Faith, education, and choice: a study of the educational choices of Catholic parents in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, N.Y

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Faith, Education, and Choice:  
A Study of the Educational Choices of Catholic Parents in the  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, N.Y.  

by  
Christopher Bruce Bott  

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ABSTRACT

School choice is a research topic that is often associated with public funds supporting educational alternatives. While much of the school choice research literature focuses on this category, additional types of school choice merit examination. This study examines how Catholic parents chose high schools for their children within the geographic boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany (RCDA), New York.

The purposes of the study were to explore whether these parents selected Catholic or public schools for their children, factors that influenced their decisions on school placement, and sources of information about schools that assisted with the decision-making process. Study findings were derived from a survey administered to parents who resided in the RCDA, had a child in the household in grades 10-12, and had enrolled their child in a Catholic faith formation program.

The Findings revealed several similarities and differences in the decision-making process of parents who selected Catholic schools and those who selected public schools. The majority of survey respondents (83.3%), selected public schools for their child's high school. Parents who selected Catholic schools and those who selected public schools shared some similarities in terms of income, education, and church attendance. When it came to school factors, the study discovered statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of preferences for single sex education, moral and character education, religious education and worship, and a disciplined and orderly school environment. The two groups of parents shared some similarities in factors that influenced their school choices including concerns about quality of academic
program, distance of school from home, family history of attending Catholic or public schools, financial considerations, school safety, school reputation, student services, and athletic programs. Lastly, the study discovered that those who selected Catholic schools and those who chose and public schools relied on different types of information about schools.

The results of this study will assist researchers, educational policy makers, and school leaders in better understanding how parents choose schools.
DEDICATION

I have decided to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Paula Bott and my parents, Bruce (posthumously) and Maureen Bott.

My studies came at a cost to my family life and the contributions that I was able to make at home over the past seven years. Paula, know that you unwavering support of my studies and professional responsibilities are appreciated. I love you and am forever grateful for your support.

I am the son of two Catholic educators that provided me and my siblings with a remarkable upbringing. We were given all of the support, love, and guidance that every child deserves. Mom and Dad, I hope that it is very clear to both of you that you are extraordinary parents and that we appreciate the sacrifices you made to support all of us over the years. I can only wish that my children look at me with the same respect, love, and admiration that I feel for both of you.

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Chapter 1 / Introduction

INTRODUCTION AND DISSERTATION OBJECTIVES

Enrollment in Pre-K – 12th Grade Catholic schools has significantly and consistently decreased over the past five decades in the United States. The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) reported that 1,974,578 American children were enrolled in 6,594 Catholic elementary or secondary schools during the 2013-2014 school year. As a matter of comparison, the NCEA reported that 5,253,000 students were enrolled in 12,893 Catholic elementary or secondary schools during the 1959-1960 school year (McDonald and Schultz 2014). This enrollment phenomenon begs many questions for researchers to consider. For example, the shift in enrollment over time raises questions about whether Catholic parents are selecting schools other than Catholic schools for their educational family’s educational needs. This dissertation focuses on what types of schools Catholic parents are selecting, factors that influence how Catholic parents select these schools, and where parents obtain information about schools when deciding.

The purpose of this study is to explore parent decision making regarding education in three specific areas. I first looked at the types of schools Catholic families are selecting in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. This region offers a variety of school options to families including, but not limited to, Catholic schools, traditional public schools, charter schools, public magnet schools, non-public schools, home schooling, and other types of unique schools. Catholic parents today have a much wider variety of options in comparison to the Catholic parents of 1959. Second, this study examines factors including family priorities that Catholic parents consider when selecting schools for their children. Some researchers consider tuition costs to be the primary concern of parents when considering private schools, but a variety of other variables are also relevant (Schneider 1993). Researchers Mark Schneider, Paul Teske, and
Melissa Marschall have identified eleven characteristics that parents consider while choosing schools including teacher quality, test scores, class size, special programs, discipline, values, socioeconomic status of students, diversity, location, and safety (Schneider et al 2000). While this dissertation does not attempt to analyze all of these characteristics, it explores parent preferences and school characteristics through a framework specifically designed for this study. The parental preferences and school characteristics examined in this study include quality of academic program, drive time between home and school, family members previously attended the school, single sex education, tuition and fees, school safety, moral and character education, religious education and worship, discipline and orderly environment, reputation in social network, services provided at the school address the special needs of this child, and quality of the school’s athletic program. Lastly, I explored how families obtain information for selecting a school. Drawing from my own experiences as a Catholic school administrator, I have worked with parents that base their decisions on social networks, information provided by the school, and information provided by sources other than the school. Schneider, Teske, and Marschall (2000) also use these sources of information when analyzing where parents obtain information about schools.

I have established three prerequisite family characteristics for participants in this study. I aimed to have parents or guardians participate who reside in the geographic boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, have a child or children enrolled in a school in grades 10-12, and have that child enrolled in a Catholic parish-based faith formation program. I encouraged a diverse group of families to participate in the study. Understanding the options available to parents who reside in the RCDA, I aimed to capture the perspectives of parents who have selected many different types of schools. The act of participating in a parish-based faith
formation program is an indication that families are in some way interested in Catholic education or formation. The outcomes from this study will assist policy makers, leaders, and researchers in better understanding how and why parents make the educational decisions they make.

A survey instrument designed specifically for this study serves as the source of data collection. The data collected and analyzed is relevant to how and why parents selected schools over other options that might be available to their family. It is important to understand why families enroll their children in Catholic schools, public schools, or other educational options that may be available to these families. Identifying trends and relationships amongst these data within demographic groups will allow educational policy makers and researchers to focus attention and resources on areas that are important to currently enrolled families as well as prospective families from all types of schools. A better understanding of parents’ priorities while selecting schools can also help school leaders to shape curriculum and programs to coincide with the priorities of the communities they serve. We are now in a time in the history of American education when all types of schools are concerned with student enrollment. The expansion of choice programs in certain communities now brings public school leaders into the discussion of recruiting and retaining students. Public funding in most communities that have adopted school choice programs has been diverted from the traditional public school to other types of schools, both public and private. Public school leaders have a vested interest in these communities to better understand how parents select schools.

**CATHOLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT**

In the spectrum of issues that affect educational policy and practices in Catholic education, few items are more significant than individual school and diocesan enrollment trends. Enrollment in Catholic schools dictates many different types of limitations and opportunities for
schools in the areas of resources, curriculum, and funding. These ideas, grouped with declining enrollment numbers over the past fifty years nationwide, lead some educational policy makers to ask why Catholic families choose the schools they select for their educational needs. Current and long term enrollment trends in Catholic schools serve as the primary justification for this study.

Contrary to the U.S. enrollment numbers provided earlier, enrollment in Catholic schools world-wide has significantly increased between 1997 and 2008, achieving almost a twenty percent increase in both the number of schools and total enrollment in these schools (Ziegler 2011). However, the trend is almost the opposite in the United States and locally in the RCDA. The pinnacle of enrollment numbers in American Catholic schools occurred during the 1960s with total enrollment surpassing 5.2 million students in over 12,000 schools. Chart 1.1 shows Catholic school enrollment data from National Catholic Educational Association’s statistics reports from 1960 through 2014. The chart indicates a consistent enrollment decline over the 54-year period represented on the chart.

![Chart 1.1 National Catholic School Enrollment 1960-2015](chart1.png)

**Chart 1.1 National Catholic School Enrollment 1960-2015**

Looking to more recent data, the National Catholic Educational Association reported that 2,484,252 students were enrolled in 7,955 Catholic schools nationwide during the 2003-2004 school year. As a matter of comparison, 1,974,578 students were enrolled in 6,594 schools nationwide during the 2013-2014 school year reflecting a 20.5% decrease in enrollment over a ten-year period (McDonald and Schultz 2014).

Enrollment in Catholic schools in the RCDA was reported at 48,209 during the 1965-1966 school year and 6,875 during the 2013-2014 school year (RCDA Statistics Reports 1965-2014). These numbers reflect 41,334 fewer students in 2014, representing an 85.74% decrease in enrollment over the 49-year period. More recently, 10,764 students were enrolled in 43 schools during the 2003-2004 school year (Herb 2003) and 6,875 in 28 schools during the 2013-2014 school year reflecting a 36% decrease in enrollment between 2003 and 2014 (Pizzingrillo 2013). The RCDA enrollment numbers show greater reductions in the selected time periods than the national numbers. Chart 1.2 shows Catholic school enrollment data from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany’s statistics reports from 1965 through 2014. The chart indicates a consistent enrollment decline over the 49-year period represented on the chart.
To put some of these statistics into context, I will provide three data comparisons utilizing similar time parameters that relate to the entire Catholic Church in the United States. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown collects data relevant to the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. They report that 46.3 million Americans identified themselves as Catholic in 1965 compared to 67.7 million in 2016. Based on this data, one might conclude that the Church is growing. However, they also report that 55% of Catholics attended weekly services in 1965 compared to 22% in 2016. In addition, they report that 58,632 Catholic priests served in the United States in 1965 in comparison to 37,192 in 2016 (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate 2016). While more Americans are reporting themselves as Catholic, less are actively participating in weekly services and there are more than 20,000 fewer priests.

Why has there been such a significant decrease of Catholic school students over the past fifty years? Catholic schools are more expensive, even when taking inflation into account, than ever before. While many factors come into play when determining cost, staffing appears to be a
significant expense items in today’s Catholic schools. Schools that were once wholly staffed by priests, nuns, and brothers in the 1960s were staffed by 98% lay teachers and administrators in 2015 (Marcus 2015). The expansion of educational choices to parents with the evolution of charter schools and an increase in homeschooling has allowed American parents to choose amongst school options. According to some researchers, this expansion of the schooling market has negatively affected Catholic school enrollment (Lackman 2013). While local and national trends point toward Catholic families migrating from urban to suburban communities to reside in, many Catholic schools have remained in urban settings. This phenomenon has contributed to the enrollment reductions that Catholic schools have experienced over the past fifty years (Weber 2009). Enrollment trends in RCDA Catholic schools do not coincide with local (Capital Region) population trends. The population of children age 5 to 14 increased from 122,250 to 124,021 between 1990 and 2010 in the Capital Region (Capital District Regional Planning Commission 2012). The population increased from 16,782,304 to 17,558,072 between 1960 and 1980 in New York State. In 2010, the population in New York State was reported as 19,378,102 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1960, 1980, 2010). While New York's population trends are increasing, enrollment trends in Catholic schools are decreasing.

CATHOLIC PARISH FAITH FORMATION PROGRAMS

Catholic families interested in religious education who do not send their children to Catholic schools may use parish-based faith formation programs at their place of worship. Catholic school parents also utilize the faith formation programs to fulfill diocesan requirements relevant to receiving the sacraments of First Communion and Catholic Confirmation. The programs provide Sacramental preparation, spiritual formation, religious education, and a variety of other educational experiences relevant to the Catholic faith. The programs also assist in
fostering a sense of community for families and provide an avenue for young people to become involved in the parish. Aside from the years that Catholic school students are required to attend faith formation programs as a matter sacramental preparation, some parents have the option of having their children attend both faith formation programs and Catholic schools.

The faith formation programs in the RCDA are staffed by 193 catechetical leaders, 3,088 volunteer catechists, and 56 youth ministers in faith formation programs spread across the diocese. The programs served 17,619 elementary and junior high school students, and 6,320 high school students during the 2012-2013 school year (RCDA 2012). Enrollment in faith formation programs in the RCDA totaled 23,939 during the 2012-2013 school year in comparison to the 6,898 students enrolled in Catholic schools during that same school year (RCDA 2012). If we were to consider those enrolled in Catholic faith formation programs as families interested in some form of Catholic education, policy makers might be interested in factors influencing educational choices with this pool of parents to better understand how Catholic parents make these decisions. These programs are spread across all regions of the RCDA and Capital Region. The geographical layout of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany covers over 10,000 square miles across 14 counties.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY**

This dissertation contributes to the researcher literature on school choice. The limited literature available regarding educational choices associated with Catholic families is discussed in Chapter 2, the literature review. Moreover, Catholic school policy makers in the United States are wrestling with significant decisions associated with Catholic school closures, consolidations, governance shifts, restructuring of schools, and relocation of schools. They are also considering societal trends like demographic shifts of Catholics moving from urban areas to suburban
communities that might have high performing public schools. Catholic school policy makers also face economic challenges such as the recent Great Recession, which occurred in 2007-2009. This study will be useful to these policy makers, educational leaders, and others interested in how and why Catholic parents select schools for their children.

This study explores how consumers make choices in the educational marketplace. The concept of school choice is multi-faceted and highly politicized. For example, the use of public tax revenue to support student enrollment in religious schools is controversial. When using the term school choice, one could be referring to school vouchers, educational tax credits, charter school education, public magnet schools, or several other choice programs in the United States. The concept of school choice as utilized in this study does not focus on the use of tax revenue to support parental choice or private schools. Additionally, this dissertation does not study the effects or benefits of school choice as sociologist James Coleman (1966) or economist Milton Friedman (1955) researched in their contributions to the school choice literature.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology for this study features quantitative analysis of parents’ responses to a survey administered with the cooperation of leadership at Catholic parishes in the RCDA. All parishes were asked to participate, aiming to achieve a geographically and demographically diverse pool of respondents. The survey instrument targets key demographic characteristics of participating families to identify relationships between the decision and the demographic makeup of the family. These demographic characteristics include information about their education, income, community, attendance at religious services, number of children in the household, and distance between home and their child’s school. The data is first analyzed to provide a base of descriptive statistics to better understand who responded and what they
reported. The data is then subjected to T-tests and Chi-Square Tests to identify associations between dependent and independent variables. Primarily, the tests measure differences between respondents who have selected Catholic and public schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: In what types of schools are children of Catholic parents in the RCDA enrolled?

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to Catholic parents’ selection of schools for their children?

Research Question 3: What types and sources of information do Catholic parents rely on when considering schools for their children?

CONCLUSION

In an effort to contribute to the scholarly discussion on how parents choose schools, this dissertation assists policy makers and researchers in better understanding how Catholic parents select schools. The research findings will be useful for a broad audience of scholars and practitioners interested in school choice. The goal of this analysis is to uncover information that may be useful to researchers, policymakers, and school leaders. While all of the findings are important to this study, a key finding focuses on factors that influence parents’ decision making and the perception of overall quality in both public and Catholic schools. The results will allow those who are interested in school choice to better understand how Catholic parents select schools.
Chapter 2 / Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this dissertation is to investigate what types of schools Catholic families are selecting for their children and how families are selecting these schools. The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the concept of school choice. This section includes a description of the educational options available to Catholic parents for Pre-K through 12th grade education. For example, there are now tuition-free options for Catholic parents other than traditional public schools. The charter schools within the boundaries of the RCDA are options for Catholic families. In the second section, I explore the literature on how families choose schools and factors that influence decision making. In particular, Rational Choice Theory is the primary concept that is scrutinized in this section of the literature review. Third, I focus on research pertaining to how families select schools, regardless of the school type they select. Lastly, I will review the literature relevant to how parents obtain information about schools.

