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The Great Migration: Charter School Satisfaction Among African American Parents

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Abstract

This study addresses the reasons that African American students are disproportionately enrolled in public charter schools by surveying parents of African American charter school students at a small public charter middle school in California. The researcher utilized a quantitative research design by collecting survey data from 71 charter school parents. The findings indicate the following reasons that African American parents remove their students from traditional public schools: their desire for a safer schooling environment, higher expectations for their students, individualized attention, and a college-going atmosphere. Recommendations are made for traditional public school leaders to consider the implementation of these practices.

African American students continue to be among the worst academic performers in the nation. In 2009, 4th grade African American students scored lower than Whites and Asians, the same as Hispanics, and one point better than American Indians/Alaska Natives on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment. During the same year, 8th and 12th grade African American students scored worse than any other racial/ethnic group on the NAEP reading assessment (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009; NCES, 2010). African American achievement in mathematics is similarly dismal. In 2009, 16% of African American 4th graders, 12% of African American 8th graders, and a miniscule 5% of African American 12th grade students scored proficient and above in mathematics, poorer than any other racial/ethnic group (Aud, Fox, and KewalRamani, 2010).

Poor academic achievement among African American students has changed relatively little since 1992, and gaps in achievement between White students and their African American peers continue to persist (NCES, 2009; NCES, 2010). A plethora of reform efforts have attempted to remedy the African American achievement dilemma; however, no one reform to date has successfully altered the academic performance of the African American K-12 student population at scale.

Public charter schools¹ were introduced into the American education landscape in 1991 as a result of ongoing United States education reform efforts aimed at targeting the poor academic achievement of America's children in comparison with countries that appeared to be out-competing and out-innovating America. Schools in poor, urban communities became the target, as the students within their confines had the poorest academic performance by far. Charter schools were marketed as free-market public schools that would be free of traditional public

¹ Public charter schools will be referred to as, "charter schools," "charters," and "public charters" throughout.

school bureaucracy and would provide for innovative and rigorous curricula, the flexibility of hiring and firing teachers at will, and the opportunity for teachers, parents, and community members to create and manage niche schools designed to serve the students within their community. Further, these schools were intended to be a competitive alternative to force traditional public schools² to improve their academic structure or face the loss of students to new and innovative schools.

Charter school enrollment has been increasing since the inception of the movement in the early 1990's (Grady and Bielick, 2010). Charter school students today make up 3.7% of the traditional public school student population and are largely minority (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools [NAPCS], 2011). The majority of charter schools are located in urban areas and mostly serve low-income student populations (Center on Reinventing Public Education [CRPE], 2009). African American students are disproportionately enrolled in charter schools compared with other racial/ethnic groups, and are choosing to attend charter schools at nearly double the rate that they are attending traditional public schools—29.5% vs. 16.1% (Grady and Bielick, 2010; NAPCS, 2010).

As a result of the ongoing increase in charter school enrollment annually, particularly in urban communities, a handful of studies have sought to address the factors that influence parents to remove their students from traditional public schools and enroll them into charter schools and to measure their level of satisfaction with the charter schools their students attend. One study surveyed charter school parents in an urban school district to determine the reasons that parents withdrew their students from the local public schools and found that parents perceived an enhanced educational experience with the overall quality of the charter school environment (May, 2006). A small group of studies found that the majority of charter school parents were highly satisfied overall with the charter schools their students attend in comparison with the traditional public schools they left (Buckley and Schneider, 2006; May, 2006; Wohlstetter, Nayfack, and Mora-Flores, 2008). Finally, a third set of studies examined the overall school choice phenomenon to determine enrollment trends, student characteristics, and political constraints that make up the school choice movement (Grady and Bielick, 2010; Manno, 2010).

No study to date has specifically addressed the concerns and educational needs of African American students in relation to the factors that are influencing African American parents to remove their children from traditional public schools and enroll them into charter schools. Given the unprecedented number of African American families selecting the public charter school sector, it is important to understand what makes these schools so attractive to African American families, as well as whether or not these schools are successfully educating African American students.

