of the local community	2.29	Culture of the local community	45%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Survey Item 66, *proximity of school to home*, ranked highest (*M* = 2.43). Half of participants (50%) responded the proximity of school to home either influenced or significantly influenced their decision to enroll into the study district. Although proximity of school to home is not statistically significant as influential, it was reported by parents in the open ended survey item, 83.

The considerations respondents identified as least influential in Construct C are identified in Table 12. In this table, the first column lists the items in decreasing rank order of mean. The second column lists the items in decreasing rank order of the sum of the percent rating the item as significantly influential plus the percent rating the item as influential.

Table 12. Least Influential Items for Construct C

Item	*M*	Item	%*
Bus service	1.47	Bus service	14%
Proximity of school to daycare	1.43	Proximity of school to daycare	13%
School lunch	1.36	School lunch	9%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

S*chool lunch* was reported as the least influential with a mean score (*M* = 1.36) and only 9% of participants reported the school lunch as significantly influential or influential.

Levels of Significance in One-sample *t* tests

One-sample *t test*s were used to compare mean scores to a predetermined scale score value of 2.5 based on the four-point Likert-type scale. In these analyses, positive *t* scores for survey items indicate greater influences on respondents' decisions to open enroll their children into the study district. A negative *t* score for survey items indicate less influence on respondents' decisions to open enroll their children into the study district. A score of less than 95% confidence was considered statistically significant.

School culture.

Table 13 lists items in Construct S with positive *t* scores and significance at 95% confidence levels, in decreasing order of *t* scores. Appendix F shows data for all survey items for Construct S.

Table 13. Most Influential Items for Construct S
(based on *t* scores)

Item	*t* score	sig (2-tailed)
Caring teachers	5.54	0.00
Student safety	4.27	0.00
Safety and security	3.75	0.00
Caring principals	3.47	0.00
Friendly student body	3.01	0.00
Student friendships	2.99	0.00
Low frequency of bullying	2.19	0.03
Quality of facilities	2.07	0.04

Under Construct S, *School Culture,* there were eight survey items with statistically significant positive *t* scores ($p < 0.05$). The top 3 reported were *caring teachers*, *student safety*, and *safety & security*. Survey Item 24, *caring teachers*, reported the highest *t* scores of +5.54 and a level of significance of 0.00. Survey Item 45, *student safety*, had a *t* score of +4.27 and a level of significance of 0.00. Survey Item 49, *safety and security*, had a *t* score of +3.75 and a level of significance of 0.00.

The descriptive data as referenced earlier in this chapter in Table 5 reported the same three survey items in the same rank order. Each of these positively valued *t sco*res indicates these items influenced respondents' decisions to enroll into the study district. Significance was at a 95% confidence level.

Table 14 lists items in Construct S with negative *t* scores and significance at a 95% confidence level, in decreasing order of *t* scores.

Table 14. Least Influential Items for Construct S
(based on t scores)

Item	*t* score	sig. (2-tailed)
Caring advisors	-2.73	0.01
Athletic coaching staff	-2.86	0.01
Building office clerical staff	-4.21	0.00
Staff of the fine arts after school clubs	-4.46	0.00
Communication from web site	-4.89	0.00
Communication from newspapers	-5.10	0.00
Communication from newsletters	-5.27	0.00
District office staff	-6.02	0.00
A presentation by a school employee	-7.56	0.00
A personal invitation and tour	-7.81	0.00

There were ten survey items in this construct with statistically significant negative *t* scores ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate with a statistically significant degree of confidence these survey items did not influence respondents decision to open enroll into the study district.

The two survey items reported as the least influential were *a presentation by a school employee*, and *a personal invitation or tour by a school employee.* Survey Item 76, *a presentation by a school employee*, had a *t* score of -7.56 and a level of significance of 0.00. Survey Item 77, *a personal invitation or tour by a school employee*, reported a *t sco*re of -7.82 and a level of significance of 0.00.

Quality of academic excellence.

Table 15 lists survey items in Construct Q with positive *t* scores and significance at the 95% confidence levels in decreasing order of *t* scores. Appendix F shows data for all items for Construct Q.

Table 15. Most Influential Items for Construct Q
(based on positive *t* scores).

Item	*t* score	sig (2-tailed)
Competent teachers	4.66	0.00
Competent principals	3.62	0.00
Quality of core curriculum	3.36	0.00
Available technology	2.36	0.02
Preparation for college	2.23	0.03

Under Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence*, there were five survey items with statistically significant positive *t* scores ($p < 0.05$). Survey Item 23, *competent teachers*, reported the highest *t sc*ore of +4.66 and a level of significance of 0.00. Ranking second in *t* scores with a score of +3.62 was Item 27, *competent principals* also reporting a level of significance of 0.01. Survey Item 7, *quality of core curriculum*, ranked third with a *t* score of +3.36 and a level of significance of 0.00. The rank order for these three survey items reporting positive *t* scores is consistent with the rank order for these same three survey items as reported in the descriptive statistics and Table 7.

Table 16 lists items in Construct Q with negative *t* scores and significance at a 95% confidence level, in decreasing order of *t* scores.

Table 16. Least Influential Items for Construct Q
(based on negative *t* scores).

Item	*t* score	sig (2-tailed)
Specific sports program	-2.20	0.03
Competent advisors	-2.39	0.02
Gifted & talented program	-2.49	0.02
A specific employee	-3.35	0.00
Quality of clubs & co-curriculars	-3.41	0.00
Middle school math program	-4.14	0.00
Middle school reading program	-4.80	0.00

There were seven survey items in this construct with statistically significant negative *t* scores, ($p < 0.05$). Negative *t* scores at a 95% confidence level indicated that these survey items did not influence respondent's decision to open enroll into the study district.

The middle school math program, Item 38, reported a *t* score of -4.14 and a level of significance of 0.00. *The middle school reading program*, Item 37, reported a *t* score of -4.80 and a level of significance of 0.00. These negative *t*-scores are consistent with the descriptive statistics reported in Table 8.

Variety of course offerings.

Appendix F provides data for all items for Construct V. For this construct, there was only one survey item with a statistically significant positive *t* score ($p < 0.05$). Item 64, *more opportunities in the study district compared to other school districts*, reported the highest *t* score of +2.37 and a level of significance of 0.02.

Table 17 lists items in Construct V with negative *t* scores and significance at 95% confidence levels, in decreasing order of *t* scores.

Table 17. Least Influential Items for Construct V
(based on negative *t* scores).

Item	*t* score	sig (2-tailed)
Music Program	-2.25	0.03
Technology Education Courses	-2.72	0.01
Foreign Language Courses	-3.35	0.00
Art Courses	-3.78	0.00
Fine Arts After School Clubs	-4.36	0.00
Special Education Program	-4.99	0.00
Physical Education Program	-5.08	0.00
FACE Courses	-5.39	0.00
Health Education Courses	-5.52	0.00
ESL Program	-11.43	0.00

There were ten survey items in this construct with statistically significant negative *t* scores ($p < 0.05$). These values indicate with a statistically significant degree of confidence these items did not influence respondents decision to open enroll into the study district.

Survey Item 22, *ESL courses*, reported a *t sco*re of -11.43 and a zero level of significance. This was reported as the least influential survey item. Its negative *t* score was more than double the score of the next least influential survey item, *health courses*.

Convenience of school and community.

Under Construct C, *convenience of school and community*, there were zero survey items with a statistically significant positive *t* score ($p < 0.05$). There were five survey items in this construct with statistically significant negative *t* scores ($p < 0.05$) shown in Table 18. These results indicated that these survey items did not influence respondents' decisions to enroll into the study district.

Table 18. Least Influential Items for Construct C
(based on negative *t* scores).