SCHOOL CHOICE AND CHOOSING SCHOOLS

The term “school choice” is often associated with public funding of schools other than the local public school. However, choice relevant to education goes well beyond the issue of government funding supporting alternative education programs. Today’s parents have a wide variety of educational choices for Pre-K through 12th grade education. These options include choices that come at a financial cost to parents in the form of tuition as well as options that are supported by tax dollars. Some parents bypass their tax supported local public school option and choose to personally finance their children’s education at private or parochial schools, special vocational schools, and/or boarding schools.
The most common publicly-funded forms of school choice are charter schools, educational tax credits, school vouchers, and magnet schools. It is important to take a brief look at the history of school choice prior to engaging in a more specific study of choice and decision making within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany.

**EDUCATIONAL CHOICE FOUNDATIONS**

Tracing the origin of choice in American education is complex because the origin and history of American education is complex. Using Catholic schools as an example, the origins of American Catholic schools trace back into the 16th Century with the arrival of Spanish missionaries in Florida. Although the concept of choice is debatable in regards to missionary work, Catholic religious education was occurring during the 16th Century in what is today the United States (Walch 2003).

A handful of notable 18th Century political and economic philosophers included the concept of school choice in their writings. Adam Smith, who is often referred to as the father of modern economics, published *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776. While the work is considered by many to be the most significant foundational document in the discipline of economics, Smith included commentary on the benefits of competition and choice in the arena of education. He wrote, “Were the students upon such charitable foundations left free to choose what college they liked best, such liberty might perhaps contribute to excite some emulation among different colleges. A regulation, on the contrary, which prohibited even the independent members of every particular college from leaving it, and going to any other, without leave first asked and obtained of that which they meant to abandon, would tend very much to extinguish that emulation.” (Smith 1776 Page 623). Smith’s claims from over two
hundred years ago are at the foundation of contemporary arguments favoring American school choice.

School choice is also a concept that private school administrators understand well. If a given private school’s annual tuition rate is $7,000, and students to transfer out of the institution, that school will lose $7,000 in funding for each student that leaves. The school described in this situation has a natural economic motivation to ensure that families are satisfied with the school. If the school would retain the $7,000, regardless of the performance of the school, the school has little motivation, in an economic sense, to worry about parent satisfaction.

A second concept of school choice that is often cited by modern choice advocates is the idea that tax dollars designated for education should follow students to the school of their choice, whether public or private, and not automatically to the local public institution. Political theorist and activist Thomas Paine is most famous for his 1776 work, Common Sense. Paine provided some noteworthy commentary relevant to education and choice in his later work, Rights of Man, which was published in 1791. Paine wrote, “Suppose then four hundred thousand children to be in this condition (not able to afford education), which is a greater number than ought to be supposed, after the provisions already made, the method will be, to allow for each of those children ten shillings a year for the experience of schooling each year, and half a crown a year for paper and spelling books” (Paine 1995 Page 630). Paine’s assertion that the government should pay tuition for poor families at the private school of their choice is also a primary argument of modern school choice advocates.

Since the establishment of organized American public and private schools in the early 1800s, issues have existed around the concept of the schools that parents could choose to send their children to, even when government funding was not part of the formula. In 1922 the
Oregon state legislature enacted a law that prohibited parents from sending their children to schools other than the local public school option. It was determined by the United States Supreme Court in the case *Pierce v. The Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, in 1925 that the government could not force students to attend public schools. In writing the court’s opinion, Justice McReynolds stated, “The inevitable practical result of enforcing the Act under consideration would be destruction of appellees' primary schools, and perhaps all other private primary schools for normal children within the State of Oregon. These parties are engaged in a kind of undertaking not inherently harmful, but long regarded as useful and meritorious. Certainly, there is nothing in the present records to indicate that they have failed to discharge their obligations to patrons, students or the State. And there are no peculiar circumstances or present emergencies which demand extraordinary measures relative to primary education.” (McReynolds 1925). *Pierce v. The Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* holds special importance in the history of American school choice for two reasons. First, the existence of private education was preserved and protected by the decision. Secondly, if not for the court deciding as it did, a parent’s ability to choose schools would have been in great jeopardy. Taking this case from a different angle, researchers claim that this court case has more relevance to 1st Amendment freedoms and liberty than the protected rights of private schools to exist (Arons 2012).

The modern era of choice in organized schools can be traced back to a handful of researchers who introduced the concept of choice as an alternative to traditional public school options during the middle part of the 20th Century. Economist Milton Friedman introduced the concept of a voucher system, using public funds to sponsor a student’s attendance at non-public schools in his work, *The Role of Government in Education* (Friedman 1955). Friedman went on
to support the school choice movement and established his own foundation to support choice later in his career. Friedman predicted that school choice would prompt improvements in local public schools that were now in competition as a result of the choice programs. Contemporary school choice research shows mixed results of market forces on school performance (Carpenter and Medina 2011). Friedman writes, “Governments could require a minimum level of education which they could finance by giving parents vouchers redeemable for a specified maximum sum per child per year if spent on ‘approved’ educational services” (Friedman 1955, 125).

Sociologist James Coleman submitted his classic report “Equity of Educational Opportunity” to the US Federal Government in 1966 in an effort to provide an academic perspective on equity in American schools. The report itself is not a commercial for the modern school voucher system, but it suggests that racially and economically diverse schools improved educational outcomes for traditionally disadvantaged students. This “Coleman Report,” is a foundation document for school desegregation movements, including school choice (Coleman 1966). Coleman and Friedman, among other social scientists, provided the intellectual foundations for school choice and voucher systems in the United States.

SCHOOL CHOICE JUSTIFICATION

Researchers and school choice advocates advance several key arguments. In some cases, school choice advocacy groups churn out “research” in an effort to advance their cause. In a similar tactic, advocates for traditional public school education and public school teachers’ unions engage in studies that support their cause. Many legitimate studies yield mixed and even contradictory results pertaining to the outcomes of school choice.

One of the school choice benefits scrutinized by researchers is the relationship between enrollment in secondary school choice programs and college enrollment/college degree
attainment. The Charlotte–Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina provides public school choice options, including both public magnet schools and career technical schools, for families residing in the district. The district utilizes a lottery system to determine enrollment eligibility. Deming, Hastings, Kane and Staiger (2014) examined data from 1996-2009 from the Charlotte – Mecklenburg choice program with the objective of studying correlations between first choice lottery winners who enrolled in their school of choice and college attainment. The researchers concluded that the students who were awarded their first-choice school and enrolled in the school experienced a significant overall higher rate of college attainment in comparison to all students in the district who did not fit these two criteria (Deming et al. 2014).

Educational researchers have also explored the economic benefits of choice programs in comparison to their cost. The general premise of the economic benefit argument is that improved education and higher graduation rates will provide the general economy with fewer liabilities and more assets than the status quo. McShane and Wolf (2013) created a model to study the benefit/cost analysis of the Washington DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, established by Congress in 2004. The scholarship program functions essentially as a voucher program, in which families can apply for the vouchers to attend private schools in Washington DC. McSchane and Wolf concluded that for every dollar spent on the program, the local economy benefited by $2.62 through an increase of better educated participants in the city’s economy and a reduction of citizens that rely on government subsidized social services. The researchers claim significant economic benefits to the program aside from a 12% increase in the high school graduation rate for participants in comparison to a randomized control group (McShane and Wolf 2013).
School choice researchers have also attempted to measure the effects of school choice programs on traditional public schools in terms of academic achievement. Many would argue that natural market forces created by the presence of educational choice in the market place would cause improved student achievement in traditional public schools. For example, the state of Ohio has experimented with a few forms of educational choice. Ohio offers a state-wide scholarship program that allows families to use scholarship funds to attend the public or private school of their choice. Gray (2012) examined data from 2003 to study the effects of charter schools on local Ohio public schools in terms of student achievement. He found that the competitive threat of a charter school had a positive effect on traditional public school achievement for the schools in close geographic proximity to the charter school (Gray 2012).

The achievement gap is an issue that educational researchers have wrestled with for many years, but most intensely since the publication of the Coleman Report in 1966. Many of the attempts to reduce the achievement gap between lower income minority students and middle to upper class Caucasian students since the Coleman Report could be categorized as ineffective. Some research suggests that school choice policies may reduce the gap. Jeynes (2014) studied the effects of choice programs that included private school options and their effects upon reducing the achievement gap. Utilizing national data, he found that choice programs that included a faith-based option for families reduced the achievement gap by 25% for both the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps equally in comparison to local public school options (Jeynes 2014). These findings suggest that the presence of choice in faith-based schools may increase educational achievement for American students who are members of minority groups or live in households with lower incomes.
CHALLENGES TO SCHOOL CHOICE POLICIES

One of the greatest challenges to justifying or endorsing school choice is the fact that the research literature reveals inconsistent findings. Researchers are also challenged by the fact that individual choice programs are comprised of numerous components that make it difficult to compare choice programs that may appear to be similar at face value, but are quite different in characteristics. Charter schools, for example, differ across states, regions, and schools. Rotberg observes, “Despite hundreds of studies on school choice, the general perception is that we have little research information or that the information we do have is ambiguous” (Rotberg 2014, 28). The fact that the body of research associated with school choice is not definitive creates difficulties for policy makers in making valid policy decisions based on research.

Much of the research relevant to academic achievement comparisons between traditional public school options and school choice programs suggests that choice programs do not have an academic advantage over traditional public schools (Gill et. al. 2007). In an effort to find more compelling evidence of the effectiveness of charter schools regarding academic achievement, researchers Zimmer, Gill, Booker, Witte, and Lavertu (2012) conducted a longitudinal study over seven states using uniform methodology to see if the schools produced positive effects on academic achievement for their students. The study resulted in mixed results and no advantage was consistently exhibited by the research data (Zimmer et. al. 2012).

One of the more serious challenges to the effectiveness of school choice programs is the claim that they promote segregation and re-segregation in the communities they serve. Research shows that there is a strong link between school choice programs and an increase in student segregation by race, ethnicity, and income (Rotberg 2014). Researchers have also found that school choice programs may neglect or exclude students with special needs, such as Special
Education and English as a Second Language (ESL) students, citing an inability to meet their educational needs (Arcia 2006). Excluding these students from admission promotes segregation and discrimination based on educational abilities. Special school choice programs, such as charter schools that focus on languages like Hebrew or Arabic, could attract higher enrollments for ethnic groups in communities. Studies have shown that the presence of these special schools promotes educational segregation and results in a less diversified traditional public school (Ecks 2011).

**TYPES OF SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO CATHOLIC PARENTS**

This dissertation will explore educational choices that are available to Catholic families in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. However, the literature about programs and types of schools available to Catholic parents is not confined to this geographic location. In order to better understand how parents choose schools this literature review examines information about programs and types of schools available to Catholic parents on the national level. While many of these programs are not available in the Capital Region of New York State or the geographic boundaries of the RCDA, it is important to understand the landscape of school choices.

**VOUCHERS**

School voucher programs allow families to use a publically-funded voucher to cover tuition at a school of their choice. These options could include, but are not limited to, tuition at private schools, tuition at other public schools, or homeschooling. There were 21 active school voucher programs in operation during the 2013-2014 school year, serving 115,580 students (American Federation for Children 2014).

One example of a voucher system is the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) which has served families in Milwaukee, Wisconsin since 1990. Many minority and
impoverished families of the 100,000+ students enrolled in the Milwaukee public schools felt that their public school system was failing them during the late 1980s. The achievement gap was significant and African American students were failing at alarming rates. The Milwaukee legislature responded to civic pressures by adopting the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) during the 1990-1991 school year. In the initial year, 337 students benefited from the program, each receiving a $2,500 voucher for use at a private school. In order to qualify, families needed to have an income substantially below the official poverty rate, which was $28,788 for a family of four in 1990 (Kahlenberg, Page 35). By the 2007-2008 school year the program had 18,550 students participating, which was approximately 18% of the population of school aged children in Milwaukee during that school year. During the 2015-2016 school year enrollment in the MPCP was 27,619 with 117 private schools participating at a cost of $196,400,000 to the tax payers of Milwaukee (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction 2016).

There have been privately-funded and publically-funded voucher programs. Today, publically-funded voucher programs exist in Washington D.C., Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin. While the MPCP has sustained enrollment, many states have abandoned their voucher programs. Weil explains, “Indeed, as a result of the successful passing of the MPCP legislation, initiatives supporting tuition vouchers that would allow parents to spend public money on private and parochial schools mushroomed nationally over the next three years and were supported in more than thirty states. It is clear, however, that although proponents of private vouchers initiatives depicted the movement as a grassroots, parent-led expression of democratic activism, the initiatives have not proven popular enough to succeed” (Weil 2002, 61).
CHARTER SCHOOLS

The modern era of American public charter school education developed in a similar time frame to that of school vouchers. Minnesota became the first state to enact a charter school law in 1991 and the first charter school opened there in 1992. Approximately 2.6 million students attended charter schools in the United States during the 2013-2014 school year (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools 2014). According to Davis (2013): “The market model of education is built on two primary premises: first, allowing families to choose schools rather than subjecting them to a strictly enforced school assignment plan will create a variety of schools that will better meet the needs and wants of families and second, choice will generate competition among schools that will maximize student achievement” (Davis 2013, 2). While school vouchers tend to provide the option of tuition dollars to families, charter schools provide an alternative public school setting with fewer to no ties to the local public school district. Charter school laws currently existed in 42 states and the District of Columbia. Nearly three million students are educated in 6,700 charter schools nationally (National Alliance for Public Charter School Education 2014).

One example of a unique charter school initiative is in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. In the years leading up to, and during the reconstruction of the city after Hurricane Katrina, the expansion of charter school education experienced growth at an unprecedented rate. Eighty percent of public school students attended charter schools in New Orleans during the 2012-2013 school year and only 37% of those students attended schools in their own neighborhoods (Zimmerman and Vaughan 2013). The conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year coincided with the closure of the remaining traditional public schools in New Orleans. New Orleans is now an all charter school district, the only district in the country that can make such a
claim. While proponents of charter schools cite the district as a progressive model of education, many are critical of the implications associated with such a system. A recent article in the *Washington Post* states that, “The creation of the country’s first all-charter school system has improved education for many children in New Orleans, but it also has severed ties to a community institution, the neighborhood school, and amplified concerns about racial equality and loss of parental control” (Layton 2014).