This study attempts to contribute to the knowledge base both by specifically identifying reasons that African American parents in a small charter middle school chose to remove their students from the traditional public school system and enroll them into a charter school and by determining their level of satisfaction with their decision. This area of study is important due to the fact that a disproportionate number of African American parents are choosing to enroll their children in charter schools versus traditional public schools nationwide. Having an understanding of the mechanisms in place within charters, and whether or not these mechanisms are successful

² Traditional public schools are American schools that serve grades K-12. They are mandated by law and open to all school-age children free of charge. There is no admissions process, and children are typically assigned to the public school closest to their residence.

by way of measuring levels of parental satisfaction, can help to provide a framework for traditional public schools that serve similar student populations.

Literature Review

School choice has become more prevalent in the United States. More parents are removing their children from the traditional public school system and placing them in private schools or charter schools, or are choosing to homeschool their children (Grady and Bielick, 2010). African American students are one of the largest student populations who are leaving traditional public schools and enrolling in schools of choice, most commonly charter schools. This has been noted extensively in research that examines student achievement and student characteristics within charter schools at the local, state, and national levels (Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2009; Bifulco and Ladd, 2006a, 2006b; Bodine et al., 2008; Booker, Zimmer, and Buddin, 2005; California Charter Schools Association [CCSA], 2008; Frankenberg and Lee, 2003; Hoxby, Murarka, and Kang, 2009; Zimmer and Buddin, 2005; Zimmer et al., 2009). According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) (2010), African American students make up 29.5% of the national public charter school population and only 16.1% of the national traditional public school population.

Within the literature, key components are identified that drive African American parents to make school choice decisions: (1) the effectiveness of the market approach to schooling; (2) the perception of academic quality among African American parents; and (3) common characteristics of charter schools that serve predominantly African American students and lead parents to articulate their satisfaction with such schools.

The Market Approach to Schooling

The market approach to schooling enables parents to unearth their schooling preferences by selecting schools that they deem suitable for their child's needs, and in turn, holds schools accountable to their clients—i.e., the parents—for the services they provide. Chubb and Moe (1991) presented their “bold proposal” of the market approach to schooling in a book entitled *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*. The authors proposed that state governments should create a new system of public education based on the market principals of parental choice and school competition. In their proposal, they articulate that traditional public schools are subject to direct control through politics, but autonomous schools, such as private schools, are subject to indirect control, through markets. Chubb and Moe backed up their proposal with an empirical study that examined over 400 high schools and 20,000 students. In their study, the authors found that the more autonomous schools are from external controls, the more likely they are to have effective organizations. Some researchers purport that this model makes for a successful approach to schooling—one that enables families the freedom to choose the learning environment that will best meet the needs of their students (Bast and Walberg, 2004; Buckley and Schneider; Wohlstetter et al., 2008). For this reason, the market approach has been tied to both the success and presumed legitimacy of charter schools.

Parental Satisfaction in Charter Schools

Existing research on parental satisfaction with charter schools is limited. Researchers who have taken on the topic have shown that the majority of charter school parents are highly satisfied with their students' charter schools. May (2006) queried 260 predominantly African American elementary and junior high school parents in urban communities in Ohio who withdrew their children from traditional public schools and enrolled them into charter schools. Eighty percent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their child's school by giving the schools an "A" grade. Wohlstetter, Nayfack, and Mora-Flores (2008) found that 70% of a sample of charter school parents in California also rated their school an "A" grade, and over 90% of all parents were "satisfied" and "highly satisfied" with all dimensions of the schooling experience. The commonalities among available surveys of charter school parents indicate that parents are satisfied with the following components of charter schools: a challenging curriculum, individualized attention, a college-going atmosphere, small class size, high expectations placed on students, a safe schooling environment, teacher quality, and effective administrative leadership (Buckley and Schneider, 2006; Grady and Bielick, 2010; Lacey, Enger, Madonado, and Thompson, 2006; May, 2006; Wohlstetter et al., 2008).

One group of researchers compared the satisfaction of charter school parents with the satisfaction of traditional public school parents in Washington, D.C., through a cross-sectional analysis and longitudinal analysis of 1,000 parents (Buckley and Schneider, 2006). The cross-sectional analysis showed that charter school parents evaluate their schools more highly than parents with children in the District of Columbia Public Schools. However, the researchers discovered that over time (through longitudinal data), there was only a small difference between charter school parental satisfaction and the satisfaction of parents with children in D.C. public schools.