Item	*t* score	sig (2-tailed)
Proximity of School to Relatives & Friends	-3.27	0.00
Services offered through the Community	-4.18	0.00
Proximity of School to Child's Daycare	-8.27	0.00
Bus Service	-8.28	0.00
School Lunch	-11.98	0.00

Survey Item 67, *proximity of school to daycare*, had a *t* score of -8.23 and a level of significance of 0.00. This statistically significant negative *t* score is interesting, because school officials of the study district have reportedly perceived this proximity to be important and influential to parents. Survey Item 71, *bus service*, and survey Item 72, *school lunch* also showed negative *t* scores at high confidence levels.

Most Influential Items

Of 80 survey items, 46 survey items (56%) resulted in statistical significance at 95% confidence levels. Of these 46 survey items, 14 survey items showed positive *t* scores above 95% confidence levels, and thus were statistically significant in influencing respondent's decisions to open enroll into the study district (Table 19).

Table 19. Fourteen Most Influential Items

(Items influencing parents to open enroll their children into the study district, in decreasing order of mean scores)

Item #	*M*	Item	Construct	*t* score	Level of Significance
24	3.25	Caring teachers	S	5.54	0.00
23	3.16	Competent teachers	Q	4.66	0.00
45	3.13	Student safety	S	4.27	0.00
49	3.07	Safety & security	S	3.75	0.00
27	3.04	Competent principals	Q	3.62	0.00
28	3.02	Caring principals	S	3.47	0.00
43	2.96	Student friendships	S	2.99	0.00
46	2.96	Friendly student body	S	3.01	0.00
7	2.95	Quality of core curriculum	Q	3.36	0.00
64	2.91	More opportunities	V	2.37	0.02
39	2.86	Preparation for college	Q	2.23	0.03
51	2.84	Available technologies	Q	2.36	0.02
47	2.84	Low rate of bullying	S	2.19	0.03
52	2.82	Quality of facilities	S	2.07	0.04

Of these 14 survey items reported in Table 19, eight of them identify with Construct S, five with Construct Q, one with Construct V, and zero with Construct C. Of the 46 survey items with statistically significant *t* scores, 32 survey items were reported with a negative *t* score at a 95% confidence level, which indicated no statistical significance on respondent's decisions to open enroll their children into the study district.

Open-ended Item Responses

There were two open-ended survey items at the end of the survey, which allowed for qualitative comparisons to the quantitative statistical results. The first of the two open-ended items allowed the participant the opportunity to answer the following question: "What considerations influenced you to enroll your child into the study district?" Responses to this survey item are tabulated in Appendix G. Table 20 shares the most frequent responses participants shared for this open-ended survey item.

Table 20. Most Frequent Responses for Open-ended Item 83.

Connection to item	Construct	# of responses
Negative experience in another district	S	12
Teachers & principals	S	10
What I heard from others	S	9
Student friendships	S	8

There were 50 participants who responded to this question. Some participants responded with multiple reasons they considered as influential. *A negative experience in another school district* was identified 12 times, which was the most frequent response. This response is quite different from the quantitative data retrieved from Item 63. The survey item, *negative experience from another school district*, had a mean score of 2.39, a negative *t* score of -0.11, which was not at a significant level at 95% confidence level, nor a key finding.

The second most common statement shared by respondents in this open-ended survey item was regarding *quality teachers and principals* with ten statements. This is comparable to the quantitative statistics collected, which reported *competent teachers and principals* and *caring teachers and principals* as a key finding and influential and statistically significant at a 95% *confidence level.*

What I heard from others, was also a theme noted in this open-ended survey item with nine statements shared by respondents. The quantitative survey results for Item 80, *what I heard from others about the study district*, had a mean score of 2.51 and a positive *t* score of +0.01, but was not identified as a key finding in this study.

The theme of *student friendships* was identified eight times in this open-ended survey item. *Student friendships* and *friendly student body* were also identified as a key finding and influential in the quantitative portion of the survey each with mean scores of 2.96 and each with positive *t* scores. These scores were considered statistically significantly influential for respondents when making decisions to open enroll into the study district.

Some other statements, which were shared by respondents in this open-ended survey item were core curriculum, increased opportunities, quality of sports, AP course offerings, proximity of school to home, proximity of school to work, preparation for college, course offerings, and low frequency of bullying. Most of the statements support the key findings as influential for respondents when considering enrolling into the study district.

The second of the two open-ended survey items asked parents whether they enrolled more than one child into the study district during the school years of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, or 2013 to 2014; whether they may have had considerations influencing their decisions, which were unique to each child; and any pertinent information on the subject of multiple student open enrollments.

There were 22 statements reported from a total of 12 participants. This low response rate may indicate the reasons for open enrollment for multiple children are the same as the reasons influencing the respondents when considering open enrollment for the first child. There were no significant themes identified from this survey item to report.

Summary

This quantitative convenience sample study utilized data collection procedures consisting of a survey of parents who chose to open enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district. This rural school district is the study district of this research. The survey was designed to measure reasons influencing parents' decisions to open enroll into the study district.

The survey was created around four constructs. The four constructs analyzed were school culture (S), quality of academic excellence (Q), variety of course offerings (V), and convenience of school & community (C). This analysis indicated that the survey instrument including all four constructs was reliable.

Construct S, *school culture* and Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence* were the most influential constructs parents reportedly considered when deciding to open enroll their children into the study district. Construct C, *convenience of school and community*, rated as not very influential, when parents were considering enrolling their children into the study district. This is important because the items in this construct, such as proximity to home or culture of the community, are less controllable by school personnel.

The open-ended survey items provided further support that school culture and the items in the survey regarding school culture are influential for parents when they consider enrolling into the study district. Student friendships, a negative experience at another school district, and a caring faculty were reported as important by the respondents via this open-ended question.

The results of the survey identified fourteen survey items with positive *t* scores that were statistically and significantly influential when parents considered enrolling into the study district.

These fourteen items along with the constructs of school culture and quality of academic excellence allow school officials to properly develop marketing and public relations plans.

Chapter 5 provides key findings and a conclusion to the study. The key findings and conclusion address influences with a positive *t* score and those with a negative *t* score. Chapter 5 also suggests recommendations to local stakeholders providing direction for public relations and marketing plans for the leaders of the study district.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study was designed to determine the considerations influencing parents to open enroll their children into the study district. The findings provided data for the leaders of the study district to guide decisions toward effective changes. These changes are designed to have a positive impact on open enrollment into the study district and reverse the net loss open enrollment trend the study district has experienced.

Research Question

This quantitative study addressed the following research question: What considerations do parents report as having influenced their decisions to open enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district?

Key Findings

Constructs and items.

Construct S, *school culture* and Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence* reported the highest mean scores, (M = 2.46 and M = 2.43) respectively. The items in these two constructs make up 13 of the 14 survey items identified with statistically significant positive t scores ($p < 0.05$). This finding is important because the items in these two constructs are controllable by the study district. For example, reduced bullying, caring teachers, and friendly students are influences the study district maintains some level of control.

In this study, there were 14 survey items out of 80 that reported statistically significant positive t scores ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates these 14 items were influential with respondents when they considered open enrolling their children into the study district. Table 21 identifies these 14 items in decreasing order of mean scores.

Table 21. Levels of Significance

(Items influencing parents to open enroll their children into the study district, in decreasing order of mean scores)

Item #	*M*	Item	Construct	*t* score	Level of Significance
24	3.25	Caring teachers	S	5.54	0.00
23	3.16	Competent teachers	Q	4.66	0.00
45	3.13	Student safety	S	4.27	0.00
49	3.07	Safety & security	S	3.75	0.00
27	3.04	Competent principals	Q	3.62	0.00
28	3.02	Caring principals	S	3.47	0.00
43	2.96	Student friendships	S	2.99	0.00
46	2.96	Friendly student body	S	3.01	0.00
7	2.95	Quality of core curriculum	Q	3.36	0.00
64	2.91	More opportunities	V	2.37	0.02
39	2.86	Preparation for college	Q	2.23	0.03
51	2.84	Available technologies	Q	2.36	0.02
47	2.84	Low rate of bullying	S	2.19	0.03
52	2.82	Quality of facilities	S	2.07	0.04

The four constructs of *quality of academic excellence* (Q), *variety of course offerings* (V), *school culture* (S), and *convenience of school & community* (C) are identified in the fourth column of the table. Construct C is not represented in Table 21.