**HOMESCHOOLING**

Although homeschooling has been going on worldwide for centuries, it became a more prominent option for American parents in the 1980s. The number of students being homeschooled has grown from 1,096,000 in 2003 to 1,520,000 in 2007 and 1,773,000 in 2012 (National Center for Educational Statistics 2015). Of the options relevant to family choice discussed in this literature review, homeschooling is the least regulated choice, which draws both praise and criticism from the educational community. It is certainly the choice model that empowers parental control of education to the greatest extent. In 2002, Conley described the typical demographic makeup of the family that chooses homeschooling, “The profile of homeschooling parents identifies them as predominantly white, religious, and members of two-parent households. As a rule, such parents are not wealthier than the norm, but they do tend to have more years of education” (Conley 2002, 48).

The academic literature on homeschooling highlights curriculum, regulations, bureaucracy, and oversight as key issues. Proponents of home schooling feel that the potential diversity of curricula and flexibility of instructional practices benefits students and society (Anthony 2013). Opponents often cite concerns about curriculum standards in homeschooling including possible influence (Shives 2008). Parents who home school their children in Missouri
for example, are not subjected to visits from officials to oversee the educational program that is implemented, are not required to supply documentation of progress, and do not have to report that they are homeschooling their children (Barnette 2013).

Homeschooling families now have a wider variety of networks and forms of homeschooling in comparison to options of the 1980s. However, some critics claim that students that spend the preponderance of their time with their family members suffer from poor socialization skills, and have difficulty dealing with people outside of the bounds of their immediate family. Shyers (1992) analyzed the results of trained observers studying the socialization behaviors of two groups of 70 children ages eight to ten. The first group was students from traditional public or private schools and the second group of students was educated in home school settings. He concluded that the homeschooled students experienced fewer problem behaviors than the students from the more traditional school settings (Shyers 1992).

**MAGNET SCHOOLS**

Public magnet schools are tuition-free schools of choice that are typically funded by a public school district or groups of school districts for use by their resident students. Aside from creating an option of a specialized school for parents, magnet schools were also utilized during the 1970s as a tool to desegregate schools. Some researchers claim that public magnet schools were created to promote racial diversity, improve standards, and provide diversified programs to satisfy individual talents and interests (Goldring and Smrekar 2002). Regardless of a magnet school’s theme or focus, such schools allow public districts to deviate from the practice of using a student’s home address as the factor for determining school placement.

Are magnet schools more diverse than traditional public schools? Studies have been conducted to explore racial diversity in magnet schools compared to traditional public schools.
Davis (2014) utilized data from the 8th grade portion of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study to study racial segregation and public magnet schools. She found that the racial composition of magnet schools was not very different than that of the traditional public schools, magnet schools were more heterogeneous at the classroom level, and that honors classes in public magnet schools were significantly more diverse, but only in the case of white and Hispanic racial composition (Davis 2014).

Do magnet schools lead to greater satisfaction among parents than traditional public schools? Researchers have engaged in studies regarding parent decision making in magnet schools and family satisfaction with the school. Hausman and Goldring (2000) studied the relationship between the reasons for parents selecting a public magnet school and their level of satisfaction, involvement, and influence in the school. They found that parents choose the schools for a wide variety of reasons and were mostly satisfied with their chosen school. Furthermore, they discovered a correlation between the reasons for choice and level of satisfaction, involvement, and influence. Lastly, they found that parents who choose for the teaching of values, as compared to other reasons, are most likely to be involved and satisfied (Hausman and Goldring 2000).

Some researchers have challenged the concept that specialized magnet schools should have the ability to attract and admit students with special talents in certain areas and exclude students who do not possess the desired talents. The process of selective admission practices may lead to better performance of a school, but some question the use of public funds to support public educational institutions that intentionally exclude lower performing students. Vopat (2011), citing research that indicates that student talent is not simply innate, but a result of opportunity, encouragement, and deliberate practice, argues that this process is fundamentally
unfair and that the use of public funding to promote such exclusive programs is not appropriate (Vopat 2011). The concepts of exclusion, exclusivity, and selective admission are some of the characteristics of non-public schools. When some of these admissions practices are applied to schools that are primarily supported by tax dollars and municipal voucher systems, citizens may take exception to the process. An example of this practice is the admissions procedures of the Bronx High School of Science, which utilizes a competitive placement exam which determines who gets in and who is excluded from the public magnet school. The school is considered by many to be one of the best schools in New York City, yet only talented and gifted students have access to this public magnet school.

**TAX CREDITS**

Educational tax credit programs are currently administered at the state level, and 14 such programs are in operation to date in the United States (National Council of State Legislatures 2014). Proposals for such a program in New York State have not been successful. Although tax credit programs differ from state to state, the general structure of the programs rely on corporations or individual citizens to make voluntary donations or direct a portion of their state tax liability to statewide scholarship programs. These scholarships are typically used to pay private school tuition or out of district public school tuition. In many states, donors receive a dollar for dollar credit toward their state income tax obligation for making the donations. Research suggests that private school tuition rates influence family choice decisions in regarding to private schools (Meyer 2007). Thus, availability of tax credits could influence parent decision making regarding private education. States like New York have experienced lobbying pressure both for and against educational tax credit programs. Advocates are often school choice
proponents and private school community members, while the opposition typically includes those that support traditional public schools.

**CHALLENGES TO CHOICE AND CHOICE PROGRAMS**

A perceived implication of some school choice programs is the idea that government regulations and accountability will follow the implementation of these programs. This is the case when largely unregulated private schools participate in choice programs which allow them to receive public funding. Two examples of these implications are the public reporting of standardized exam results to state officials and assurances that a separation exists between church and state. Coulson (2011) studied the relationship between voucher and educational tax credit programs and regulations on private schools. He concluded that voucher programs demonstrated a statistically significant regulatory burden on participating private schools while private schools that participated in educational tax credit programs did not (Coulson 2011).

Similar to most of the other school choice options, most educational tax credit programs target low income individuals as scholarship recipients. Sugarman (2014) claimed that low income families should be given preferential treatment in regards to the scholarships. He asserts that the low-income families are more likely to attend poorly performing public schools and less likely than wealthy families to have the resources to relocate to an area with better performing educational options (Sugarman 2014). This is a common theme in work by school choice analysts and advocates.

The fact that many educational tax programs support tuition costs at religious schools calls into the question the US Constitution’s Establishment Clause and state constitutions’ Establishment Clauses. The US Supreme Court found that the school voucher program in Cleveland did not compromise these clauses in the case Zelman v. Simmons-Harris (2002)
(Russo and Mawdsley 2003). This case set a precedent for the legality and legitimacy of state support for choice in education. Despite the findings of this case, some feel it is inappropriate for public funds to support attendance at schools that are rooted in religious traditions. While the Zelman case allows for these programs to exist, some state constitutions and legislation prohibit school choice programs.

**RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY**

Research has indicated that substantial and systematic regularities exist in how people make decisions (Holyoak 2005). Rational Choice Theory (RCT) focuses on self-interest and the costs and benefits of choices that individuals or groups of individuals make. RCT can be summarized by concluding that we make decisions by determining how likely something is to happen, judging the value of the outcome, and then multiplying the two. The option with the greatest product is the option that will most likely give us what we want (Edwards 1955). RCT is categorized as meshing of both economic theory guided research and sociological studies that rely heavily on the collection and analysis of empirical data (Coleman 1992).

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) is rooted in the assumption that human beings utilize reason to make economic choices that will work to their benefit. When studying choice in schools, we might assume that parents engage in an analysis of school factors that lead to a choice about the best school for the educational needs of their family and children. According to Coleman, RCT “takes as its central core the idea that persons act rationally to satisfy preferences, or to maximize utility” (Coleman 1994, 166). This theory has been applied to different disciplines and sciences when analyzing factors that contribute to decision making. RCT could be looked upon as an economic approach to both political science and sociology.
When applying RCT to the question of choosing schools, the complexity of family decision making must be acknowledged because the process of choosing schools is the result of more than a sterile measurement of benefits. According to Eriksson, “Instead of studying patterns between inputs and outputs in an inductive way, RCT relied on deduction from assumptions about agents’ motives, beliefs, and incentives to conclusions about the rational course of action” (Eriksson 2011, 3). Thus, the parent decision maker’s experiences in life and personal beliefs are likely considered when applying RCT to school choice. According to Boudon (2009) the basic principles underlying rational choice theory can be summarized by three statements, “(1) explaining a social phenomenon means making it the consequence of a set of statements which should all be easily acceptable; (2) a good sociological theory is a theory that interprets social phenomenon as the outcome of individual actions; and (3) actions should be analyzed as rational” (Boudon 2009, 179). As I apply Boudon’s claims to my study, I will provide analysis from three perspectives. First, I am attempting to align factors associated with decision making with different types of parents and different types of schools. The results of the inquiry should be a series of statements that can serve as an explanation for the different social phenomenon associated with choosing schools. Second, my study examines individual decisions. Lastly, I will work under the assumption that the decision-making process is rational.

A key to the success of RCT applications is the assumption of “rational agents.” Rational agents are people who use logic to guide their decisions. People act in ways they think are rational and in their self-interest. According Cummins (2012), “To an economist, rational agents are first and foremost self-interested – that is, they compare choices and select those that maximize their own benefits and minimize their own costs” (Cummins 2012, 34). It is important
to understand that cost can be interpreted in different ways when studying choices than just financial implications.

An understanding of the concepts of preferences is also important, such as money, time, and opportunity costs. Hausman (2012) claims that an agent’s preferences can be categorized into one of four categories. First, preferences can be categorized as enjoyment comparisons. This means that the agent might prefer chocolate chip cookies over oatmeal cookies simply because the chocolate chip cookies give that agent more enjoyment. Second, preferences can be based on comparative evaluations. This would indicate that one of the options is superior to the other based on some data. A consumer wishing to purchase a new automobile might consider referencing the magazine *Consumer Reports* to learn about the scientific studies that determined one product superior to the other. Third, preferences can be developed through favoring or showing favor. This indicates that the decision maker might isolate a single characteristic to favor one option over the other, which does not necessarily indicate that one is better than the other. Lastly, preferences can be determined based on choice rankings. A person might prefer corn over carrots not because of the superior nature of corn, but because the agent must decide and there are only two known options, corn and carrots (Hausman 2012). These concepts of preference can be applied to the school choice process among parents.

In order for RCT to be useful in application and empirical analysis, two assumptions must be met. The first assumption is that the agent is acting as a rational person. The second assumption is that a utility function is present and the choice will maximize the agent’s interests (Graziano 2013). Decisions that do not expand upon the agents’ interests or the utility of the chosen path do not fit into the model.
An important issue to consider when using RCT is the concept of constraints. Gilboa (2010) has utilized the term constrained optimization to describe a model of RCT and the maximization of utility in decision making while taking constraints into account when making the decision (Gilboa 2010). Gilboa claims that rational agents work through stages in the formulation of a problem. First, the decision maker will identify the variables that are under their control. In this study, the decision maker may identify all the school options available to their family. Secondly, the decision maker will identify the constraints presented by the scenario being considered. The constraints when choosing schools could be, but are not limited to, resources, appropriateness of school, needs of the student, and geography. Lastly, the agent may specify the objective, or stated differently, which utility function should be maximized. In our scenario, a family might state their objective as selecting the school which gives their child the best chance to get into a good college. Many constraints are placed upon students and families when making decisions relevant to education. In the arena of contemporary Catholic education, the cost of tuition could be considered when looking at constraints on decision making. The National Catholic Educational Association reported a national mean elementary school tuition of $3,880, and a secondary school tuition of $9,622 during the 2013-2014 school year (McDonald 2014).

Much of the literature on RCT points toward the agent’s preferences and the relationship of these preferences with the decision or choice. In applying RCT to educational choices, these preferences could include, but are not limited to: strength of academic program, geographic location, religious affiliation of school, safety, tradition, athletics, or size of the school. A criticism of RCT is that the model considers the agent’s preferences, and does not account for how the agent developed those preferences (Dietrich and List 2013). For example, two sets of
parents could have the identical educational preference of safety. One set of parents might have
developed that preference through personal experiences of bullying while they attended school
themselves while the other parents might live in an area that is perceived as unsafe. While the
preference is the same, the reasons for the preference are quite different.

A second criticism of RCT is that agents often act in unpredictable and seemingly
irrational ways when making decisions. As stated earlier, a critical assumption made when
applying RCT is that the agent is working rationally. They are influenced by institutions,
cultural influences, and psychological limitations that make the assumption of rational unlikely
(Quackenbush 2004). The limitations of RCT are generally centered around the assumption that
agents’ decisions are influenced by factors other than their self-interest or the utility of the option
selected. These outside influences can be a determining factor in whether a decision can be
classified as rational or irrational. According to Ericksson (2011) five general criticisms of RCT
exist, two of which include influences from institutions and culture (Ecksson 2011). While RCT
theorists claim that the economic model works well with social science framework many
concede to the imperfection of the model (Lichbach 2006). It is problematic when one begins to
label decisions as rational or irrational based on personal opinions or experiences. Many would
consider selecting a school based on liking the school colors as irrational while others would
consider that factor to be important. Eriksson describes the state of being instrumentally rational
as, “having consistent preferences and maximizing expected utility” (Eriksson 2011). Using this
line of reasoning, it is rational to select a school based on school colors if Eriksson’s two
conditions are in place. Jonge emphasizes the point that rational choices should be based on a
rational ordering of preferences, but in practice, is based on a consistent ordering of preferences
(Jonge 2012). Gilboa (2010) claims that “behavior is rational for a given person if this person
feels comfortable with it, and is not embarrassed by it, even when it is analyzed for him” (Gilboa 2010, 5).

While advocates and critics of RCT struggle with defining rationality and accounting for influences, it is difficult to argue the point that the economic model has influenced all the social sciences in some capacity. RCT is certainly applicable in a study of education choices relevant to Catholic school education in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. I will apply this social science theory to my study of variables that drive families to either choose or not choose Catholic schools.

**HOW PARENTS CHOOSE SCHOOLS**

I will now transition from the wider concept of choice in schools to specific ways in which parents choose schools. Despite a broad literature on school choice, there is relatively limited analysis and research of how parents choose schools. In the concluding section of this literature review I provide analysis on how parents obtain information about schools.

A parent who exercises choice because of access to public school choice programs might have very different reasons for choosing a school than a parent deciding to send their child or children to a Catholic school and paying tuition. One might assume that the academic performance of the school of choice is paramount in parent preferences. While this has been the case in several studies, (Armor and Peiser 1997, Fisk and Ladd 2000, Gauri 1998, Glatter, Woods, and Bagley 1997), the literature also brings to the surface other factors and school characteristics that supersede academics when families choose schools. Villavicencio (2013) found that charter school parents do not necessarily choose higher performing schools and do not necessarily leave lower performing charter schools. This finding calls into question whether parents can make optimal educational decisions in the choice process and if they are making
informed decisions with quality data. Villavicencio also found that parent choice sets vary depending on networks and social capital (Villavicencio 2013). A study of the Florida McKay choice program indicates parents emphasize teacher quality, academic quality, special education services, curriculum and class size (Weidner and Harrington 2006). Additionally, a 1998 study of the Indianapolis school voucher program concluded that parents based their choice on academic performance, financial aid, religious values, and school safety (Weinschrott and Kilgore 1998). Clearly more factors and variables are at play aside from academic quality. The research suggests that parents consider factors beyond academic quality of a given school.