Although the majority of the research on parental satisfaction in charter schools indicates a high level of satisfaction among parents, the research collectively shows that charter school parents overwhelmingly are least satisfied with subpar school facilities and diminished resources—though these were not as great a concern to parents. Parents gave low rankings to issues such as the cleanliness of their child's school, the overall appearance of the school facility, the quality of the lunch program, the lack of physical education offered, inadequate library facilities, and other school necessities that were difficult to ascertain for new and relatively new charter schools (Lacey et al., 2006; Wohlstetter et al., 2008).

The Perception of Academic Quality

A small group of authors contend that parents who are satisfied with charter schools overall are satisfied with the perceived academic quality that these schools provide, not necessarily the demonstration of sustained academic achievement (Bast and Walberg, 2004; May, 2006). May (2006) found that despite a lack of statistically significant academic gains among the charter schools in her sample, parents perceived an enhanced educational experience that she attributed to the positive culture that these charter schools displayed. According to May, "Many parents base their school choice decision on factors that have nothing to do with the quality of education" (May, 2006, p. 28). In her study, parents reflected on positive feelings, which translated into smaller class sizes, teacher familiarity, one-on-one attention, and a sense of belonging. May refers to this construct as "the perception gap"—the positive expressions parents

attribute to charter schools that are consistent more with their feelings rather than with achievement results, but are ultimately defined as “academic satisfaction.”

Characteristics and Best Practices of Predominantly African American Charter Schools

According to the literature, charter schools that serve large proportions of African American students have distinct characteristics and tend to vary tremendously from the cultures and practices of traditional public schools (Farmer-Hinton and Adams, 2006; Hoxby et al., 2009; Merseth, 2009; Tough, 2009). The following best practices have been identified as common characteristics among these schools and, in some cases, statistically significant in relationship to their positive effects on the academic outcomes of African American students:

- A defined mission statement that emphasizes academic performance (Hoxby et al., 2009; Merseth, 2009)
- A culture of high expectations (Merseth, 2009; Tough, 2009)
- A college-going atmosphere (Booker, Gill, Zimmer, and Sass, 2009; Farmer-Hinton and Adams, 2006; Hubbard and Kulkarni, 2009; Merseth, 2009; Tough, 2009; Zimmer et al., 2009)
- A focus on standardized tests and the use of routine, internal evaluations (Hoxby et al., 2009; Knowledge is Power Program [KIPP], 2008; Merseth, 2009; Tough, 2009)
- Longer school days and extended academic years (Hoxby et al., 2009; KIPP, 2008; Merseth, 2009)

Other best practices exist in predominantly African American charter schools such as student advisory teams, school uniforms/school dress codes, family and student contracts, behavioral systems (demerits/merits, small rewards/small penalties), a direct instruction style of teaching, use of the Blackboard Configuration (BBC) system, a greater amount of instructional time devoted to English Language Arts, data-driven instruction and planning, strong leadership, parent and community involvement, and others (Hoxby et al., 2009; Merseth, 2009; Tough, 2009). Taken together, these characteristics presumably illustrate models of effective schools that are free to be innovative and inclusive. These schools appear to lack the bureaucracy that often impedes the success of traditional public schools (Chubb and Moe, 1991).

This study explores the results of parent surveys from a predominantly African American public charter middle school in Long Beach, California. The investigation examines the reported reasons parents choose to remove their children from traditional public schools and identifies the factors that lead them to report their overall satisfaction with the charter school in reference. Two major research questions guided this study: (1) What factors influence African American parents to remove their students from traditional public schools and enroll them into public charter schools? (2) How satisfied are African American parents with their decision to enroll their students in public charter schools, and what are the key elements that lead parents to report high levels of satisfaction with charter schools?