Construct C, *convenience of school & community*, had the lowest mean score ($M = 2.09$). There were zero survey items in Construct C with positive *t* scores. *Convenience* is not influential for parents when they are deciding to open enroll their children into the study district. This key finding is important because the conveniences, such as proximity of school to daycare or services offered by the community, are not controllable by the study district.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that qualitative surveys via telephone initiated by personnel in the study district over the past several years pointed to *convenience* as influential when considering open enrollment *out of* the study district. The findings from this study reveal that *convenience* was not influential when open enrolling *into* the study district.

The findings identified eight items in construct S, *school culture*, parents reported as influential, when considering open enrolling their children into the study district. These eight

items were *caring teachers, student safety, safety and security, caring principals, student friendships, friendly student body, low frequency of bullying,* and *the quality of facilities.* This finding strongly indicates parents value a caring and safe environment for their children. This finding also indicates parents perceive the study district as a district with great school culture and possessing a caring and a safe environment.

The findings identified five items in Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence,* parents reported as influential when considering open enrolling their children into the study district. Those five items were *competent teachers, competent principals, quality of core curriculum, preparation for college,* and *available technologies*. This finding strongly indicates parents' value academic excellence for their children. This finding also indicates parents perceive the study district as a district with academic excellence with competent employees, excellent technologies, quality core curriculum, and excellent preparation for college.

The findings identified one item in Construct V, *variety of course offerings,* parents reported as influential when considering open enrolling their children into the study district. This one item was *increased opportunities in the study district compared to neighboring districts*. This finding strongly indicates parents' value opportunity for their children. This finding also indicates parents perceive the study district as a district with more opportunities than neighboring districts.

There were 33 items in the survey reported by parents which did not influence parent's decision to open enroll their children into the study district at 95% confidence level. In other words, the data indicated that these 33 items were not influential when parents were considering open enrolling their children into the study district and this degree of influence was statistically significant. These 33 items were identified as key findings.

In Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence*, eight items were reported by respondents as not influential in their decision to open enroll into the study district at 95% confidence level. Those items were the *elementary math program, a specific sport, competent club advisors, the gifted and talented program, a specific employee, the quality of clubs, middle school math,* and *middle school reading*.

In addition to these above items in Construct Q, the researcher identified the items *WKCE test scores, ACT test scores,* and *AP test scores* as a key finding. Although these items did not report at a 95% confidence level, these test score related items reported a negative *t* score. This is counterintuitive to what many advocates of open enrollment stake claim. Open enrollment advocates claim that schools with higher test scores will attract more students. This business model will then force the underachieving schools to improve.

In Construct V, *variety of course offerings* 11 items were reported by respondents as not influential in their decision to open enroll into the study district at 95% confidence level. Those items were *business education, music education, technology education, foreign language education, art education, fine arts after school programs, special education, physical education, health education*, and the *English as a second language program*. This finding is important to leaders in the study district for the purposes of strategic planning and marketing. In an effort to improve student enrollment through open enrollment, the stakeholders in the study district should market and communicate what parents' value. The items in Construct V are reported as not influential and therefore need not be focused on when marketing.

In Construct S, *school culture*, nine items were reported by respondents as not influential in their decision to open enroll into the study district at 95% confidence level. Those items were *caring advisors of clubs, the athletic coaching staff, office clerical staff, fine arts staff, web site*

communications, newspaper communications, newsletter communications, the district office staff, a personal invitation by an employee, and *a personal tour*. This finding is also important to leaders in the study district for strategic planning and marketing purposes.

The researcher identified the item, *what I heard from others about the study district*, to be a key finding. Communication for any organization is important. The *web site communication*, *newspaper communication,* and *newsletter communication* items were reported with a negative *t* score at a 95% confidence level. Although, *what I heard from others about the study district*, did not report a statistically significant *t* score, this item was the only communication with a positive *t* score. In order for the study district to increase student enrollment through open enrollment, marketing and public relations efforts through excellent communication will need to occur. The stakeholders in the study district will need to utilize parent and student testimonials.

Two other items in Construct S with critical findings were *a negative experience in a neighboring school district* and *character education*. Negative experiences in neighboring school districts were reported by several respondents in open-ended survey items. The study district won a national award and has experienced many accolades for a character education program. Although the study district has become known in the region for this program, many local citizens comment on the program as insincere. These negative comments about character education have been face-to-face comments to the researcher and other members of the study district administrative team. These negative comments have been from citizens, parents, students, and employees. As such, it was a key finding that parents reported the character-education program as not influential in their consideration to open enroll their children into the study district.

In Construct C, *convenience of school and community*, five items were reported by respondents as not influential in their decision to open enroll into the study district at a 95% confidence level. Those items were *proximity of school to relatives and friends*, *community services*, *proximity of school to day care, bus service*, and *the lunch program.*

Open-ended items.

On open-ended survey items, respondents reported influences they considered. Findings included negative experiences from other school districts. Other findings reported competent and caring teachers and principals, and student friendships in the study district. Lastly respondents' reported hearing positive comments from others, about the study district.

Comparison with hypothesis.

This researcher hypothesized the most common considerations parents open enroll their children into the study school district were the same considerations parents chose to open enroll their children out of the study school district. The following considerations were hypothesized as influential for parents choosing to open enroll their children into the study district:

- Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings;
- College preparation;
- Test scores;
- Academic excellence;
- Quality teachers;
- Student discipline;
- Reduced bullying.

The hypothesis was correct for influences such as the preparation for college, academic excellence, the quality of teachers, student discipline, and reduced bullying. The hypothesis was

not correct for influences such as AP course offerings and test scores. WKCE test scores, ACT test scores, and AP test scores were not found to be statistically significant influences reported by respondents.

Comparison with base survey.

In 2012, the study district hired an outside source to survey parents who decided to open enroll their children out of the study district. The results of this base survey are available in Appendix B and are used to compare with the key findings of this study. The following nine considerations were reported as influential in 2012 for parents who made decisions to open enroll their children out of the study district:

1. AP course offerings;
2. Gifted & talented programs;
3. Socioeconomics of the community;
4. Discipline;
5. Safety & bullying;
6. Preparation for college;
7. Band, choir, & music offerings;
8. Preparation for life after high school;
9. Competent & caring principals & teachers.

A key findings was identified in that five of these nine influences respondents identified in their decisions to open enroll *out of* the study district in the 2012 basis survey are the same considerations respondents identified in their decisions to open enroll their children *into* the study district. Those common influences were:

- Student safety & discipline;

- Reduction in student bullying;
- Preparation for college & for life after high school;
- Competent teachers and principals;
- Caring teachers and principals.

Alignment with theoretical model.

These first two conclusions are supported by the theoretical model which is another key finding of the study. The theoretical model utilized the philosophical research of Glasser and Vroom. It was found that parents' exercised their school choice rights and open enrolled their children into the study district through the lens of Glasser's choice theory and Vroom's expectancy theory.

Glasser's choice theory suggests parents, educators, and the community at large can promote environments encouraging others to develop Quality World pictures, which allows them to satisfy their needs responsibly (Glasser, 1998). It was concluded parent respondents in this study were seeking a positive social environment and high quality academic offerings for their children.

In his choice theory, Glasser (1998) sought to explain human behavior and motivation. According to his theory, human behavior is driven by five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. It was concluded school choice through open enrollment into the study district can meet these basic needs. The first conclusion points to positive social experiences which connect with love, belonging, and fun. The second conclusion leads to quality of academic offerings which are important for survival, power, and freedom.