It can be difficult to measure and compare choice programs because of diverse types of choice that is available. Voucher programs in Milwaukee may look very different than voucher programs elsewhere. Furthermore, the reasons parents cite in taking advantage of the programs may be significantly different from program to program. Fung (2011) conducted a study of parent choice in relation to a pre-primary school voucher scheme (system) which has been in place since 2007 in Hong Kong. Fung surveyed 800 Chinese parents from three levels of Kindergarten to determine their considerations while choosing a school for their child or children. The parents were asked to rank 24 school characteristics and complete a 4 point Likert scale for each of the items. Fung concluded that the three levels of Kindergarten parents he surveyed and interviewed selected teaching methodology and strategies, program offerings, link with parents, and quality review/reporting as the four greatest influences on their decision making (Fung 2011). The groupings of characteristics selected as lower priorities included, physical characteristics of school, school administration, school background, finance and charges, and school academic performance.
The literature relevant to factors in choosing schools can be divided into two sub-categories, characteristics of the school and the characteristics of families making the choices. I will first consider ideas relevant to the characteristics of schools and how they affect school choice. Yaacob, Osman, and Bachok (2014) studied the factors influencing parents from Malaysia in choosing a private school for their child or children. The researchers identified eight factors that influence the decision. These factors were distance from home, teacher quality, location of school, school performances, school environment/facilities, school syllabus, and the income level or social background/status of families with children in the school. The survey responses indicated that the parents claimed that, in the order of preference, school syllabus, school environment/facilities, school performances, and teacher quality were the factors that most influenced their decision to select a private school (Yaacob, Osman, and Bachok 2014). In this study, parents appear to be more concerned with the quality of the academic program over the status of the families enrolling their children at the school.

School climate may also influence parents’ decision making. Positive school climate is a characteristic that can be interpreted in many ways. In schools that struggle in this area, improvements in this area could be a reduction in fist fights over a certain period. In schools that thrive in this area, improvements could be an increase in programs that encourage students to treat each other in kind and just ways. Dronkers and Robert (2008) investigated explanations for differences in academic achievement for students with similar demographic characteristics from public and private schools in 22 countries. With controls in place, they concluded that the advantage private school students gained over their public school counterparts could be attributed to a more positive school climate in their schools (Dronkers and Robert 2008). While the research affirms the importance of a positive school environment for student performance, it
also enforces the importance of parents’ perception of this school characteristic in the formula of parents choosing schools.

Parents may also consider single sex or co-educational schools as important school characteristics when choosing schools. Historically, single sex schools have been predominantly found in the private sector. However, publicly funded choice programs now offer a single sex option. Two single sex charter high schools exist in the catch area of this research study. Albany Leadership Charter High School for girls and Green Tech High Charter School for boys were both established to give parents who reside in the city of Albany a single sex charter school option for their children. Of the seven Catholic high schools in our dioceses, three are single sex schools, including the Academy of the Holy Names, Christian Brothers Academy, and LaSalle Institute. Does the school characteristic of being single sex cause parents to select these schools, or are other variables influencing their decisions? Jackson and Bisset (2005) explored gender and school choice in independent schools in their study of three types of schools. They reached out to parents in a single sex girl’s school, a single sex boy’s school, and a co-educational school. They found that the academic reputation of the independent school and the performance on standardized exams trumped other influences on parent decisions (Jackson and Bisset 2005). The results were consistent across the different types of schools involved in the survey. Although it will not be pursued in this study, it would be interesting to see where parents selecting the Albany single sex charter schools or one of the three single sex Catholic schools would place the single sex characteristic on their list of priorities in selecting the school.

The literature on school choice suggests that family characteristics influence decisions as much as school characteristics. This idea is most clearly illustrated in a family possessing the financial resources to pay tuition at a private school. However, that is not the only family
characteristic that influences choice. Rehman, Khan, Triq, and Tasleem studied factors that affect school choice in regards to private schools in the District Peshawar, Pakistan in 2010. They concluded that family size, parents’ level of education, and family income were the most significant influences on private school choice (Rehman, et. al. 2010). Race is also a family characteristic that could assist in determining private school attendance. Fairlie (2006) examined the racial and ethnic patterns of private school attendance. He concluded that a high level of racial sorting occurred between the private and public sector. His study included students at the 8th and 10th grade levels and he found that African-American and Hispanic students were substantially less likely to attend private schools than are Caucasian students. He also concluded that lower rates of family income contribute to lower attendance rates of African-American and Hispanic students (Fairlie 2006). Race can be used as an explanation for demographic anomalies in the survey results. Some parents choose private schools for religious reasons. This characteristic is not unique to Catholic schools as many Protestant and Hebrew schools also exist in the RCDA. Van Pelt, Alison, and Alison (2007) studied who made decisions in households regarding private education in Ontario and what factors they took into consideration while making the decision. They concluded that parents who select religious schools are concerned with morals, values, religion, family and character development (Van Pelt et. al. 2007). Clearly in a rational choice framework, utility functions exist aside from academic achievement.

The distance between a family’s home and their school of choice can also influence parent decisions regarding which school they send their child or children to. This factor will be analyzed in this study and should provide valuable data regarding some of the non-public school options in this region. Goldring and Rowley concluded that distance between school and home is a significant factor for most parents (Goldring and Rowley 2008). However, Bernal (2005)
has concluded that middle and upper-class families of means will consider which school performs better academically and will consider distance as a less important factor in their decision (Bernal 2005). One could infer from this data that those with financial resources available to them may be willing to devote these resources to transportation in a trade-off for better academics. Schneider (1993) found that many parents exercised their school choice when they decided where to live. She claimed that parents, especially those with lower incomes, experience severe constraints on school choice based on geography and resources. She also found that among those whose family incomes were below $12,500, only 2.1% mentioned private schools as a possible choice for their child’s education (Schneider 1993). The U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics’ calculates that $12,500 in 1993 would be worth $20,781.66 in 2016 (U.S. Department of Labor 2016).

Some parents choose private schools simply because of dissatisfaction with the local public school option that is available to them, and not an expressed desire to have an association with a private school. Drawing from my own experiences as a private school administrator, I have observed that many transfer students, particularly those that come in the middle of the school year, are not motivated by an interest in private school education. Rather, they come to our private school because of a bad experience at their current school and are looking for an alternative. Bukhari and Randall (2009) studied reasons why parents decided to exit public schools that their children were already enrolled in and enter private schools as transfer students. They found, in order of significance, that parents left the public sector because of the quality of curriculum or the lack thereof, religious values, moral values, quality of instruction, class size, school climate, and disciplined environment (Bukhari and Randall 2009).
Much of the research devoted to school choice programs focuses on differences between the local public school option and options available to families in close geographic relationship to that school. However, many families engage in choices between schools that do not include the local public school option. Goldring and Rowley (2006) explored choice in relation to public magnet schools and private schools. Intentionally excluding traditional public schools, these researchers desired a comparison between public school choice options and private school choice options. Goldring and Rowley’s work provides three significant findings for this literature review. First, in the absence of structured financing for private school choice, tuition at private schools is a significant variable in parent decision making. The researchers found a strong correlation between family income and attendance at a private school where tuition payments from families were expected. They found less of a correlation with established voucher systems or subsidies to support the financing of private school tuition. Second, from the sample used for the study, they found that most of the study’s participants did not leave traditional public schools due to dissatisfaction. On the contrary, they were pulled into the private or public schools because of the desirable characteristics of those schools. Lastly, Goldring and Rowley found a strong correlation between parent involvement and enrollment in private schools. The researchers defined parent involvement as communication with their children about schools as well as communication and participation at the school (Goldring and Rowley 2008).

When studying school choice, it is important to investigate why parents choose non-public schools, which require tuition, over a free local public school option. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, 6,875 students bypassed the free public school option to attend Catholic schools in the RCDA during the 2013-2014 school year (Pizzigrillo 2013). West (2001) conducted a survey to investigate why 4,614 students in Providence, R.I. attended private
schools instead of the local public school option in October 2001. West concluded that the most significant influences in parent decisions were teacher quality, personal attention students receive in private schools, safety, academic reputation, and school’s responsiveness to parents and students (West 2001). The strong response to the “personal attention” option clearly indicated the importance of this characteristic to these private school parents in Providence.

When discussing how parents choose, it is important to identify how rational choices when considering educational options. Many of us would prescribe a well thought out process in which family priorities were defined, followed by an analysis and decision. Schneider, Teske, and Marchall (2000) claim that parents should have an outlined plan that would lead to a rational choice once they have completed the steps. Their recommended steps for parents include having a set of preferences predetermined about education and schooling prior to searching, gathering information about the schools available to their children, executing trade-offs between the attributes of these schools, then select the school that best fits their preferences. Once the choice is made, the social scientists suggest that parents should monitor the performance of the school and seek a different school if they selected poorly (Schneider et al 2000). This process is simplified and does not address the many variables and contexts that influenced how these decisions are made. Aside from not addressing the variables, many parents are not willing or able to engage in a process as outlined by the social scientists.

When parents choose a school for their child they will likely bring their own life experiences and personal beliefs into the equation as important variables in making the decision. These experiences and beliefs may cause parents to prioritize the characteristics of the schools they are considering. A parent who has experienced violence abuse in their own lifetime may prefer a school that places a great emphasis on security and anti-bullying programs. If this is
true, decisions that families make about schools are as unique as the experiences and beliefs that families hold as their own. Schneider, Marschall, and Teske (2000) have conducted the most significant work associated with how parents select schools. A significant portion of the study was devoted to how school characteristics influence parents’ decisions and how parents prioritize those characteristics. The researchers identified eleven characteristics of schools for the purposes of the study which included: teacher quality, high test scores, class size, special programs, discipline, values, same race, economic background, diversity, location, and safety. The parents were asked to identify which of these characteristics were most important and influential on their educational decision. Teacher quality was selected as the most important attribute, with 39% of the parents from the sample selecting it as the most important attribute. The second, which could be categorized as a product of the school’s education programs, is high scores on standardized examinations (Schneider et al 2000). The fact that the two characteristics selected by the participants at the highest percentages are academic in nature tells us that the quality of the education program is a very high priority for parents when selecting schools. The least important characteristics to the study’s participants was the racial and economic background of the students and families that were enrolled at the school. This finding could be the result of a social desirability bias or respondents’ reluctance to admit that they consider race even if they do. The overall results were as follows (highest percentage to lowest) teacher quality, high test scores, safety, values, discipline, class size, special programs, diversity, location, economic background, and same race (Schneider et al 2000). The researchers claimed that, “This pattern shows that overall, most parents believe academic conditions are the most important attributes of schools” (Schneider et al. 2000, 95).
Schneider et al (2000) also explored whether a parent’s level of education influenced how they choose schools. Schneider and his colleagues compared responses from parents who have any college education and those who do not. They found that those with higher levels of education rated academic characteristics, such as teacher quality, much higher than parents with no college. Parents with no college emphasized safety and discipline consistently over academic characteristics. Parents with college education also selected, at more than double the rate, values than parents with no college education (Schneider et al 2000).

The study also explored whether a parent’s race influenced how they choose schools. The researchers reported on the four largest racial groups from the sample, White, Hispanic, Black, and Asian. They found that White respondents rated teacher quality and values high, but high test scores lower than the other three groups. Black respondents reported high test scores at a greater percentage than other groups. Black and Hispanic parents reported safety and discipline at higher percentages than White or Asian respondents. Black and Asian parents selected high test scores at higher percentages than White and Hispanic parents (Schneider et al 2000).

Do private school parents choose differently than public school parents? The US Department of Education conducted the School Finance Project in 1983 and a portion of the study explored how parents choose schools. The researchers concluded that private school students mentioned academic quality, values or religious instruction, and discipline as the three primary characteristics that influenced their decision to select a private school. Public school parents mentioned school assigned to, transportation, and academic quality as the three factors that influenced their decision most significantly (US Department of Education 1983). Schneider, Teske, and Marschall also explored differences between private and public school parents’
reasons for choosing the schools in which they enrolled their children. They found that values are very important to private school parents as evidenced by the fact that they selected values at three times the rate of public school students. Private school parents also are more likely to mention special programs and school diversity as important in their decision. Lastly, public school parents are significantly more likely to mention safety as an important school characteristic that influenced their decision (Schneider et al 2000).

The researchers also explored if parents who reside in urban and suburban areas choose schools for different reasons. Schneider, Teske, and Marschall utilized school districts in New York City and suburban areas in New Jersey for their study on choosing schools. The parents who resided in New York City were far more likely to mention safety and discipline as characteristics considered when choosing schools. The New Jersey suburban parents were more likely to emphasize teacher quality and values while choosing schools. New York City parents were also more likely to emphasize test scores as important characteristics (Schneider et al 2000).

The last category of Schneider, Teske, and Marschall’s work that relevant to this dissertation is analysis on differences between choosers (public and private) and parents who do not have funded choice as an option. The researchers only identified marginal differences in the ranking of the selected characteristics for the study with the exception of two areas. The parents who do not have public school choice available to them were more likely to emphasize safety. In contrast, parents who have public school choice available to them tended to emphasize values and diversity (Schneider et al 2000).
CHOOSING CAHOLIC SCHOOLS

In terms of school choice and Catholic schools, much of the literature addresses choice programs that include funding sources for enrollment in Catholic schools. In this section I will consider questions more aligned with family and parent decision making relevant to Catholic schools in particular.

What effects does public school choice have on decisions about private and Catholic schools? Schneider Teske and Marschall (2000) found that parents are less likely to opt for private or Catholic schools when the district has a public school choice option available to parents, such as charter or magnet schools. The authors suggest that public school choice programs have reduced gaps in performance that could otherwise be bridged with a private school option. The researchers have also found that school choice programs have created public schools with better defined missions and more visible communities (Schneider et al 2000).

Schneider has concluded that fewer and few public school families are considering private or Catholic high school for their secondary school needs: “Few public school students and their parents consider a private high school as a possibility than consider alternative public high schools” (Schneider 1993, 161). Schneider (1993) reports that while 20% of public school parents consider two or more public schools as possibilities, less than 5% mention a private school as a possibility (Schneider 1993). Data does not appear to be available on parents leaving private schools due to public choice options available to parents. However, private school enrollments are lower in districts where choice is available based on an analysis of enrollment data (Schneider et al 2000).