Methods

The research method employed for this study is a quantitative investigation utilizing cross-sectional survey data. The survey, an instrument designed by the researcher, was compiled

by referencing key literature in the field. The population consists of the parents of 112 charter school students enrolled in Micro-Enterprise Charter Academy (MECA), a predominantly minority public charter school in Long Beach, CA, that enrolls students in grades six through eight. The sample consists of a 61% response rate from data obtained from 71 parents who completed the survey anonymously. The majority of the surveys were sent home with students through the school office, while others were distributed and collected by the researcher at a parent meeting. A consent form accompanied each survey, informing respondents that their participation was voluntary and that their responses were completely anonymous. The survey was administered over three weeks during March 2011. The researcher utilizes purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique, to ascertain an adequate sample of African American charter school parents, as the goal of the researcher is to quantify and qualify the school choice decisions in which African American parents engage.

Explanation of Coding

The survey was distributed in paper form and consisted of 41 items. There were 28 Likert scale items (Questions 1-12 and 28-30: 1=Not Important, 2=Somewhat Important, 3=Very Important; Questions 13-25: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree), five closed-ended questions, one open-ended question, and seven demographic questions. The key variables in this study address the main research questions and identify: (1) the factors that influence African American parents to remove their students from traditional public schools and enroll them into public charter schools, and (2) the factors that determine their level of satisfaction with the charter schools their students enroll in. The key variables in this study are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Key Variables

Variable Name	Research Question	Item on Survey
Variable 1: Parents seeking school choice in the form of public charter schools	What factors influence African American parents to remove their students from traditional public schools and enroll them into public charter schools?	Questions 1-12: 3-point Likert scale items
Variable 2: Overall satisfaction with the charter school environment	How satisfied are African American parents with their decision to enroll their students in public charter schools?	Questions 29, 30: 3-point Likert scale items
Variable 3: Measures of satisfaction with the charter school environment	How do parents identify their level of satisfaction with the charter school environment?	Questions 13-25: 4-point Likert scale items

Results

Participants

From the 71 parental survey respondents, the majority were mothers (55). Twenty-seven of the respondents were married, 22 were single/never married, 10 were divorced, four legally

separated, one widowed, and seven chose not to answer the question. The largest group (20) of respondents were between the ages of 45-49, while 18 were between the ages of 35-39, 13 between the ages of 30-34, 11 between the ages of 40-44, two between the ages of 25-29, three were 50 or older, and four did not respond. Twenty-three respondents reported annual earnings below \$20,000, while 14 reported earning \$50,000 or more annually, ten reported earning between \$20,000-\$29,999 annually, four between \$30,000-\$39,999 annually, another four between \$40,000-\$49,999 annually, and 16 did not respond to this question.

MECA Student Demographics

Table 2

“What is your student’s race/ethnicity?”

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Valid Percent
African American/Black	56	83.6%
Asian	2	3.0%
Hispanic/Latino	6	9.0%
Pacific Islander	1	1.5%
White	2	3.0%

Table 3

“What is your child’s gender?”

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Male	30	44.1%
Female	38	55.9%

Table 4

“The former school my child attended prior to MECA was...”

Former School	Frequency	Valid Percent
Traditional Public School	53	75.7%
Private School	5	7.1%
Public Charter School	9	12.9%
Homeschool	3	4.3%

As Tables 2 and 3 illustrate, survey respondents identified the majority of MECA students as African American (83.6%) and female (55.9%). Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents’ students (75.7%) attended traditional public schools prior to enrolling into MECA.

The first research question guiding this study asks, “What factors influence African American parents to remove their students from traditional public schools, and enroll them in public charter schools?” The reasons that parents enrolled their students into MECA, and the level of importance in their decision, were measured on a 3-point Likert scale (1=Not Important, 2=Somewhat Important, 3=Very Important). According to parents, reasons that were somewhat important to them for choosing MECA were: their dissatisfaction with the prior school ($m=1.98$, $sd=.86$); dissatisfaction with their students’ performance at the prior school ($m=2.07$, $sd=.89$); MECA being closer to home than the prior school ($m=1.87$, $sd=.91$); and MECA’s student

population being more diverse than the former school ($m=1.94$, $sd=.83$). Reasons that were important and very important to parents enrolling their students into MECA were: their interest in MECA's academic focus on technology and entrepreneurship ($m=2.77$, $sd=.49$); the desire for their child to be in a safe learning environment ($m=2.96$, $sd=.20$); the many positive things they had heard about charter schools ($m=2.62$, $sd=.66$); the many positive things they had heard about MECA ($m=2.46$, $sd=.67$); the perception that MECA had a clear mission of preparing students for college ($m=2.80$, $sd=.50$); and the desire to have a choice in where their child attended school ($m=2.86$, $sd=.46$).