Additionally supporting these first two conclusions are the survey data reported by parents. The following are influential when considering open enrolling their children into the study district:

- Caring teachers and principals;
- Competent teachers and principals;
- Student safety and security;
- Student friendships and friendly student body;
- Quality of core curriculum;
- Increased opportunities in the study district compared to neighboring districts;
- Preparation for college;
- Available technologies;
- Low frequency of bullying;
- Quality of facilities.

Each of these considerations is easily linked to a human behavior driven by the five basic needs of survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun which further indicates the study fits in the theoretical model. For example, reduced bullying can be linked to survival. Increased friendships can be linked to belonging. Increased opportunities can be tied to power. Preparation for college can be connected with freedom.

In this study, there were fourteen survey items that reported statistically significant positive *t* scores ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates these fourteen items were influential with respondents when they considered open enrolling their children into the study district. To further support the first two conclusions, each of these fourteen items maps with one or more of Glasser's five basic needs (Table 22).

Table 22. Key Findings Items Mapped with Glasser's Basic Human Needs

(Items influencing parents to open enroll their children into the study district and corresponding human need met)

Item	Construct	Glasser's Human Need Met
Caring teachers	S	Love & Belonging, Fun
Competent teachers	Q	Power, Freedom
Student safety	S	Survival
Safety and security	S	Survival
Competent principals	Q	Power, Freedom
Caring principals	S	Love & Belonging, Fun
Student friendships	S	Love & Belonging, Fun
Friendly student body	S	Love & Belonging, Fun
Quality of core curriculum	Q	Power, Freedom
More opportunities than neighboring districts	V	Power, Freedom
Preparation for college	Q	Survival, Power
Available technologies	Q	Power, Freedom
Low rate of bullying	S	Survival
Quality of facilities	S	Fun

Conclusions

Each of these 14 items can be mapped onto one or more of the Glasser's five basic needs, as discussed in this section. There were three conclusions drawn from this study. Also identified are two key observations to serve as additional considerations within the conclusion.

The first conclusion points to *school culture* as important to parents who open enrolled their children into the study district. A sense of belonging, a positive experience, positive relationships with others, safety, security, and reduced bullying were important influences for parents when considering open enrollment into the study district. The researcher concludes this cultural connection is more important to parents than test scores.

A second conclusion is that *quality of academic excellence* was important to parents who open enroll their children into the study district. Preparation for college, quality of core

academics, and competent instruction are important influences for parents when considering open enrollment into the study district. The researcher concludes this quality of services is more important to parents than test scores.

A third conclusion was the lack of influence *convenience of school and community;* played in parent's decision to open enroll their children into the study district. Conveniences such as proximity of school to a day-care facility, relatives, and work were not influential considerations. Conveniences such as the services offered by the community were also not reportedly influential considerations when open enrolling their children into the study district. Convenience for parents was not reportedly influential when compared to school culture and quality of academic excellence.

Two additional conclusions were made: first, the study district's high test scores had relatively low influence in parents' considerations as parents chose to open enroll their children into the study district. This conclusion is counterintuitive to mandates for local leaders.

The second additional conclusion is the importance of testimonials. There were several items in the survey related to good news communicated about the study district; however, only one item reported a positive *t* score, *what I heard from others*. It was concluded parent testimony is a powerful means of communication and advertisement for the study district.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

Five recommendations for stakeholders were identified. Stakeholders are defined as school board members, administrators, teachers, and influential community members. Three recommendations focus on themes of school culture, quality of academic excellence, and convenience of school and community. Two recommendations are for district practices on the subjects of test scores and communications.

School Culture.

First, it was recommended school leaders of the study district place greater emphasis on improving school culture. Building positive and trusting relationships was a key finding of this study. Caring teachers, student safety, safety and security, caring principals, student friendships, friendly student body, low rate of bullying, and quality of facilities were all identified as influential for parents when considering open enrolling their child into the study district. The data revealed that the parents value school culture and perceive these considerations with an excellent rating for the study district.

Stakeholders in the study district should emphasize four categories within the theme of school culture. The first is caring employees. The data revealed that parents valued school employees who genuinely care for their students. One recommendation is for principals, school board members, and district office personnel to include *caring* as a disposition to actively screen for and evaluate. Hiring practices, evaluation methods, retention, and professional development should emphasize the importance of *caring*. Communications should recognize specific examples of employees' caring actions toward students.

Student relationships were another category of school culture that was found to be important. The study district elementary schools have a long standing tradition of caring teams. The middle school operates using an advisory model. The high school has approximately 80% of the study body involved in one or more clubs. Approximately 50% of the student body is involved in at least one sport. Another recommendation is for these cultural opportunities to continue and grow in order to foster more and deeper positive opportunities for student friendships.

A safe environment was another reportedly critical attribute of school culture. It is recommended polices that may assist with assuring student safety and security be part of a continuous improvement plan. These include but are limited to lockdown policies, anti-bullying policies, security doors, and camera systems.

Lastly, quality of facilities was reportedly another influence on school culture. As a result, it is recommended the facilities are maintained and that efforts are made to communicate to the taxpayers that school officials do adhere to maintenance plans.

These recommendations should be shared with the employees of the study district. The theme of school culture is recommended to be incorporated into goal setting, public relations, marketing, and strategic planning.

Quality of Academic Excellence.

Secondly, it was recommended school leaders of the study district place greater emphasis on improving the quality of academic excellence. Competent teachers, competent principals, quality of core curriculum, preparation for college, and availability of technologies were all identified as influential for parents when considering open enrolling their child into the study district. The data revealed that parents valued academic excellence and gave high ratings to the study district.

It is recommended stakeholders in the study district emphasize the importance of competent employees. It was evident that parents valued school employees who are skilled, trained, and competent in their respective fields. It is recommended principals, school board members, and district office administrators include competence as a critical capacity to screen for and evaluate in hiring practices, evaluation methods, retention procedures, and professional development.

Furthermore, it was recommended local core curriculum and 21st century technologies remain current. The data revealed that parents of elementary, middle and high-school students valued the core curriculum and access to technologies. As such, curriculum and technology should receive appropriate budget allocations and professional development.

Lastly, it is recommended that stakeholders in the study district emphasize programs that prepare students for college. Interestingly, preparation for post-secondary education at two-year colleges was not a key finding, but preparation for four-year-college was reported to be important. Perhaps students who are bound for four-year colleges are more likely to open enroll into the study district. Therefore, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on advanced placement (AP) and other advanced courses, and that college representatives frequently visit the buildings. It is also recommended that discussions about college begin with students at the elementary schools.

Convenience of School and Community.

A recommendation is for stakeholders of the study district to be aware that conveniences were not influential when parents reportedly considered open enrolling their children into the study district. These conveniences included: school lunch, bussing services, services offered by the community, proximity of school to home, school to work, school to relatives, to friends, and to daycare. This recommendation is critical because for many years key school district officials reported these influences were reasons students open enrolled out of the study district or into the study district. This meant that schools had no control over these influences, which resulted in an attitude of denial. In other words, because students leave the district for reasons out of our control, a net loss in open enrollment is therefore not our fault. An attitude of denial and apathy

became evident claiming there is little that can be done to change the trending net loss of students due to open enrollment.

It was recommended district leaders communicate that students who open enrolled *out of* the study district may be influenced by conveniences, but not those who open enrolled *into* the study district. It was further recommended that school and community conveniences be omitted from setting goals to increase net gains of students into the study.

Test scores.

It was recommended the influence of test scores such as ACT, AP, and WKCE assessment scores be emphasized in proportion to their importance to stakeholders when marketing the study district. This unanticipated recommendation is the result of the study's finding that school culture proved to be of greater influence than quality of academic excellence when parents considered open enrolling their children into the study district. In other words, it was recommended that communications and marketing plans do not let messages about high test scores overshadow messages that emphasize school culture.