While many may speculate on the reasons for a decline in Catholic school enrollment, few have attempted to measure the attitudes of parent decision makers. Youniss and Convey
(2000) provide “parent attitudes” as reasons for national declines over the past several decades in Catholic schools. They claim that, “Other reasons have to do with changes in the perceptions of Catholic parents during this period concerning the value, utility, and necessity of Catholic schooling for their children. These changes may be seen in terms of the post-World War II generation of Catholic parents joining the American economic and cultural mainstream. The putative consequences of this shift were that parents no longer wanted to segregate their children in parochial schools to keep them away from “modern” influences. Also, it is possible that parents came to see Catholic schools as academically inferior to public schools and therefore harmful to the career prospects of their children” (Youniss and Convey 2000, 18-19). Catholic parents of the 1960s likely had a different “attitudes” toward Catholic education than that of Catholic parents in 2016 because fewer options were available to the parents of the 1960s.

In some instances, the characteristics of the individual Catholic school are key factors in parents selecting the school or looking elsewhere. Kennedy, Mulholland and Dorman (2011) conducted a study for the Queensland Catholic Schools to explore factors influencing access to Catholic schools. They found that all families, regardless of income, had high expectations for Catholic schools in terms of care and concern for students and management of relationships. Much like the Schneider, Teske, and Marschall findings, teacher quality was the most highly valued of the characteristics scrutinized. They found that affordability did change priority positions as incomes changed, but it was cited across all income groups as important. They concluded that Catholic school parents placed great value on teacher quality, school-based relationships, and religion as reasons for choosing Catholic schools (Kennedy, Mulhoulland, and Dorman 2011).
The characteristics and demographic makeup of families that select Catholic schools today are very different than during the pinnacle of Catholic school enrollment in the 1960s and 1970s. In comparing today’s Catholic school family to that of the 1970s, today’s family is, “less likely to be Catholic (or even religious at all), is significantly more likely to be wealthy, is more likely to be non-white, and is more likely to pay a considerable tuition. These changes are occurring against the backdrop of a steadily shrinking proportion of Catholic families using Catholic schools to educate their children” (Baker and Riordan 1998, 18). While Baker and Riordan’s findings are consistent with national trends, their study does not address why Catholic parents are unwilling to enroll their children in Catholic schools.

Some analysts may argue that Catholic schools have not been aggressive enough in engaging choice programs in the states that provide public funding to parents who select a private or parochial school for their children. While voucher and tax credit programs are not available in NYS, they are present in 21 and 14 states respectively. Schoenig (2013) estimates that approximately 460,000 “empty seats” in Catholic schools nationwide could benefit from these publicly funded programs. While Schoenig accurately points out that embracing these programs could build enrollment in Catholic schools, he does not address the implications of religious schools accepting public funding to support tuition costs of families attending these schools (Schoenig 2013).

As tuition continues to increase and create a barrier to Catholic education for families, some Catholic school advocates are trying to creatively find ways to help families. Researchers have found that characteristics of schools, like geographic location of the school, are far less important to parents than tuition (Schneider 1993). Tuition costs consistently appear in the literature as a characteristic that influences choices and causes enrollment shifts toward those
that can pay. Noted Catholic school researcher Fr. Andrew Greeley provides suggestions to address this barrier, “The problem can be addressed by more comprehensive scholarship programs, either within a given school itself or in a diocesan program of scholarships” (Greeley 1998, 25). Tuition costs of contemporary Catholic education, particularly at the secondary school level, consistently surface in the literate as influential on parent decision making.

The National Center for Educational Statistics published the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, which reported that the percentage of students in Catholic secondary schools from the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status has shifted from 12.3% in 1972 to 15.2% in 1980, and then plummeted to 5.5% in 1992. Conversely, students from the highest quartile of socioeconomic status has increased from 29.7% in 1972 to 35.5% in 1980 and 45.8% in 1992 (National Center for Educational Statistics 2002). This data suggests that Catholic schools moved in a direction of serving wealthiest consumers in the market between 1972 and 1992 (Huber 2007). This trend is even more evident at the secondary level, with a very small representation of students who live in poverty represented in Catholic high schools. Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) explain, “The underrepresentation of the very poor in Catholic schools is more manifest at the secondary level. For elementary schools, the social class composition of the two sectors is more similar. A primary explanation for this phenomenon is the higher tuition rates for secondary schools” (Bryk et al 1993, 71).

Some leaders and others in the Catholic community are concerned that fewer parents are citing faith formation as a primary reason for selecting Catholic schools. This concern is significant for those involved in parish and Catholic school leadership. Catholic school researchers Frabutt, Holter, Nuzzi, Rocha, and Cassel (2010) analyzed Catholic pastors’ views of parents and the parental role in Catholic schools. While much of the study related to parents’
roles in Catholic schools after they made their decision, one area of concern noted by pastors is relevant to this study. Pastors are concerned that parents are no longer choosing Catholic schools for religious education. The researchers claim that, “Parents no longer see the importance of Catholic education, choosing to advocate for academic, athletic, or performing arts instead” (Frabutt et al 2010, 40).

Some parents select Catholic schools for a sense of community and membership. While this characteristic is perhaps more difficult to calibrate in comparison to test scores or safety, it is a characteristic that parents consider. Bauch (1987) observes: “Within this membership group, families interact beyond school events to include church and other community activities. Such interactions provide connections that bind the child and the parents to the school as well as to the larger religious community. These connections are found in the sharing of common religious values and social exchanges that occur as a part of religious worship” (Bauch 1987, 8).

**HOW PARENTS OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOLS**

When parents make decisions regarding any area of their child’s life they likely gather information prior to reaching any conclusions. As discussed earlier in this chapter, information regarding schools should be closely scrutinized because of the politics of school choice. Schneider, Teske, and Marschall (2000) identified sources of information that parents considered while selecting schools as newsletters from the school or district, friends, the mass media such as TV, teachers, staff, coworkers, children, other parents, community centers, and politicians (Schneider et al 2000). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will utilize three categories of sources including information provided by the school or district, information from sources other than the school, and social networks. These categories will serve as the focus of both the research questions and survey questions for this dissertation.
While the literature offers evidence that parents consider various factors when deciding on a school, parents may rely on their own social networks, such as the advice of teachers and other school parents more than on any analysis of data (Benson, Bridge, and Wilson 2015). In New York State, the state education department publishes annual “Report Cards” for each public school district in the state. This electronic resource provides parents with information about school enrollments, results of standardized exams, attendance, and suspensions. The NYS Report Cards provide parents with comprehensive information in a nonbiased form. While other sources of information can be sought out by parents, the NYS District Report Card is an objective set of data that could be used for the purposes of comparisons of schools and organizational assessment. This data is readily accessible to citizens but it is unknown whether parents utilize the information in making decisions or possess the skill set to understand the statistics in the manner that it is presented.

When attempting to determine whether different types of parents sought information from different sources or at different quantities one factor appeared to remain consistent in the research literature. In cases where parents’ social networks provided information that could be categorized as useful and from a good source from their perspective, parents sought less additional information. Evidence also indicates that the quality of parents’ sources of information vary depending on networks and social capital. (Villavicencio 2013). Based on this information, I might assume that parents who are surrounded by social networks with high social capital and education are less likely to seek less information. Schneider, Teske, and Marschall (2000) have found that parents with more education claim a lower number of sources in comparison to parents with less education. The reason cited by the researchers is that respondents with higher levels of education are surrounded by a better informed social network
in comparison to parents with less education (Schneider et al 2000). When questioning whether parents from different races seek different sources of information, the researchers found that White and Asian parents find fewer sources of information useful in comparison to Hispanic and African-American parents (Schneider et al 2000). Lastly, parents that resided in suburban communities found fewer sources of information useful in comparison to parents who resided in urban communities (Schneider et al 2000). I conclude that parents with higher levels of confidence in their own social networks will seek less additional information in comparison to parents with less confidence in their networks. A college professor who is surrounded by people with high levels of education on a consistent basis may put more trust in the networks available to them in comparison to someone who did not finish high school who interacts with people of similar educational attainment daily.

The deliberate construction of these social networks for the purposes of decision making is also an interesting process to consider. Who do parents trust and find to be useful sources of information as they consider schools for their children? Parents tend to put an emphasis on people they have access to that would know more about education than others in their local community. These “local experts” include other parents who attend PTA meetings, sit on school boards, or those who work in the school. Parents also trust other parents with higher levels of education as good sources of information (Schneider et al 2000). As indicated earlier in this section, the quality of these sources may either satisfy the parent seeking information or cause them to look further to sources outside the bounds of their social network.
CONCLUSION

As I pave the path to learning more about how Catholic parents choose schools in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany I have established a foundation of research and analysis relevant to choosing schools. This literature review provided analysis and commentary on important historical components of American choice in education, Rational Choice Theory, forms of educational choice, factors that influence parental decision making regarding education, and issues relevant to Catholic school choice. I now move to an explanation of the research methodology utilized in this study to explore how parents choose schools in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany.
Chapter 3 / Research Design and Methodology

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the types of schools that Catholic parents are choosing for their children in the RCDA, factors that influence that decision, and how parents obtain information about schools. A review of literature has been provided in the previous chapter on the different types of schools parents choose, factors that influenced parent decision making, Rational Choice Theory, as well as an analysis of literature relevant to parents obtaining information about schools. Some of the design and methodology utilized in these studies will be replicated in this study. The research questions for this study are: 1) In what types of schools are children of Catholic parents in the RCDA enrolled? 2) What factors contribute to Catholic parents’ selection of schools for their children? 3) What types and sources of information do Catholic parents rely on when considering schools for their children?

This chapter is divided into four sections to outline the Methodology and analysis plan. I will first provide information relevant to the study’s participants and explain why they were selected. Second, I will describe the survey instrument and how the questions contained in the survey are linked to the research questions. Third, the procedures by which the study was approved by administrators at the University at Albany, RCDA, and local parishes is outlined along with procedures for introducing the survey to the participants of the study. Lastly, an explanation of the methods for data analysis will then be outlined.

TARGET POPULATION

The targeted sample for this study consists of parents who meet three criteria. First, study participants must have a child or children enrolled in a school in grades 10-12 or home school in the same grade levels. Second, the participants must reside within the geographic
boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, which covers all or part of 14 counties in eastern New York State. Lastly, the study participants must have a child enrolled in a Roman Catholic parish faith formation program during the students’ 10th, 11th, or 12th grade year in high school. Students enrolled in Catholic high schools are required to attend parish faith formation programs in the year that they are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. In the RCDA, this sacrament is typically prepared for during 10th or 11th grade. In some rare instances, high school students prepare for this sacrament during 12th grade. Intentionally targeting these three grade levels allows for a participant pool that will represent many different types of schools in the RCDA, including Catholic school students. I will draw two assumptions from the enrollment in faith formation programs at these grade levels. Families who enroll their children in such programs are both Catholic and interested in some form of religious education or formation.

It was originally my hope that a cross section of parents who use traditional public schools, charter schools, public school choice schools, non-public school (both sectarian and non-sectarian), and home school settings would participate in the study. However, the vast majority of survey participants, over 90%, had children enrolled in a traditional public school or Catholic school. The other school types are not represented in the sample at a level that would result in statistically significant data. A more thorough and specific analysis of the participants’ demographic makeup will be presented through the data analysis.

The stated criteria for participation create both advantages and limitations to the study. In asking parents to consider their most recent decision they are more likely to remember specific details about the decision-making process that took place, which is clearly an advantage and should allow for more accurate data. Students in grades 10 – 12 who are participating in
faith formation programs are likely preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Families and students who reach this level in Catholic formation have demonstrated a certain commitment to the Catholic Church, which is acknowledged through Confirmation. This assumption is based on the expense of time and resources that have been invested without the need to address it in the survey instrument.

The limitations created by the criteria for participants and data collection instrument include the limited scope of data collection from each family. In asking parents to isolate one decision, the data will not include information from each transition point in the student’s education or for families with multiple children. It is very possible that families have children attending different types of schools based upon different factors. To mitigate this limitation, I have included a question asking if the student had attended this type of school from Kindergarten to their current grade level.

A second limitation is simply the fact that we are limiting the pool to students and families that have demonstrated a high commitment to faith formation. It is possible that Catholic families attend Mass weekly and do not enroll in faith formation programs. This group will not be represented in the pool of survey participants.

The final limitation is the fact that some participants had a variety of options available to them while others were limited to one or two educational choices. Where families that reside in the City of Albany may have several educational choices available to them for high school education, families that reside in rural areas in the diocese may only have the local public school option or homeschooling available to them. Only six families that reported residing in rural communities also reported selecting a Catholic school.
RESPONDENTS

This section provides information about the Catholic parents who responded to the survey. In addition to basic demographic characteristics (e.g. family income and size), this analysis will include information on their personal experience in Catholic education and involvement with the Catholic Church. The purpose of this section is to provide a profile of the Catholic parents who are reporting on decisions concerning their children’s schools.

The self-reported household income of the respondent pool is shown in Table 3.1 The reported income was higher than anticipated with 239 (55.3% of those who answered the questions) reporting income greater than $110,000. The United States Census Bureau reports that the median household income in New York State between the years 2011-2015 was $59,269 (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). Considering the outcomes, in retrospect, it would have been wise to extend the ranges into higher income levels to assist with the data analysis. It is safe to say that our respondent pool has a higher than anticipated income range.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $80,000</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 to under $110,000</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$110,000 or more</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A factor that surfaced in the literature review regarding school choice was parents’ education level in relation to choosing a school for their child. Table 3.2 shows the respondents’ self-reported educational attainment at the time of the survey. The Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) has reported that 19.1% of citizens who reside in the Capital Region have obtained Bachelor’s degrees and 15.1% have obtained Master’s Degrees or greater
The CDRPC data indicates that 34.6% of Capital Region residents have attained a Bachelor’s degree or higher. The respondents to the survey reported attainment of a Bachelor’s degree at a rate of 39.4% and a graduate degree at a rate of 44.7%. That places the survey respondents’ self-reported educational attainment of a Bachelor’s degree or higher at a rate of 84.1%. The data suggests that the educational level of survey respondents is greater than regional averages. This combined with higher incomes can serve as an indicator that the respondent pool for this survey tends to have relatively high socioeconomic status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2 Respondent's level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer Options</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School and/or Some College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 434
skipped question 32

Survey respondents were asked to describe the community that they resided in by picking from three choices: urban, suburban, or rural. Table 3.3 shows the responses, which show a tendency toward residence in a suburban community with 75.1% of respondents selecting that option. Only 7.8% of respondents reported residence in an urban community and 17.1% reporting residence in a rural community. The small percentage of respondents residing in an urban setting may provide an explanation for the smaller percentages of parents who selected charter schools or magnet schools. Targeting just these parents could be a topic for another study.
Table 3.3 Respondents described the community in which they reside as __________.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 434  
skipped question 32

Respondents were asked to report the number of children ages birth through 18 that reside in their home. Table 3.4 shows that most frequently respondents reported two children, with almost equal numbers indicating one or three children (27.8% and 21.5% respectively). As a matter of comparison, the United States Census Bureau conducts an annual survey on *America’s Families and Living Arrangements*. The 2016 survey reported data from 82,183 households, 47,415 of which reported no related children under the age of 18 in the residence. Drawing from the remaining 34,768, 42.5% report having one child in the residence, 37.5% two children, 14% three children, and 6% four or more children (US Census Bureau 2016). Thus, the Catholic parents responding to this survey had slightly larger families than parents in the nation as a whole.