The second research question guiding this study asks "How satisfied are African American parents with their decision to enroll their students in public charter schools, and what are the key elements that lead parents to report high levels of satisfaction?"

Table 5

"What is your overall satisfaction with MECA?"

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
			3.16	0.694
Highly Dissatisfied	1	1.4%		
Dissatisfied	9	12.9%		
Satisfied	38	53.5%		
Highly Satisfied	22	31.4%		

Table 6

"Would you recommend MECA to your friends and family?"

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
			2.28	0.725
Not Recommend	11	15.9%		
Recommend	28	40.6%		
Highly Recommend	30	43.5%		

As Table 5 illustrates, the majority of parents are satisfied with MECA. 53.5% reported that they are satisfied, and 31.4% reported that they are highly satisfied with MECA overall. Less than 15% of parents indicate that they are dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with MECA. When asked if they would recommend MECA to their family and friends, nearly 85% of parents indicate that they would recommend or highly recommend MECA, as illustrated in Table 6, with only 16% of parents stating that they would not recommend MECA to their family or friends.

Table 7

“MECA is more attentive to my student’s needs.”

	Frequency	Valid %	Mean	Std. Deviation
			3.13	0.765
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%		
Disagree	13	18.8%		
Agree	31	44.9%		
Strongly Agree	24	34.8%		

As Table 7 illustrates, the majority of parents (79.7%) agree or strongly agree that MECA is more attentive to their student’s needs than the former school their child attended. Only 20% of parents disagreed with this statement.

Table 8

“Higher expectations are placed on my student at MECA.”

	Frequency	Valid %	Mean	Std. Deviation
			3.17	0.862
Strongly Disagree	2	2.8%		
Disagree	15	21.1%		
Agree	23	32.4%		
Strongly Agree	31	43.7%		

The majority of parents (76.1%) either agree or strongly agree that higher expectations are placed on their students at MECA, in comparison with the former school, as shown in Table 8.

Table 9

“My student takes greater ownership of his/her academics and is a more active participant at MECA.”

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
			3.01	0.837
Strongly Disagree	4	5.6%		
Disagree	12	16.9%		
Agree	34	47.9%		
Strongly Agree	21	29.6%		

Table 9 illustrates that parents agree that their students are taking greater ownership of their academics at MECA, with nearly 80% indicating that their students are more engaged, in comparison to the former school their students left.

Table 10

“The former school placed a greater emphasis on college preparation.”

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
			2.52	0.922
Strongly Disagree	8	11.6%		
Disagree	32	46.4%		
Agree	14	20.3%		
Strongly Agree	15	21.7%		

The majority of parents disagree that the former school their child attended was more focused on college preparation than MECA, with nearly 60% of respondents either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement, as shown in Table 10.

Table 11

“A greater emphasis is placed on testing at MECA.”

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strongly Disagree			3.13	0.644
Disagree	10	14.7%		
Agree	39	57.4%		
Strongly Agree	19	27.9%		

As Table 11 illustrates, the majority of parents (85.3%) either agree or strongly agree that MECA places a greater emphasis on testing than the former school their child attended. Only 14.7% of parents disagree with this statement.

Table 12

“My student had better grades at the former school.”

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
			2.31	0.996
Strongly Disagree	15	22.1%		
Disagree	28	41.2%		
Agree	14	20.6%		
Strongly Agree	11	16.2%		

The majority of parents disagree that their child had better grades at the prior school, with 63.3% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement, as illustrated in Table 12.

Table 13

“The class sizes are smaller at MECA.”