It was concluded that the quality of academics excellence was a key finding which significantly influenced parents when considering open enrolling their children into the study district. However, it was also realized that high test scores did not influence parent's decision to open enroll their children into the study district. However, high test scores are an indicator academic excellence and college readiness. Preparation for college was reported as influential for parents when considering open enrolling their children into the study district.

Communications.

It is recommended stakeholders leverage parents and students as the best means of communicating the good news in the study district. Marketing, communications, and public

relations efforts should be through the voices and faces of parents and students. Parents considering open enrolling their children into the study district found that what they heard from others was more influential than newsletters or websites.

Newspaper articles, newsletter publications, and website may continue to be important, but there has been very little content in these media from parents and students. It is recommended student successes, student testimonials, and parent testimonials be shared through all forms of media including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube© as well as websites, newsletters, posters, newspapers, marquee advertisements, and announcements.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher has identified four considerations for future research on the topic of open enrollment in rural school districts in southern Wisconsin. Net gains or losses due to open enrollment in the study district may change in future years. It would be interesting to know if the changes are due to the implementation strategies identified by the recommendations to study district stakeholders. The first recommendation for future research is to determine whether net gains or losses in open enrollment in the study district in ensuing school years from 2015 to 2016 through 2019 to 2020 might ensue from recommendations in this study.

The study district reports high test scores in WKCE, AP, and ACT tests. A key finding in this research indicates parents were not influenced by the study district's high test scores when considering open enrolling their children to the study district. A second recommendation for future research includes a very similar study to this research however with a school district reporting low test scores.

A third recommendation for future research surrounding the geographical shape of a school district might prove to be worthwhile to stakeholders. The study district is unique in its

geographical shape and location. The geographical shape and location might influence parents' when considering open enrollment. Similar studies in Wisconsin or other states could be conducted in other rural school districts. The triangulation of research may prove to be beneficial to school district leaders and state policy makers.

Wisconsin public schools have experienced statewide open enrollment since 1998. New on the horizon for Wisconsin public schools a statewide voucher system. The mechanism for open enrollment is likely to change with an increase in the voucher system. The theories of Glasser and Vroom will likely identify well with the new vouchers system. The voucher system in Milwaukee Public Schools has much research surrounding it, but further research incorporating rural Wisconsin schools experiencing vouchers is recommended.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the key strengths of this study is that the researcher is an employee of the school district. This connection allows for deep knowledge and experience in the study district and therefore a better guarantee the results and recommendations of this study be efficiently and effectively put to practice. These assurances will benefit the students, employees, and community members of the study district as school leaders craft a marketing, communications, and public relations plan. However, this connection to the study district may also identify as a weakness due to researcher bias.

Additionally, the survey method allowed for an efficient means of survey administration. The survey method proved to be less time consuming and efficient for the respondent. The survey instrument was economically advantageous reducing the cost for the study. The survey was a cross-sectional design, which allowed for a twenty day window for the survey to be taken. This survey design provided for a rapid turnaround in responses allowing for quick access to the

data. These efficiencies provided for a greater response rate which helped to assure of reliable data.

There were several limitations to this study. This research was specific to one study district. The district was made up of a greater number of low to middle income families in comparison to many other neighboring school districts. The ethnicity of the community recognized a larger percentage of Hispanic immigrants from Mexico compared to other school districts. The unique shape of the school district with considerable marshland in the center of the district provided a limitation as well.

The school district had already initiated efforts regarding changing of perception of the school district through marketing and public relations. These efforts may have impacted the research of this study.

The survey was an on-line internet based survey. Families without access to the internet were afforded an opportunity to take the same survey via hard copy postal mail. It was decided not to provide the survey in Spanish because there were very few families who speak Spanish who had chosen to open enroll into the study district. Although these numbers are very low, this does provide for another limitation to the study.

This was a time-bound survey because the data collected reflected participant who open enrolled into the study district over one period of time. Specifically, the participants open enrolled their children into the study district during the school years of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, and 2013 to 2014. This provided a snapshot of results as opposed to a longitudinal study providing results over many years. A snapshot of results may be influenced by considerations such as current trends, media, and the economy.

Summary

This quantitative study addressed the question, “What considerations do parents report as having influenced their decisions to open enroll their children into a specific south-central Wisconsin rural school district?”

By using statistical analysis the constructs of school culture and quality of academic excellence were identified as significantly influential at a 95% confidence level. This study also identified 14 items statistically influential at a 95% confidence level, as follows:

- Caring teachers;
- Caring principals;
- Competent teachers;
- Competent principals;
- Student safety
- Safety and security;
- Student friendships;
- A friendly student body;
- Quality of core curriculum;
- Increased opportunities compared to neighboring districts;
- Preparation for college;
- Available technologies;
- Low frequency of bullying;
- Quality of facilities.

One construct, *convenience of school & community*, was reported as not influential by respondents when considering open enrolling into the school district. The limited influence of

convenience of school & community is an important finding because these items are not controllable by school personnel.

It was concluded school culture and quality of academic excellence were influential for parents considering open enrolling their children into the study district. It was further concluded that convenience of school and community was not influential for parents considering open enrolling their children into the study district. It was also concluded test scores were less important to parents than may have been presumed. Lastly, it was concluded the best means to market the study district is through parent and student testimonials as opposed to district communications. Finally, school officials should consider embracing public relations and marketing plans proven to be effective in competitive business models.

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Appendix A. Wisconsin Enrollment Data

Table A1. Wisconsin Virtual Charter Enrollment 2002 to 2003 to 2011 to 2012

Year #	School Year	#VCS	Total Enrollment
1	2002 to 2003	2	247
2	2003 to 2004	4	878
3	2004 to 2005	5	1,459
4	2005 to 2006	7	1,954
5	2006 to 2007	9	2,283
6	2007 to 2008	12	2,853
7	2008 to 2009	12	2,961
8	2009 to 2010	13	3,927
9	2010 to 2011	15	3,927
10	2011 to 2012	25	4,857

Table A2. Wisconsin Open enrollment Dollar Amounts per Student 1998-99 through 2011 to 2012

School Year	$Transferred/Student	Avg. State Revenue/Student	%Transfer Revenue
1999 to 2000	$4,703	$ 7,158	66%
2000 to 2001	$4,828	$ 7,418	66%
2001 to 2002	$5,059	$ 7,667	66%
2002 to 2003	$5,241	$ 7,931	66%
2003 to 2004	$5,446	$ 8,216	66%
2004 to 2005	$5,496	$ 8,511	65%
2005 to 2006	$5,682	$ 8,815	64%
2006 to 2007	$5,845	$ 9,150	64%
2007 to 2008	$6,007	$ 9,499	63%
2008 to 2009	$6,225	$ 9,836	63%
2009 to 2010	$6,498	$10,107	64%
2010 to 2011	$6,665	$10,316	65%
2011 to 2012	$6,867		

Appendix B. Basis Study

Dear Mark Rollefson:

The <Study District> purchased the services of School Perceptions to conduct a survey during the summer of 2012. The participants in this survey were parents of students who enrolled out of the <study district>. The participation in this survey was voluntary.

The <study district> purchased and owns the results of this survey. As superintendent of schools, my signature below provides you permission to use these results in any way you wish for your research on the study on the topic of open enrollment.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Gerlach
Superintendent

Item: “When making decisions about your child’s education, how important are the following programs to you?”