Table 3.4 The number of children ages birth - 18 years old residing in the respondent’s home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 +</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 432  
skipped question 34

Survey respondents were asked to report how often they attended Roman Catholic Church services. Table 3.5 contains the responses of the 434 parents who answered the question.
The respondents have self-reported that 71.6% of those who answered the question claim to attend a Roman Catholic service weekly or on most weekend. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has reported that 55% of Catholics who reside in the United States reported attending Church weekly in 1965 in comparison to 22% in 2016 (USCCB 2016). The data suggests that the respondents to this survey attend Roman Catholic Church services more frequently than the national average.

| Table 3.5 Respondent's self-reported attendance at Roman Catholic Church services? |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
| I attend weekly | 30.6% | 133 |
| I attend most weekends | 41.0% | 178 |
| I attend on holidays, special occasions, or do not attend | 28.3% | 123 |
| answered question | | 434 |
| skipped question | | 32 |

Because this study focuses on the type of schools their children attend, what type of school these Catholic parents attended is of primary interest. Table 3.6 shows the school types that the respondents attended during their own K-12 education. Respondents were allowed to select more than one option because they may have attended more than once school type in this grade range. The 435 respondents who completed the questions reported 543 different types of schools attended. It is for this reason that the percentages in Table 3.1. do not sum to 100%. The majority of respondents reported attending at a Private Catholic School (186 respondents representing 42.8% of the respondents) or Public School Assigned Based on Residential Attendance Zones (338 respondents representing 77.7% of the respondents).

The number of the respondents selecting other school types is very small in comparison (19 respondents representing 5 school types and 4.3% of the responses). The smaller number of responses in the school types other than Private Catholic Schools or Public Schools Assigned
Based on Residential Address area will limit statistical tests and outcomes in the next chapter.

Eight respondents selected the option of “other.” Six of the seven responses included an option that could have been picked from the school types included as options or related to commentary on reasons why they went to a certain type of school. For example, one respondent indicated that he/she attended a public school on a military base. These results highlight that Catholic parents who responded to this survey had themselves mainly attended either traditional public schools or a Catholic school.

| Table 3.6 Type(s) of schools the respondent attended in grades Kindergarten through 12th Grade. |  |
|---|---|---|
| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
| Home School | 0.0% | 0 |
| Private Catholic School | 42.76% | 186 |
| Private Non-Religious | 1.15% | 5 |
| Private School Affiliated with a Religion other than Catholic | 0.46% | 2 |
| Public Charter School | 0.46% | 2 |
| Public Magnet School | 0.46% | 2 |
| Public School Assigned Based on Residential Attendance Zones | 77.7% | 338 |
| Virtual Education | 0.0% | 0 |
| Other (please specify) | 1.84% | 8 |

**SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

The survey instrument was developed by the author of this dissertation and is specifically designed for this study. The survey can be found in Appendix F of this document. The survey yielded data on the educational preferences and decision making processes of parents who have made decisions regarding the placement of their child or children in a school. The demographic information includes information about each family’s faith life, income, residential community, and educational background. Respondents indicated their educational priorities and perceptions
of the school selected for their child. Respondents were also asked to share their perceptions of both Catholic and public schools. The survey includes multiple choice, rating scales (Likert), demographic questions, and ordinal rating questions. There are also two open-ended questions at the end of the survey inviting respondents to share additional information about their school choices.

I have categorized the 30-question survey instrument into five general sections. First I ask questions relevant to basic demographic information that will allow for analysis of the data in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Second, I ask questions that are relevant to the selection of the school as well as the parents’ or guardians’ perceptions on both Catholic and public school options. Third, I ask questions relevant to school characteristics and how they may have influenced the parents’ or guardians’ decisions. Fourth, I ask questions about where parents obtain information about schools. Lastly, I ask two open ended questions to allow participants to share information not specifically addressed in the survey.

The first six questions of the survey attempt to capture the respondents’ levels of education, income, level of participation in Roman Catholic services, the types of schools the respondents attended as students, number of children in the household, and the type of community the family lives in. Information regarding the respondents’ levels of education and income will allow for analysis on correlations between levels of education, income and schools selected. Question 3 asks respondents to indicate their level of attendance at Roman Catholic Church services. They can choose from attending weekly, attending most weekends, attending on holidays and special occasions, and indicating that they do not attend. While I do not think that frequent attendance at services defines the type of Catholic you are or a certain level of spirituality, it does demonstrate a certain level of commitment to the Roman Catholic Church.
This question will allow for an investigation of correlations between level of attendance at services and types of schools selected. The types of schools that the survey respondent attended will allow for analysis to identify relationships between the personal experiences of the respondent and the school that they selected for their own child. Drawing from my own experiences as a Catholic school administrator, I frequently meet with prospective parents who have multigenerational family experiences with Catholic schools. Their own family and individual experiences with a certain type of school are significant factors in selecting a school.

The second grouping of questions focuses on the decision itself and the participants in the decision-making process. I begin this section by simply asking what type of school the family selected for their child. The responses to this question are the driving force behind this study and will be referenced throughout the analysis of the data. I then ask who had the greatest influence on the decision and how many schools were considered in the process of deciding. The responses to these questions will provide more insight on the family’s internal considerations regarding the decision. In the review of literature neither of these questions were considered in the studies included in Chapter 2. The responses to these questions and corresponding analysis will provide new information to the body of literature associated with school choice. The distance between the family’s home and school is referenced in Goldring and Rowley (2008), Bernal (2005), and Schneider (1993) as an important variable in the school choice process. This variable is addressed twice in the survey. The question from the second grouping of questions asks for specific distance ranges including, less than 5 miles, between 5-10 miles, between 10-15 miles, and over 15 miles. The question in the third grouping of questions asks the survey respondents to measure the extent to which geographic distance influenced their decision of selecting a school. Lastly, I ask survey respondents to provide their general perception of the
quality of education provided at Catholic schools and local public school options that are available to them. The data collected from this question will provide information about parents’ perceptions of at least one school option that they did not select.

The third grouping of questions focus primarily on factors that could influence a family’s decision to select a school. The factors selected for this survey include: quality of academic program, drive time between home and school, family members previously attended the school, single sex education, tuition and fees, school safety, moral and character education, religious education and worship, discipline and orderly environment, reputation in my social network (Friends, family, colleagues, other parents), services provided at the school address the special needs of this child, and quality of the school’s athletic program. The participants are asked to rate each factor on a rating scale (Likert) which was specifically designed for this study. Eight factors utilized in the survey for this dissertation surfaced regularly in the surveys referenced in the literature review including, cost, safety, distance, quality, religious education, discipline, reputation, athletic programs, and family members previously attended the school. The studies that included these factors include: Armor and Peiser (1997), Fisk and Ladd (2000), Gauri (1998), Glatter, Woods, and Bagley (1997), Villavicencio (2013), Weidner and Harrington (2006), Weinschrott and Kilgore (1998), Fung (2011), Yaacob, Osman, and Bachok (2014), Dronkers and Robert (2008), Goldring and Rowley (2008), Bernal (2005), and Marschall, Schneider, and Teske (2000).

The three additional factors were included for specific reasons. First, single sex education was included because families that reside in the RCDA have five options for single sex education. Jackson and Bisset (2005) have studied this factor, which was included in the literature review of this dissertation. I wish to include this factor to examine how influential this
factor was upon the families who selected these five schools or if other factors were more influential on the decision. Second, I have included reputation of the school as a factor to coincide with the fourth grouping of questions included in the survey. The fourth section investigates what information parents obtained prior to making the decision. The purpose of the question in the third grouping is to gauge how influential the information was on the decision. Third, I included a question on the services provided by the school for the special needs of the child. This question was developed because of an issue that arose during the piloting of the survey.

Four of the respondents who both work in schools and have placed their own children in school brought the issue to my attention. Many parents have children who have special needs in a wide spectrum of medical and developmental areas. These parents are often faced with difficult decisions regarding school placement because of a limited number of schools with the capabilities to serve the special needs of their children. Parents in this situation may have to abandon some or all of their “wants” for their child’s education in exchange for their “need” to address. For example, a parent with an autistic child with significant education needs may want their child to receive a faith-based education, but the schools available to that parent may not possess the resources to address the needs of the child. I believe that many parents are put into this position and that is the reason that I have decided to include this question.

The fourth grouping of questions are relevant to where parents obtain information about schools. Marschall, Schneider, and Teske (2000) included this topic in their study of how parents choose schools. They investigated several sources of information including newsletters from the school or district, friends, the mass media such as TV, teachers, staff, coworkers, children, other parents, community centers, and politicians. In an effort to keep the data
manageable, I have consolidated these specific sources into six categories: social networks (Friends, family, colleagues, and other parents), information provided by the school (e.g., online and brochures), information from a source other than the school (e.g., published ratings or test scores), personal school visit, group school visit, and community event. Survey respondents are asked to first indicate from which sources they received information, and then were asked to indicate which was the most influential on their decision.

The fifth and last grouping of questions consist of two open-ended questions asking if the respondents had anything else to share about their decision to choose a school or the process by which they selected a school. The survey instrument is not all inclusive and parents or guardians may have selected a school based on factors not included as options. For example, a school may have been selected since one of the parents is an employee at the school. Since factors for choosing a school can be great in numbers, it is important to include open ended questions to capture this valuable data.

**Pilot Survey**

The survey was piloted during the week of February 22, 2016. Participants were provided with either a paper or electronic version of the document and were asked to complete the process within a five-day period. I asked 10 parents that fit the criteria for the survey, one college professor, two RCDA administrators familiar with surveying, and one high school admissions officer to accomplish two tasks. First, I asked them to complete the survey to the best of their ability. Second, I asked them to provide feedback about the process of completing the survey. Most of the suggestions were relevant to the wording of certain questions or responses. I made edits to the survey based on my opinion on the merits of these suggestions. The more significant changes to the survey based on the pilot included the addition of question
22, which asks how services provided at the school address special needs was influential to their decision. Although the suggestions came in different forms, four of the pilot participants indicated that special education needs should be included in the survey. One of the pilot participants and my advisor both suggested the inclusion of open ended questions at the conclusion of the survey instrument.

The research questions developed for this study are:

Research Question 1: In what types of schools are children of Catholic parents in the RCDA enrolled?

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to Catholic parents’ selection of schools for their children?

Research Question 3: What types and sources of information do Catholic parents rely on when considering schools for their children?

As mentioned earlier in this section, I have grouped the survey questions into five sections. The first section (demographic information) and last section (open ended questions) will be utilized in the analysis of the data to address all the research questions. It is most likely that the information obtained in the open-ended questions will be relevant to Research Questions 2 and 3. Question 7 asks parents to identify the type of school they have selected for their child and directly addresses Research Question 1. The second grouping (information about the decision) and the third grouping (factors that influenced the decision) are directly aligned with Research Question 2. The fourth grouping of questions (information about the schools) is directly aligned to Research Question 3. The grouping of the questions into five sections has allowed for a better sequential ordering of the survey questions as well as a clear alignment of the survey and research questions.
Survey Strengths

I have identified three characteristics of the survey and study that I would categorize as strengths. First, some of the survey questions are intended to capture data that was not addressed in the review of literature. For example, the survey asks which family member had the most influence on the selection of the school. The survey also asks what types of schools the respondents attended themselves and how often their family participates in religious services. These questions will allow for new data sets that will add to the body of research on school choice. Second, the requirement of participation in a parish based faith formation program serves as a useful independent variable for the study. This qualification item will tie all the respondents to a similar level of commitment to the Roman Catholic Church as well as religious studies. Third, it is important that families from all different types of schools were invited to participate in the study. Despite efforts to collect data from a diverse group, the majority of respondents reported attendance at only two school types: Catholic school or traditional public school.

Survey Limitations

The survey also has limitations and weaknesses based on the scope of the study. First, I have identified ten characteristics of school factors that influence the decision to choose a school. In reality, any number of factors could influence how families choose schools. Ten factors were selected for the reasons provided earlier in this section of the dissertation. Second, while the survey does address why and how families choose schools, it does not address why they do not choose schools. For example, the survey does ask the distance from the respondent’s home to the school and how influential that characteristic was on choosing a school. It does not address if a parent did not select another school because the distance was too great. Third, like the first
limitation, I ask respondents to indicate where they obtained information about the school and provided six options for responses. While each of the six options covers a broad array of sources of information, the questions limit the respondent’s answers to specific categories. Fourth, the survey asks only about the most recent decision for the child in the faith formation class. Some parents may have selected differently for other children in the family. Parents were also asked in the survey if the child had attended this school type since kindergarten. The survey does not ask about why they switched the school type. In an effort to mitigate these limitations, I have created two open ended questions to conclude the survey to allow the respondents to provide any additional information that they wish to share about choosing schools.

PROCEDURES

According to King, Keohane, and Verba, “The most important rule for all data collection is to report how the data were created and how we came to possess them” (King et al Page 51 1994). This study requires the participation of human subjects as survey participants and required approval from the University at Albany’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The approval letter from the University at Albany’s IRB can be found in Appendix B of this dissertation.

A critical step in completing this study was gaining approval from various groups to administer the survey and utilize the results appropriately. The first step was to obtain permission from the RCDA to administer the survey in member parishes. I met with the RCDA Chancellor at the time of the request to conduct the study, Elizabeth Simcoe, on December 13, 2016 to present my proposal. She granted approval for the study by means of a letter on December 16, 2016. The letter of approval can be found in Appendix A of this document. I then submitted a University at Albany Institutional Review Board Protocol Submission on January
05, 2017. The Institutional Review Board granted permission for the study on January 31, 2017 in the form of a letter. The letter of approval can be found in Appendix B of this document.

The third level of approval needed to be granted from RCDA parish leaders. Roman Catholic parishes are typically administered by a pastor, who is a Catholic priest, or a Parish Life Director, who could be a religious sister, lay person, or deacon. Parish leaders were mailed a letter requesting assistance in launching the survey (Appendix C), the IRB Consent Form, and the survey instrument on February 1, 2017. Efforts were made to have all parishes participate in the survey process. Paper surveys were offered to parishes that requested them. No requests for paper surveys were received. While inclusion of all areas of the diocese is important, the participation of parishes that are located in Albany, Troy, and Schenectady is critical to the study because of the presence of a diverse grouping of schools in these cities. Parish leaders were asked to return a form either granting permission or declining participation in the study. The form also asked the parish leader to designate a point of contact for the distribution of the emails if they were granting permission. They were provided with a stamped envelope to return the completed form.