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
			3.27	0.779
Strongly Disagree	2	2.9%		
Disagree	8	11.4%		
Agree	29	41.4%		
Strongly Agree	31	44.3%		

The majority of parents stated that the class sizes are smaller at MECA, in comparison with the previous school their child attended. As illustrated in Table 13, nearly 86% agree and strongly agree with this statement.

Table 14

“How important is it to you that your child attends a four-year college or university?”

	Frequency	Valid%	Mean	Std. Deviation
			2.91	0.284
Somewhat Important	6	8.7%		
Very Important	63	91.3%		

Nearly all (91.3%) parents indicated that it was very important that their child attends a four-year college or university, with less than 10% indicating that this is a somewhat important goal, and no parents indicating this goal has no importance to them at all, as shown in Table 14.

Discussion

Existing research strongly supports the current study’s findings that a majority of parents are satisfied with the overall charter school experience (Buckley and Schneider, 2006; Grady and Bielick, 2010; Lacey et al., 2006; May, 2006; Wohlstetter et al., 2008); however the reasons that African American parents remove their children from traditional public schools and employ the use of school choice is less certain.

Some have theorized that parents who choose their children’s schools are happier with the experience due to their opportunity to freely choose (May, 2006). In this study, parents indicate that their selection of MECA was due to its innovative pedagogy, its safe learning environment, the college-going atmosphere, and the strong desire of the parents to have a choice in where their child attends school. According to researchers, choice unleashes competitive pressure and forces charter schools to treat parents as customers who require quality products (Buckley and Schneider, 2006; Chubb and Moe, 1991). Further, researchers contend that African American parents view school choice as a way to flee underperforming city schools (May, 2006).

It is evident that parents are satisfied in general with the charter schools their students attend. This study shows a tie between existing research that highlights key characteristics of predominantly African American charter schools. May (2006) and Wohlstetter et al. (2008) showed that parents perceive school satisfaction through one-on-one attention, which

corresponds with the findings in this study that indicate that the majority of parents find MECA more attentive to their student's individual needs than the former school their child attended. A tie was also linked to satisfaction through a college-going atmosphere (Wohlstetter et al., 2008). Nearly 60% of respondents indicate that MECA places a greater emphasis on college preparation than the former school, and more than 90% of parents state that it is important for their child to attend a four-year college or university. Smaller class sizes also provided a link to prior research (May, 2006). The majority of parents indicate that the class sizes at MECA are smaller than the former school—a common characteristic among charter schools that serve predominantly African American students (Merseth, 2009). Higher expectations have also been linked to parental satisfaction (Lacey et al., 2006; Wohlstetter et al., 2008). Parents overwhelmingly agree that at MECA, expectations are higher for their students, in comparison to the former schools their children attended. Finally, a safe environment provides a connection to the literature (May, 2006). Parents indicate their selection of MECA was based upon their desire to have their child in a safe learning environment.

This study attempts to contribute to the knowledge base by identifying specific reasons that African American parents chose charter schools over traditional public schools and to measure these parents' levels of satisfaction with charter schools. There are a number of limitations to this study. First, the sample size acquired for this study is not generalizable to the entire charter school movement, which comprises over 1.5 million students nationwide, with nearly 500,000 African American students. Second, the sample consisted of multiple racial/ethnic groups, and therefore cannot be solely attributed to the target population—African American students—although a large majority of the study's subjects were African American. Finally, this study only drew upon the experiences of middle school students, and did not include the perspectives of parents with children in primary grades or high school. In an effort to broaden the scope of future studies, the researcher will solicit a larger target population to ensure an adequate sample size of African American parents. Further, the researcher will include achievement data, coupled with survey items on levels of parental satisfaction, in order to better understand how parents interpret academic success.

As identified earlier, African Americans are among the poorest performers in the nation. However, public charter schools have done a successful job in attracting this academically disadvantaged group to their schools by providing an atmosphere that is satisfactory and enticing to the parents. African American parents appear to be seeking schooling environments that are safer, more disciplined, attentive to their student's needs, inclined to place high expectations on their children, and college-centered. As the charter movement continues to grow, traditional public schools desiring to be competitive in a market-driven environment must take heed to the choices of the decision makers—the parents, who appear to be looking for qualities that are outside of the traditional public school schemata.

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