Table B1. Value Parents Place on Various Programs
(based on a four-point Likert-type scale)

Program	Score
Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings	3.61
Gifted & talented program	3.60
Discipline, safety or bullying	3.57
Math and science offerings	3.51
Preparation for technical school or college	3.51
Competent and caring administrators, principals or teachers	3.50
Socioeconomic & community culture	3.48
Band, choir, and other music options (show choir, orchestra)	3.46
Class size	3.44
Friendships	3.44
Technical & vocational offerings	3.44
Use of technology in the classroom	3.41
Parental involvement	3.41
Preparation for life after school	3.40
Proximity of school to work & home	3.39
Extra-curricular activities (non-sports)	3.39
Before & after school extended daycare programs	3.38
Quality of sports programs	3.37
Opportunities for community service and service learning	3.35
Student achievement, culture of academic excellence, test scores	3.33
Foreign language offerings	3.31
Communication (newspaper, newsletters, website, etc.)	3.17
Special education	3.09
Religious education	3.05
Attractive buildings & grounds	2.93

"Please rate how well the school district you enrolled out of (the study district) performs with the following programs"

Table B2. Parent Perception of how well the Study District Performs

(based on a four-point Likert-type scale)

Program	Score
Attractive buildings & grounds	2.73
Opportunities for community service and service learning	2.60
Use of technology in the classroom	2.57
Class size	2.50
Communication (newspaper, newsletters, website, etc.)	2.33
Quality of sports programs	2.20
Special education	2.20
Math and science course offerings	2.00
Before and after school daycare programs	2.00
Friendships	2.00
Proximity of school to work & home	2.00
Competent and caring administrators, principals, teachers	1.92
Extra-curricular activities (non-sports)	1.90
Student achievement, culture of academic excellence, test scores	1.81
Preparation for life after school	1.75
Band, choir, and other music offerings (show choir, orchestra)	1.75
Foreign language offerings	1.75
Preparation for technical school & college	1.71
Discipline, safety, bullying	1.66
Religious education	1.57
Socioeconomics and community culture	1.40
Gifted & talented program	1.37
Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings	1.35

Table B3. Gap Analysis

(determined by taking the value of Table B2 and subtracting it from Table B1).

Program	Gap
Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings	-2.26
Gifted & talented program	-2.23
Socioeconomics and community culture	-2.08
Discipline, safety, bullying	-1.91
Preparation for technical school & college	-1.80
Band, choir, and other music offerings (show choir, orchestra)	-1.71
Preparation for life after school	-1.65
Competent and caring administrators, principals, and teachers	-1.58
Foreign language offerings	-1.56
Student achievement, culture of academic excellence, test scores	-1.52
Math and science course offerings	-1.51
Extra-curricular activities (non-sports)	-1.49
Religious education	-1.48
Friendships	-1.44
Proximity of school to work & home	-1.39
Before & after daycare programs	-1.38
Technical and vocation course offerings	-1.33
Quality of sports programs	-1.17
Parental involvement	-1.13
Class sizes	-0.94
Special education	-0.89
Use of technology in the classroom	-0.84
Communication (newspaper, newsletters, websites, etc.)	-0.84
Community service & service learning	-0.75
Attractive buildings & grounds	-0.40

Appendix C. Approval

The researcher successfully completed training provided by the U.S. National Institute of Health and the Edgewood College Human Participants Review Board (HPRB) established to review and approve applications for research projects involving human subjects. The primary purpose of the HPRB is to protect the rights and welfare of the human subjects. The completion of this training certified the researcher's understanding of the need for due diligence to the anonymity of this research.

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW BOARD

RULING FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: WHY PARENTS CHOOSE TO OPEN ENROLL CHILDREN INTO A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: MARK ROLLEFSON
HPRB PROPOSAL #: 825
DATE OF BOARD ACTION: 07/16/ 2014

Board Action:

- [x] Approved and Registered as Exempt Research
- [ ] Approved and Registered as a Quality Improvement Project
- [ ] Approved by Expedited Review
- [ ] Approved by Full Board Review
- [ ] Approved for Pending Recommended Modification(s)
- [ ] Not Approved (Note: May Resubmit with Revisions)

J. David Lambert

HPRB Co-Chairperson Signature Date: 08/01/2014

HPRB Co-Chairperson: J. David Lambert

Date for submission of progress report (1 year from date of HPRB approval) N/A

1

Appendix D. Survey Instrument

Closed-method Self-administered Survey of Parents

Thank you in advance for taking time to complete and submit this survey,

(Name of Researcher)

Completing this survey should take approximately 10-12 minutes. You may submit this survey one time per family if you enrolled one or more children into the study district during the school years of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, or 2013 to 2014. The study district includes the high school, middle school, and three elementary schools. Your child or children could have been in grades Pre-K through 12th grade. Completing and submitting this survey constitute your consent for the researcher to use the results of this survey.

1. How many children did you enroll into the study district?

   ❍ 1 Child

   ❍ 2 Children

   ❍ 3 Children

   ❍ 4+ Children

2. The first student I enrolled into the study district started in the _____ grade level.

   ❍ Elementary School

   ❍ Middle School

   ❍ High School

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
3. Quality of academic excellence	❍	❍	❍	❍
4. Variety of course offerings	❍	❍	❍	❍
5. School culture	❍	❍	❍	❍
6. Convenience of school & community	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
7. Quality of core curriculum which includes math, English, science, social studies	❍	❍	❍	❍
8. Science course offerings	❍	❍	❍	❍
9. Math course offerings	❍	❍	❍	❍
10. Social studies course offerings	❍	❍	❍	❍
11. English course offerings	❍	❍	❍	❍
12. Quality of elective course offerings	❍	❍	❍	❍
13. Music program	❍	❍	❍	❍
14. Technology education courses (agriculture, woods, metals, automotive)	❍	❍	❍	❍
15. Business education courses	❍	❍	❍	❍
16. Art courses	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
17. FACE (Family and Consumer Education) courses, also known as Home Economics.	❍	❍	❍	❍
18. Foreign language courses (Spanish and Latin)	❍	❍	❍	❍
19. Physical education course	❍	❍	❍	❍
20. Health education courses	❍	❍	❍	❍
21. Special education program	❍	❍	❍	❍
22. English as a Second Language (ESL) courses	❍	❍	❍	❍
23. Competent teachers	❍	❍	❍	❍
24. Caring teachers	❍	❍	❍	❍
25. Competent counselors	❍	❍	❍	❍
26. Caring counselors	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
27. Competent principals	❍	❍	❍	❍
28. Caring principals	❍	❍	❍	❍
29. Competent school board	❍	❍	❍	❍
30. Competent coaches (athletics)	❍	❍	❍	❍
31. Caring coaches (athletics)	❍	❍	❍	❍
32. Competent advisors (i.e., clubs, drama, FBLA, FFA, and other non-sports after school co-curriculars)	❍	❍	❍	❍
33. Caring advisors (i.e., clubs, drama, FBLA, FFA, and other non-sports after school co-curriculars)	❍	❍	❍	❍
34. High school advanced placement (AP) courses	❍	❍	❍	❍
35. Elementary school reading program	❍	❍	❍	❍
36. Elementary school math program	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
37. Middle school reading program	❍	❍	❍	❍
38. Middle school math program	❍	❍	❍	❍
39. Preparation for college	❍	❍	❍	❍
40. Gifted and talented program	❍	❍	❍	❍
41. Opportunities for college credit while still in high school (i.e. AP courses, PIE courses, dual credit courses with UW-W or MATC)	❍	❍	❍	❍
42. Preparation for technical college	❍	❍	❍	❍
43. Student friendships	❍	❍	❍	❍
44. Student discipline	❍	❍	❍	❍
45. Student safety	❍	❍	❍	❍
46. Friendly student body	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
47. Reduction- low frequency of bullying	❍	❍	❍	❍
48. Character education	❍	❍	❍	❍
49. Safety and security	❍	❍	❍	❍
50. Service learning	❍	❍	❍	❍
51. Technology availability & use (i.e., Smart boards, computer labs, iPads, lap tops, use of Google, etc.)	❍	❍	❍	❍
52. Quality of facilities	❍	❍	❍	❍
53. Attractive buildings and grounds	❍	❍	❍	❍
54. WKCE test scores	❍	❍	❍	❍
55. ACT test scores	❍	❍	❍	❍
56. Advanced Placement (AP) test scores	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
57. Quality of athletics	❍	❍	❍	❍
58. The success of a specific sports program	❍	❍	❍	❍
59. Athletic coaching staff	❍	❍	❍	❍
60. Quality of club & co-curriculars (non-sports)	❍	❍	❍	❍
61. Fine arts after school clubs (drama, art, music)	❍	❍	❍	❍
62. Staff of the fine arts after school clubs (drama, art, music)	❍	❍	❍	❍
63. Negative experience in a previous school district	❍	❍	❍	❍
64. More opportunities for my child in the study district compared to other school districts	❍	❍	❍	❍
65. Proximity of school to work & employer	❍	❍	❍	❍
66. Proximity of school to home	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
67. Proximity of school to child's daycare	❍	❍	❍	❍
68. Proximity of school to relatives & friends (i.e. grandparents, aunts, friends)	❍	❍	❍	❍
69. Culture of district cities and townships	❍	❍	❍	❍
70. Services offered through district cities and townships	❍	❍	❍	❍
71. Bus service	❍	❍	❍	❍
72. School lunch	❍	❍	❍	❍
73. District office staff	❍	❍	❍	❍
74. Building office clerical staff	❍	❍	❍	❍
75. Class size	❍	❍	❍	❍
76. A presentation by a school employee	❍	❍	❍	❍