The preferred method of data collection was through the on-line survey creation and data collection website, Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey can be found at www.surveymonkey.com and the service provides a variety of tools to researchers. Survey Monkey provides a consent form for students using the website who wish to engage in academic research. The consent form can be found in Appendix G of this dissertation. Although the data were collected through Survey Monkey and paper surveys, the analysis of the data and creation of charts were accomplished through SPSS software.
The survey was launched when the first parish leader returned on February 10, 2017 and the email was passed along to that parish’s contact person. Although no hard deadline was utilized in the completion of the study, the data was extracted from Survey Monkey on April 1, 2017. Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014) provide guidelines for web and mobile survey implementation in their work *Internet, Phone, Mail and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. The content of the guidelines is comprehensive and addresses a variety of types of surveys. For the purposes of this survey, the guidelines relevant to web based surveys were utilized. These guidelines include, suggestions on the content of the correspondences, personalization of the messages, the timing of the emails, and ensuring that technological limitations do not influence results (Dillman et al 2014).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The analysis plan for the survey data is centered around the three research questions. The survey is intended to yield demographic information about the respondents and information on their decision-making processes for selecting a school for their child. I decided to divide the fourth chapter and analysis of data into four sections to coincide with the three research questions and the open-ended response questions. The four sections include:

Section 1 / School Type and Decision Information

Section 2 / Factors and Perceptions

Section 3 / Sources and Utility of School Information.

Section 4 / Open-Ended Response Questions

The initial analysis in each section will simply lay out the descriptive statistics as reported by the respondents. To this end, frequencies, percentages, cross tabulations, measures of central tendency, and standard deviations will all be utilized to present what was reported by
the survey respondents. This first area of analysis will not test any hypothesis and will only establish the variables which will be utilized in the proceeding sections of the data analysis.

In the second area of analysis for each section I have conducted tests of association with the objective of identifying relationships within the data. In order to conduct the analysis, I have used two tests of association. I have selected a Chi-square to test whether a relationship exist between the categorical data, which includes the school selected and the characteristics outlined in the survey questions. In Chapter 4 I use a Chi-square test to determine if a relationship exists between school type selected (traditional public school or Catholic school) and family income. I have also selected a T-test to test whether any statistically significant differences exist between families that have selected different types of schools. In Chapter 4, I also use a T-test to determine if a relationship exists between school type selected (traditional public school or Catholic school) and the 10 school factors selected for this survey.

In the third area of analysis I will be providing commentary and analysis on the open-ended responses on the survey. Questions 29 and 30 are two open-ended questions that ask if the respondent wishes to provide additional information related to the reasons they selected a school and the process by which they chose a school. No statistical test will be applied to these narrative responses. However, if tendencies and correlations are detected in the responses they will be noted in the findings of the study and included in this third area of analysis.

**Conclusion**

The research questions developed for this dissertation explore how parents choose particular schools, why parents do not choose other schools, parents’ perceptions of the schools from which they choose, and relationships between respondents’ demographic information and how respondents choose schools. The findings of the study will contribute to the research
literature on how parents choose schools. The findings are also likely to be of interest to K-12 education leaders and specialists.
Chapter 4 / Research Results

INTRODUCTION

I have divided the findings of this study into four sections that are aligned with the three research questions and the open-ended questions. The parents and guardians that participated in the study have communicated their experiences, choices, and perceptions through the survey instrument. The purpose of this chapter is to link their experiences and opinions with the appropriate research questions from the study. Their responses have allowed me to answer the three research questions and obtain information unique to their personal situations.

The first section addresses the first research question; **In what types of schools are children of Catholic parents in the RCDA enrolled?** This section begins by providing a profile of the schools attended by the children of responding Catholic parents. In addition to whether the child attends a traditional public, Catholic or other type of school, this section will also examine the child’s tenure in the school type. Analyses in this section will explore associations between the child’s school and family characteristics. The purpose of this analysis is to establish the framework for how a school was selected for the child in question, provide information about the family, and discuss preliminary information about the decision-making process. This analysis will allow for a better understanding of the family characteristics, which proves to be useful when we analyze factors that influenced the families’ decision on school placement and where the families obtained information about the school.

The second section addresses the second research question; **What factors contribute to Catholic parents’ selection of schools for their children?** This section addresses factors that may have shaped the respondent’s decision to select a school for their child. These factors include academic program, distance, family connection to the school, single sex education,
financial considerations, school safety, moral and character education, religious education, discipline, good reputation, services for special needs, and athletics. In an effort to demonstrate the influence of the individual factors I have ordered them in a sequence where the highest percentages of “extremely influential” will be analyzed first. This section also includes information and analysis on the respondent’s perception of both public and Catholic educational options that are available to them. Although the survey questions that relate to perception of overall quality and corresponding responses were not initially intended to be a more significant portion of the study, the findings are noteworthy to the discussion of school choice in our region.

The third section addresses the third research question; **What types and sources of information do Catholic parents rely on when considering schools for their children?** When families are considering school placement factors and information are taken into consideration that influence the decision. It is important to understand the sources of that information which influences parent decision making. For example, a flyer created by a school outlining the school’s academic success might only include information that paints the school in a favorable light. As a matter of comparison, the New York State Education Department publishes standardized exam results along with statistical analysis of the results for public consumption. Families could also rely on the opinion of someone they know to assess a school’s academic success. In all three scenarios, the parent is seeking information regarding a single school factor but relies on different sources of information.

The fourth and final section of the results includes the two open-ended questions that conclude the survey. This section was included to allow parents to elaborate further on how school placement decisions were made. I had initially intended to break up the results and include them in the previous three sections. However, the responses were rich with information
relevant to the study and many included information that addressed all three research questions in a single response. For this reason, I have created a separate section with analysis on the narrative responses to these open-ended survey questions.

**SECTION 1 / RESEARCH QUESTION #1**

*In what types of schools are children of Catholic parents in the RCDA enrolled?*

The first grouping of survey results relates to the type of schools that were selected for the students and information that relates to how the decision was made. This first section addresses our first research question. The determination of the school type selected is an important data point for this study. It not only provides us information about the participant pool, it also allows for an independent variable for tests of association on factors that influence parents’ decisions and where parents obtain information about schools.

An objective of this study was to reach a diverse group of parents and guardians. The survey was administered in many geographic locations throughout the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. The survey provided eight options for school types and a ninth option of “other.” The responses indicted that 83.3% of the participating parents selected a public school assigned based on residential attendance zones for their child (Table 4.1). Based on the results, only two school types are represented to an extent that they could be included in the tests of association throughout this chapter to establish any type of statistical significance. Private Catholic School and Public School Assigned Based on Residential Attendance Zones represents 95.3% of the responses. Eleven respondents selected the option of “other.” All eleven responses included an option that could have been picked from the school types included as options or related to commentary on reasons why they selected a certain type of school for their child. In order to keep the legitimacy of the study intact and maintain the ability to establish statistical significance regarding study results, only Private Catholic School and Public School Assigned Based on
Residential Attendance Zones will be used for the tests of association. As a result of this decision, the findings and recommendations will also be aligned with these two school types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1 The type of school the respondent's child attends.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer Options</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Catholic School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Non-Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private School Affiliated with a Religion other than Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Charter School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Magnet School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public School Assigned Based on Residential Attendance Zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 425
skipped question 41

All parents and guardians select a school type at least once during their child’s educational experience. Many families make this decision when determining placement for prekindergarten or kindergarten and do not consider school placement again until considering college. Families may also consider school placements at benchmark years such as middle school and high school. School placement also comes into play if a family faces a challenging situation and determines a new school type based on the situation. Due to the variety of variables that are associated with the number of choices and when they occurred, I decided to simply ask if the child attended this type of school since kindergarten. Respondents were provided options of “yes” or “no.” The results indicate that 78.4% respondents reported that their child is still enrolled in the type of school selected for kindergarten (Table 4.2). What is of particular interest is the circumstances and time frame under which the remaining 21.6% changed their child’s school type. Perhaps this question could be addressed in a future study.
Table 4.2 Has the respondent's child attended this type of school since Kindergarten?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 425  
skipped question 41

TESTS OF ASSOCIATION FOR DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND SCHOOL SELECTED FOR THE STUDENT

This section examines whether Catholic parents differ in their likelihood of selecting a Catholic or traditional public school for their high school aged child. In particular, the analysis focuses on several key family or parent’s characteristic that are family income, number of children living in the household, attendance at Roman Catholic Church services, level of education, community of residence, and if respondent attended Catholic or public schools themselves. The goal of these tests of association is to determine if characteristics of the family influence school choice. As was mentioned earlier, this dissertation is focusing analysis and tests of association on families that selected Catholic or traditional public schools due to smaller sample sizes for other school types. Determining if statistically significant associations exist between these groups of families and the defined characteristics of the families will help us to better understand what influences school choice.

I have decided to use Pearson’s chi-square test of association for each of the items in this section. In these tests, parents who have selected Catholic schools or public schools will serve as my categorical, independent variables. The responses to the questions that relate to the demographic information selected for the tests will serve as ordinal or nominal independent
variables. The purpose of the tests will be to determine if a relationship exists between the type of school parents select for their child and key characteristics of the family.

The results shown in Table 4.3 indicate that the percentages of families from each household income level tended to be similar between those whose child attended Catholic or public schools. Approximately 14% of those selecting each school type had incomes of less than $80,000, and between 55-60% of both families had incomes over $110,000. These differences in percentages were not statistically significant (> .05). Thus, at least among parents responding to this survey, family income was not related to the choice of a Catholic or public school. While this result does not substantively support a hypothesis or theory, the analysis does challenge the misconception that only wealthy people attend Pre-K – 12th Grade schools that require tuition. Conversely, this finding could allow us to conclude that some Catholic parents are choosing traditional public schools for reasons other than an inability to pay tuition. A popular theory on the primary reason of current enrollment trends in Catholic schools is that parents cannot afford tuition. The 195 respondents earning over $110,000, representing 55.4% of the families who selected public schools, could potentially afford to pay private school tuition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Levels of Respondents</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $80,000</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 to under $110,000</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$110,000 or more</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = 1.939 (df = 3) p > .05

The results shown in Table 4.4 indicate that the percentages of families from each educational attainment group tended to be similar between those whose child attended Catholic
or public school. The two groups reported very high attainment with 49% of parents who
selected Catholic schools and 43% of those who selected public schools reporting attainment of a
graduate degree. Combining those that have attained Bachelor’s degrees and graduate degrees
creates an even more impressive statistic with 84.3% of those who selected Catholic schools and
82.5% of those who selected public schools attaining a Bachelor’s degree or higher. The
differences in percentages between the two groups was not statistically significant (.715 > .05).
Thus, at least among parents responding to this survey, educational attainment was not related to
the choice of a Catholic or public school. The noteworthy statistic is the very high educational
attainment of both groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = .715 (df = 2) p > .05

The results shown in Table 4.5 indicate that the number of children living in the
household tended to be similar between those whose selected Catholic or public schools. The
greatest number of families for both Catholic and public school families reported having two
children residing in their home, with 45.1% of Catholic school families and 44.6% of public
school families respectively. The differences in percentages were not statistically significant (P
> .05). Thus, at least among parents responding to this survey, number of children residing in
the home was not related to the choice of a Catholic or public school. Similar to the findings in
household income, this finding also addresses a popular idea that large families cannot extend the resources necessary to select schools that require tuition. The respondents to this survey, with a specified number of children, selected both school types in a similar way.

Table 4.5 Crosstabulation Number of Children in the Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Size</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = .824 (df = 3) p > .05

The results shown in Table 4.6 indicate that the percentages of self-reported attendance at Roman Catholic Church services tended to be similar between those whose child attended Catholic or public school. The greatest number of families for both Catholic and public school families reported attending “most weeks” (39.2% of Catholic school families and 41.5% of public school families). The differences in percentages were not statistically significant (P > .05). Thus, at least among parents responding to this survey, differences in attendance at Roman Catholic Church services was not statistically significant between families that selected Catholic or public schools for their children. If attendance at services is an indicator to commitment to the Roman Catholic Church as it was previously suggested in this study, the families representing both school types have demonstrated similar commitment. In speaking specifically of the parents who participated in the study, church attendance is not an indicator of school choice.
Table 4.6 Crosstabulation Church Attendance * School Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Attendance</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Weeks</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays, Special Occasions, or do not attend</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = .455 (df =2) p > .05

It was reported in Chapter 3 that 75.1% of the survey respondents reported that they resided in suburban communities. In order to test if the responses were similar between Catholic and public school parents I conducted a Chi-square test. Table 4.7 shows that 74.5% of responses from Catholic school parents indicated residence in a suburban community in comparison to 76.2% of the responses from the public school parents. The results of the Chi-square test show that no statistically significant association exists between school type selected and community of residence. However, urban Catholic parents are over twice as likely as rural parents (21% compared to 9% respectively) and just under twice as likely as suburban parents (21% compared to 12% respectively) to have their child in a Catholic school.

Table 4.7 Crosstabulation Community of Residence * School Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I would describe the community in which I reside as __________.</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = .204 (df =2) p > .05
The results shown in Table 4.8 indicate that the percentages of parents who attended Catholic schools themselves are not similar between families who selected Catholic or public schools for their child. In comparing parents who selected Catholic schools, 66% percent reported that they had attended a Catholic school during their own Pre-K – 12th Grade education. As a matter of comparison, 39% of parents who selected a public school for their child attended Catholic schools themselves. The differences in percentages were statistically significant (P ≤ .001). Thus, at least among parents responding to this survey, those who had attended Catholic schools themselves selected Catholic schools for their child at a statistically significantly higher rate than parents who had attended only public schools themselves. This result should be of interest to those who study Catholic school enrollment trends or work to reverse them. If attendance at a Catholic school as a student is a predictor of selecting a Catholic school, one could question why those who attended Catholic schools are not selecting Catholic schools for their own children. For those responsible for enrollment in Catholic schools, these findings might cause more intensive marketing efforts for parents who have attended Catholic schools.

### Table 4.8 Crosstabulation Parent attended Catholic School * School Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Attended Catholic School</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = .000 (df = 1) p < .05

In summary, this section examined the school type selected by parents for their child and how those choices related to demographic characteristics of families. The results allow us to reach conclusions that we have an affluent and well-educated respondent pool. The respondent pool has also reported attending primarily Catholic and public schools themselves, similar to the
schools that they have selected for their children. As evidenced by the Chi-Square tests conducted in this section of the results, respondents that have selected either Catholic or public schools are not dissimilar in the areas of income, education, attendance at Catholic church service, and number of children residing in the household.

My tests did establish that parents who attended Catholic schools themselves were more likely to select a Catholic school for their child in a statistically significant way. Aside from the vast majority of families selecting only two school types, this is the most important finding in this first section. The idea of a parent’s own experience in school influencing placement for their children was also discussed in the open-ended questions at the conclusion of the survey. The following are examples of two parent narratives related to their own experiences as students relating to school placement for their child:

“My husband and I were educated in Catholic schools but the financial piece held up back from sending our three children.”