Using the following scale, please indicate the extent to which the following characteristics of the school & community influenced your decision to enroll your child into the study district.

1 = Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

2 = Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

3 = Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.

4 = Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

	1	2	3	4
77. A personal invitation & tour by a school employee	❍	❍	❍	❍
78. A specific employee (teacher, coach, counselor, principal, other)	❍	❍	❍	❍
79. Communication from the study district web site	❍	❍	❍	❍
80. What I heard from others (i.e., friends, neighbors, relatives, etc.) about the study district	❍	❍	❍	❍
81. Communication through local newspapers	❍	❍	❍	❍
82. Communication through district newsletters or building newsletters	❍	❍	❍	❍

83. What considerations influenced you to enroll your child into the study district?

84. If you enrolled more than one child into the study district during the school years of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, or 2013 to 2014, you may have had considerations influencing your decision unique to each child. Please share any pertinent information regarding multiple student open enrollments.

Appendix E. Consent

To Whom It May Concern,

The <study district> is aware of the doctoral program and respective research the doctoral candidate Mark Rollefson is pursuing. The school board of the <study district> understands parents or guardians of students who enrolled into the <study district> will be asked to fill out a voluntary and anonymous survey. This survey will inquire as to the considerations why they chose to enroll in to the <study district>. I have read the consent letter the parents will receive prior to the parents receiving the survey.

As the president of the school board, I speak for the entire board of education and endorse this study.

Printed Name of School Board President	Scott Buth
Signature of School Board President	
Date Signed	July 10, 2014

Appendix F. Quantitative Data

All items used the following four-point Likert-type scale:

1. Did not influence my decision to enroll my child into the study district.
2. Somewhat influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.
3. Influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district.
4. Significantly influenced my decision to enroll my child into the study district

Table F1. Descriptive Statistics of Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence* (in decreasing order of means)

#	Item	*n*	*M*	*SD*	%*
23	Competent teachers	57	3.16	1.07	72%
27	Competent principals	57	3.04	1.12	72%
7	Quality of core curriculum	58	2.95	1.02	74%
39	Preparation for college	56	2.86	1.20	64%
51	Technology	56	2.84	1.08	66%
29	Competent school board	55	2.60	1.08	62%
12	Quality of elective course offerings	58	2.60	1.06	62%
34	AP courses	56	2.55	1.25	55%
25	Competent counselors	56	2.45	1.20	45%
54	WKCE test scores	55	2.38	1.06	49%
30	Competent coaches	56	2.38	1.11	43%
55	ACT test scores	54	2.35	1.12	48%
56	AP test scores	54	2.30	1.13	48%
57	Quality of athletics	54	2.30	1.21	30%
42	Preparation for technical college	53	2.19	1.18	38%
36	Elementary school math program	57	2.18	1.23	39%
35	Elementary school reading program	56	2.18	1.25	38%
32	Competent advisors	56	2.14	1.12	34%
58	Specific sports program	56	2.14	1.21	29%
40	Gifted & talented program	54	2.09	1.20	35%
60	Quality of co-curriculars	56	1.98	1.14	30%
78	A specific employee	54	1.94	1.22	30%
38	Middle school math program	56	1.88	1.13	29%
37	Middle school reading program	56	1.80	1.09	25%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Table F2. Descriptive Statistics of Construct V, *variety of course offerings* (in decreasing order of means)

#	Item	*n*	*M*	*SD*	%*
64	More opportunities	56	2.91	1.30	66%
41	Opportunities for college credit	54	2.69	1.26	57%
11	English course offerings	56	2.68	1.01	68%
9	Math course offerings	58	2.66	1.09	64%
8	Science course offerings	58	2.62	1.06	64%
10	Social studies course offerings	57	2.51	0.97	60%
15	Business education courses	58	2.22	1.06	41%
13	Music program	58	2.16	1.17	41%
14	Technology education courses	58	2.12	1.06	35%
18	Foreign language courses	57	2.05	1.01	39%
16	Art courses	58	2.00	1.01	33%
61	Fine arts & after-school clubs	56	1.86	1.10	29%
19	Physical education courses	57	1.84	0.98	26%
17	FACE	57	1.84	0.92	25%
20	Health education	54	1.81	0.91	26%
21	Special education	57	1.77	1.10	23%
22	ESL	57	1.37	0.75	9%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Table F3. Descriptive Statistics of Items in Construct S, *school culture*

(in decreasing order of means)

#	Item	*n*	*M*	*SD*	%*
24	Caring teachers	56	3.25	1.02	77%
45	Student safety	55	3.13	1.10	76%
49	Safety & security	57	3.07	1.15	74%
28	Caring principals	57	3.02	1.13	70%
46	Friendly student body	54	2.96	1.13	72%
45	Student friendships	53	2.96	1.13	70%
47	Reduced bullying	57	2.84	1.18	68%
52	Quality of facilities	56	2.82	1.16	63%
44	Student discipline	52	2.77	1.17	65%
48	Character education	57	2.7	1.18	65%
75	Class size	56	2.61	1.09	57%
80	What I heard	55	2.51	1.15	56%
26	Caring counselors	56	2.46	1.19	47%
53	Attractive buildings & grounds	56	2.41	1.16	48%
63	Negative previous experience	57	2.39	1.46	44%
31	Caring coaches	56	2.34	1.08	41%
50	Service learning	55	2.31	1.22	45%
33	Caring advisors	55	2.09	1.11	33%
59	Athletic coaching staff	56	2.05	1.17	38%
74	Building office clerical staff	55	1.91	1.04	31%
62	Staff of the fine arts & clubs	56	1.84	1.11	29%
79	Communications from web site	55	1.8	1.06	22%
81	Communication from newspapers	55	1.76	1.07	22%
82	Communications from newsletters	55	1.76	1.04	22%
73	District office staff	55	1.73	0.95	24%
76	Presentation by a school employee	55	1.56	0.92	18%
77	Personal invitation or tour	55	1.51	0.94	16%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Table F4. Descriptive Statistics of Items in Construct C *convenience of school & community*

(in decreasing order of means)

#	Item	*n*	*M*	*SD*	%*
66	Proximity of school to home	56	2.43	1.33	50%
65	Proximity of school to work	57	2.35	1.33	47%
69	Culture of district	55	2.29	1.20	45%
68	Proximity of school to relatives or friends	55	1.96	1.22	35%
70	Services offered through district	55	1.85	1.15	26%
71	Bus service	55	1.47	0.92	14%
67	Proximity of school to daycare	56	1.43	0.97	13%
72	School lunch	55	1.36	0.70	9%

* *Influenced* or *Significantly Influenced*

Table F5. One-sample *t test* in Construct Q, *quality of academic excellence*

(in decreasing order of *t* score, test value = 2.5)

#	Topic	*M*	mean difference	*t* score	sig. (2-tailed)
3	Quality of academic excellence	3.21	0.71	6.23	0.00
23	Competent teachers	3.16	0.66	4.66	0.00
27	Competent principals	3.04	0.54	3.62	0.00
7	Quality of core curriculum	2.95	0.45	3.36	0.00
51	Technology	2.84	0.34	2.36	0.02
39	Preparation for college	2.86	0.36	2.23	0.03
12	Quality of elective courses	2.60	0.10	0.74	0.46
29	Competent school board	2.60	0.10	0.69	0.50
34	AP courses	2.55	0.05	0.32	0.75
25	Competent counselors	2.45	-0.05	-0.34	0.74
54	WKCE test scores	2.38	-0.12	-0.83	0.41
30	Competent coaches	2.38	-0.13	-0.85	0.40
55	ACT test scores	2.35	-0.15	-0.97	0.34
57	Quality of athletics	2.30	-0.20	-1.24	0.22
56	AP test scores	2.30	-0.20	-1.33	0.19
35	Elementary reading program	2.18	-0.32	-1.92	0.06
42	Preparation for technical college	2.19	-0.31	-1.93	0.06
36	Elementary math program	2.18	-0.33	-2.00	0.05
58	Specific sports program	2.14	-0.36	-2.20	0.03
32	Competent advisors	2.14	-0.36	-2.39	0.02
40	Gifted & talented program	2.09	-0.41	-2.49	0.02
78	A specific employee	1.94	-0.56	-3.35	0.00
60	Quality of clubs & co-curriculars	1.98	-0.52	-3.41	0.00
38	Middle school math program	1.88	-0.62	-4.14	0.00
37	Middle school reading program	1.80	-0.70	-4.80	0.00

Table F6. One sample *t test* in Construct V, *variety of course offerings*

(in decreasing order of *t* score, test value = 2.5)

#	Item	*M*	Mean Difference	*t* score	Sig. (2-tailed)
64	More opportunities for my child	2.91	0.41	2.37	0.02
4	Variety of course offerings	2.79	0.29	2.28	0.03
11	English course offerings	2.68	0.18	1.32	0.19
9	Math course offerings	2.66	0.16	1.09	0.28
41	Opportunities for college	2.69	0.19	1.08	0.28
8	Science course offerings	2.62	0.12	0.87	0.39
10	Social studies course offerings.	2.51	0.01	0.07	0.95
15	Business education courses	2.22	-0.28	-1.98	0.05
13	Music program	2.16	-0.35	-2.25	0.03
14	Technology education courses	2.12	-0.38	-2.72	0.01
18	Foreign language courses	2.05	-0.45	-3.35	0.00
16	Art courses	2.00	-0.50	-3.78	0.00
61	Fine arts after school clubs	1.86	-0.64	-4.36	0.00
21	Special education program	1.77	-0.73	-4.99	0.00
19	Physical education course	1.84	-0.66	-5.08	0.00
17	FACE	1.84	-0.66	-5.39	0.00
20	Health education courses	1.81	-0.69	-5.52	0.00
22	ESL courses	1.37	-1.13	-11.43	0.00

Table F7. One sample *t test* for Construct S, *school culture*

(in decreasing order of *t* score, test value = 2.5)

#	Item	*M*	Mean Difference	*t* score	Sig. (2-tailed)
24	Caring teachers	3.25	0.75	5.54	0.00
45	Student safety	3.13	0.63	4.27	0.00
49	Safety and Security	3.07	0.57	3.75	0.00
28	Caring principals	3.02	0.52	3.47	0.00
5	School culture	2.96	0.47	3.45	0.00
46	Friendly student body	2.96	0.46	3.01	0.00
43	Student friendships	2.96	0.46	2.99	0.00
47	Reduction & low frequency of bullying	2.84	0.34	2.19	0.03
52	Quality of facilities	2.82	0.32	2.07	0.04
44	Student discipline	2.77	0.27	1.67	0.10
48	Character education	2.70	0.20	1.29	0.20
75	Class size	2.61	0.11	0.74	0.47
80	What I heard from others	2.51	0.01	0.06	0.95
26	Caring counselors	2.46	-0.04	-0.23	0.82
53	Attractive buildings & grounds	2.41	-0.09	-0.58	0.57
63	Negative experience in another school district	2.39	-0.11	-0.59	0.56
31	Caring coaches	2.34	-0.16	-1.11	0.27
50	Service learning	2.31	-0.19	-1.17	0.25
33	Caring advisors	2.09	-0.41	-2.73	0.01
59	Athletic coaching staff	2.05	-0.45	-2.86	0.01
74	Building office clerical staff	1.91	-0.59	-4.21	0.00
62	Staff of the fine arts after school clubs	1.84	-0.66	-4.46	0.00
79	Communication from web site	1.80	-0.70	-4.89	0.00
81	Communication through local newspapers	1.76	-0.74	-5.10	0.00
82	Communication through newsletters	1.76	-0.74	-5.27	0.00
73	District office staff	1.73	-0.77	-6.02	0.00
76	A presentation by a school employee	1.56	-0.94	-7.56	0.00
77	A personal invitation & tour by a school employee	1.51	-0.99	-7.82	0.00

Table F8. One sample *t test* for Construct C, *convenience in school & community*

(in decreasing order of *t* score, test value = 2.5)

#	Item	*M*	Mean Difference	*t* score	sig (2-tailed)
6	Convenience of school & community	2.95	0.45	2.81	0.01
66	Proximity of school to home	2.43	-0.07	-0.40	0.69
65	Proximity of school to work & employer	2.35	-0.15	-0.85	0.40
69	Culture of district	2.29	-0.21	-1.30	0.20
68	Proximity of school to relatives & friends	1.96	-0.54	-3.27	0.00
70	Services offered through district	1.85	-0.65	-4.18	0.00
67	Proximity of school to child's daycare	1.43	-1.07	-8.27	0.00
71	Bus service	1.47	-1.03	-8.28	0.00
72	School lunch	1.36	-1.14	-11.98	0.00

Appendix G. Qualitative Data

Table G1. Tabulated responses to the open-ended survey item, What considerations influenced you to enroll your child into the study district?

Connection to item	Construct	#
Negative experience in another district	S	12
Teachers & principals	S	10
What I heard from others	S	9
Student friendships	S	8
Core curriculum	Q	6
More opportunities than other districts	V	6
Quality of sports	Q	6
AP offerings	V	6
Proximity of school to home	C	6
Proximity of school to work	C	6
Preparation for college	Q	6
Course offerings	V	6
Low frequency of bullying	S	6
Student safety	S	4
Special ed program	V	3
Facilities	S	3
Co-curricular variety	V	2
Class size	S	2
Community culture	S	2
Bus system	C	2
High test scores	Q	1
Tech ed courses	V	1
Character education	S	1
Building office staff	S	1
Newspaper	S	1
Newsletters	S	1
A specific employee	S	1
Proximity of school to day care	C	1
Proximity of school to family	C	1

Table G2. Tabulated responses to the open-ended survey item, "If you enrolled more than one child into the study district during the school years of 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013, or 2013 to 2014, you may have had considerations influencing your decision that were unique to each child. Please share any pertinent information regarding multiple student open enrollments."

Response	#
Once decided to open enroll 1st child, it is easy to decide to open enroll the next children	6
Small school atmosphere with large school opportunities	3
Special education	2
Tech ed program	2
Advanced Placement courses	2
Sports program	2
More opportunities	2
Drama & theater	1
FFA	1
Band program	1