“I attended a Catholic grammar school as a child. My husband has a Catholic education through college and yet we both felt strongly not to send our children to Catholic school.”

**SECTION 2 / RESEARCH QUESTION #2**

_What factors contribute to Catholic parents’ selection of schools for their children?_

The second section of this reports on factors that may have influenced the decision for school placement respondents’ perceptions of Catholic and public schools. The results are broken up into three parts for Section 2. First, analysis is provided for three areas that influence decisions on school placement. These three areas are not included in the twelve factors utilized in the survey instrument, but all relate to the decision on school placement. These three areas include the number of schools considered, which family member had the greatest influence on the decision, and the distance between home and school. Second, results are reported concerning
the twelve factors that might contribute to parents’ selection of a school. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each of the twelve factors influenced their decision in this part. Tests of association will measure relationships between these factors and school types selected for their child. Third, I report on parents responses to a question asking them to indicate their perception of overall quality of the local public school and Catholic schools in the RCDA.

When family decisions are made regarding any issue, certain family members can be more influential than others in reaching a conclusion. Families take different forms and that could be a factor that influences the decision-making process. Table 4.9 shows who had the greatest influence on the child’s school placement. The results indicate that mother and father equally was the option most frequently selected, representing 72.6% of the responses. Mothers having the greatest influence was selected by 11.8% of the respondents and fathers having the greatest influence was selected 2.8% of the respondents. When one parent was identified as the person having the greatest influence, the mother was selected nine percentage points greater than fathers. Students and parents equally was reported at a rate of 7.5%. One respondent who selected “other” indicated that the student’s brother made the decision about school placement.

| Table 4.9 Who had the greatest influence on the decision to send the child to this school? |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Answer Options                 | Response Percent | Response Count   |
| Mother and Father Equally      | 72.6%            | 308              |
| Mother                         | 11.8%            | 50               |
| Student and Parents Equally    | 7.5%             | 32               |
| Other                          | 3.3%             | 14               |
| Father                         | 2.8%             | 12               |
| Student                        | 1.9%             | 8                |
| answered question              |                  | 424              |
| skipped question               |                  | 42               |
Respondents were asked how many schools they considered when selecting their child’s placement. As described earlier, families from different regions of the RCDA have varying types of school types available to them. For example, a family that resides in the City of Albany has many school options, included public schools, Catholic schools, private secular schools, magnet schools, charter schools, and homeschooling. A family that resides in the Adirondack region of the RCDA may only have a public school, boarding school or homeschooling available to them. Homeschooling may not be an option for these families due to work responsibilities, leaving just one option. Table 4.10 shows the number of schools considered by each respondent. The majority of respondents, (60.8%), indicated that only the school selected was considered. The percentages decrease as the number of schools considered increases, with just over a quarter of parents reporting that they considered two schools for this child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only the school selected</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 schools</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more schools</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td></td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The geographic location of both the family’s home and the school selected was identified as an important variable in families choosing a school in the literature review of this dissertation. Respondents were provided distance ranges to choose from to indicate the distance from their home to their child's school. This item surfaced on several occasions in the open-ended questions responses. One parent stated:
“My first thought is that we do not have any choice in school selection because we do not have a private school in the area. We do not have a catholic school choice within a 50 minute drive. The questions were difficult to answer correctly based on the current situation with private school choice in our rural area.”

Understanding that the majority of respondents selected the Public School Assigned Based on Residential Attendance Zones, and also reported reside in suburban communities, the majority of respondents reported that their child’s school is less than five miles from their home is not surprising (Table 4.11). This result might be different if the majority of our respondents resided in rural communities where the distance between home and school could be much greater.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 miles</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 miles to under 10 miles</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 miles or more</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td></td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FACTORS**

Survey question 12 provided respondents with the list of all 12 school factors that were selected for this study and asked that they identify the factors that influenced their decision. The results are shown in Table 4.12. The respondents could select as many factors as they wanted. The 441 parents who responded to this question selected on average 3.77 factors that influenced their decision. Since the respondents could select more than one factor, the percentages provided in the chart indicate the percentage of respondents who selected the individual factor, not the percentage of total responses. For this reason, the percentages shown in the first column of this table are not intended to sum to 100%.
The factors that were most frequently selected were the Quality of the Academic Program (87.1%), the School Has a Good Reputation (70.1%), and Financial Considerations (50.4%). These three factors are consistently indicated by respondents as an important consideration in selecting a school for their child. The perceptions of overall quality are discussed later in this chapter, which indicate that public school parents have a favorable perception of the public school option available to their family. Although respondent concerns regarding finances could be interpreted in a few different ways, it is clear from the responses from the surveys that this is a factor that weighs heavily on how parents choose schools.

The factors that were selected less frequently were Single Sex Education (.04%), Services at the School Address the Special Needs of this Child (12.2%), and Religious Education and Worship (15%). While three of the seven Catholic high schools and two of the charter schools in the area are gender segregated, none of the public schools in the area fit into this category. It was anticipated that this would be a smaller segment of the population. Parents of students with special needs significant enough to influence the school placement process also represent a smaller population of the larger group. Religious Education and Worship was not a driving force for parents who selected public schools as demonstrated in the T-test discussed later in this chapter. My analysis will include a test of association to measure how frequently this factor was selected amongst Catholic school parents.
While respondents could identify the factors that contributed to their decision for school placement in survey question 12, survey questions 13 through 24 invite the respondents to indicate the extent to which each factor influenced their decision. These questions and corresponding tables will show, more specifically, how the respondents value each school factor. I have decided to order these tables and corresponding analysis from the factor with the highest percentage of respondents labeling it as “extremely influential” to the factor with the lowest percentage of respondents labeling it as “extremely influential.”

While the most frequently selected factor selected by Catholic parents was the quality of the schools’ academic program, many parents (72%) also rated this school characteristic as “extremely influential.” Table 4.13 shows to the responses to the question that asks respondents to indicate the extent to which the quality of the school’s academic program influenced their decision on school placement. The quality of the school’s academic program is clearly one of the most influential factors on choosing a school based on the results from
different areas of this survey. The concept of academic quality was also cited in the open-ended responses on several occasions. The following is one example:

*Very pleased with the amount of Honors, AP and Project Lead the Way classes available to students. Also, as part of elementary honors program my children were able to participate in the Johns Hopkins CTY program.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is noteworthy to mention that the next factor in the strategic ordering of this section was, the school has a good reputation, which was selected as “extremely influential” in 44.3% of the cases (Table 4.14). The quality of the academic program for the Catholic parents that participated in this survey was the most important of the factor to the respondents as evidenced by the responses to these two questions. Table 4.14 shows a distribution that is skewed toward “extremely influential” and “moderately influential” with 81.8% of respondents selecting one of these options. This factor is explored in questions 27 and 28 in terms of how parents obtained information about the school prior to making their decision. Those results are outlined in Tables 4.30 and 4.31, which I provide analysis on later in this chapter. However, it is clear that the reputation of the school amongst people respondents know is a very important factor in choosing schools.
School safety is another factor that can be interpreted in several ways. Respondents could interpret this factor as it relates to bullying, school security systems/procedures, school violence, or any number of characteristics as they relate to the safety of students. As noted earlier, 31% of respondents indicated that school safety was among the factors considered when choosing their child’s school. Table 4.15 shows a distribution that is skewed toward the “extremely influential” and “moderately influential” side of the Likert scale with 72.2% of respondents selecting one of these responses. Parents and guardians who rated school safety as “not at all influential,” which represents 9.8% of the responses, are not necessarily indifferent about safety, they have simply reported that it was not a factor that was taken into consideration when their decision was made about school placement.
It is important to establish that moral and character education programs are not exclusive to religious or non-public schools. While public schools would not offer courses or programs in areas like Catholic morality, most have some type of character education program in place. Table 4.16 shows that 64.0% of respondents rated this factor as “extremely influential” or “moderately influential.” Given that one of the prerequisites for participating in this study was enrollment in a Catholic faith formation at a parish in the RCDA, these parents are also most likely interested in moral/character education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*answered question 411
skipped question 55*

The results from the question concerning financial considerations can be interpreted in several ways. Table 4.17 shows what could be looked upon as a bimodal distribution with the two most frequent responses being “extremely influential” (30%) or “not at all influential (23%).” For example, a respondent could have responded “extremely influential” if they selected a school that does not require tuition over a school that does require tuition because they could not afford the tuition rate. A different family could have selected “extremely influential” if they were comparing two schools that required tuition and one presented a much lower tuition rate prior to the family’s decision on school placement. Financial considerations surfaced frequently in the open-ended questions. One parent stated:

“Our process was simple and straightforward. Placing our children in a private, Catholic school was beyond our monetary means.”
The T-test presented later in this chapter will identify trends between school type selected and financial considerations. Analysis is provided later in this chapter that relates to these responses.

### Table 4.17 The extent to which financial considerations influenced the respondent’s decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 410
skipped question 56

The responses concerning the influence of a disciplined and orderly environment on school choice are shown in Table 4.18. The distribution is skewed toward “extremely influential” and “moderately influential” with 62.3% of respondents selecting one of these options. In considering the question, one could interpret the responses in two ways. Families could be expressing that they were drawn to a school because it was a disciplined and orderly environment. Alternatively, families could have selected a school to avoid a school that lacked a disciplined and orderly environment. Aside from the narrative responses, the survey instrument does not allow respondents to differentiate between the two ways I am interpreting the results.

### Table 4.18 The extent to which a disciplined and orderly environment influenced the respondent's decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 408
skipped question 58
Parents responding to the survey were also asked the extent to which the special needs of their child influenced their decision. The distribution illustrated in Table 4.19 shows 57.1% of respondents selecting “not at all influential.” As indicated in the third chapter of this dissertation, this factor was included due to the pilot of the survey. Feedback provided at that time indicated that parents of students with special needs will bypass all factors to ensure that a school is selected that can provide appropriate accommodations for their child. Special needs carry a connotation of being limited to physical, developmental, or learning disabilities. However, drawing from my own experiences as a school administrator, I know that special needs cannot be limited to these three categories. Special needs could be interpreted by parents and guardians as social or emotional problems, issues associated with sexual orientation, bullying, or any number of other issues that young people struggle with in school. Despite the high frequency of parents or guardians selecting “not at all influential,” this factor may be an extremely important factor for those who have students with special needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The geographic distance between a family’s home and the school selected was established as an important factor in influencing how families choose schools in the review of literature in Chapter 2. Despite this fact, this factor was rated lower in importance in a previous
section of this chapter and Table 4.20 shows a relatively even distribution among the five options available to respondents. The majority of respondents (64.2%) selected somewhat, slightly, or not influential at all. Like many of the factors, drive time is also open to interpretation. A family might rate this factor lower if they live close to the school or do not mind their child being on a bus for a while. They might rate it higher if they did not choose their ideal school because of distance between home and school. Regardless of the interpretation, the study participants did not emphasize this factor and more influential than most factors.

### Table 4.20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 411
skipped question 55

With the majority of respondents reporting that they selected public schools it is not surprising that 57.1% of respondents indicated that religious education and worship was "not at all influential" in their decision. Table 4.21 shows that only 23.8% of respondents reporting that religious education and worship was “extremely influential” or “moderately influential.” I question why 23.8% would report that this factor was “extremely influential” or “moderately influential” while only 12.2% reported selecting schools affiliated with religion. The survey data does not provide information to answer this question or provide an explanation for the difference. It is possible that respondents considered the combination of enrollment in a public school and concurrent enrollment in a faith formation as their educational choice for their child.
Table 4.21  The extent to which religious education and worship influenced the respondent's decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| answered question | 406 |
| skipped question  | 60  |

Table 4.22 shows the responses to the question that asks if family legacy was a factor that influenced the respondent’s decision on school placement. As a non-public school administrator, I often speak with prospective families about how their family heritage is aligned with the school’s history. However, I do not think this factor comes into play with only one school type. The findings indicate that 60.8% of the survey respondents found that a family member previously attending the school was “not at all influential” on their decision. I will later test for associations between Catholic school and public school parents regarding this school factor to identify trends with either group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| answered question | 411 |
| skipped question  | 55  |

The quality of a high school’s athletic program can be an important factor for parents and guardians in choosing a school. Table 4.23 shows a distribution with 62.6% of respondents selecting “not at all influential” or “slightly influential.” Tests of association later in this chapter.
will measure if school type selected can be correlated with the level of influence of this factor. Do parents and guardians who select private Catholic schools report a higher rate of influence on athletics than those who select public schools? What is not considered in this question is the reason that the factor is influential to respondents. Parents and guardians could value athletics as part of their child’s overall education or they could be anticipating a financial payoff at the end of high school in the form of an athletic scholarship to college. Regardless of the reasons, it is clear that respondents to this survey place a lower emphasis on athletics in comparison to other factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.23</th>
<th>The extent to which the quality of the school’s athletic program influenced the respondent’s decision.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer Options</td>
<td>Response Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 411
skipped question 55

There are only five single-sex high schools in the geographic area that is considered the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. Table 4.24 shows that 89.7% of respondents identified this factor as “not influential at all.” This is not surprising since these five schools represent a small proportion of the schools in this area and the overall enrollment of all schools in the area. Further limiting the interpretation of the data, only one respondent identified themselves as a charter school family, which represents 0.02% of the 425 respondents that answered that question. That leaves the potential for respondents from three single-sex Catholic high schools. What proves to be problematic in conducting any further analysis on this question is the fact that the survey instrument does not allow the respondent to identify themselves as someone who has
selected a single-sex or co-educational school. This has limited my ability to conduct tests of association or draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

Table 4.24  Extent to which single sex education influenced the respondent's decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Influential</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Influential</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Influential</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Influential</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Influential</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 408
skipped question 58

PARENT PERCEPTIONS ON CATHOLIC AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Catholic parents participating in this study were asked to rate their perception of both local public schools and Catholic schools in the RCDA respectively. Table 4.25 shows that 84.7% of respondents rated their local public school as “excellent” or “good.” It is also noteworthy that no respondents selected “no basis for judgment,” indicating that parents and guardians that selected a school other than their local public school felt that they could share their opinion of that public school. It is clear from the distribution of the responses that the majority of the respondents had a favorable perception of the local public school option.

Table 4.25  What is the respondent's perception of the overall quality of the local public school district in which they reside?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No basis for judgment</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 412
skipped question 54
The perception of the respondents on the overall quality of Catholic schools in the RCDA is shown in Table 4.26. It is clear that the respondents rated Catholic schools lower than public school in terms of overall quality. Approximately, 15.6% of respondents rated Catholic schools as “excellent” in comparison to 56.3% rating public schools as “excellent. When combining “excellent” and “good,” Catholic schools are rated at 66.5% in comparison to public schools achieving 84.7% in these two categories. Results from tests of association will be presented later in this chapter to indicate how Catholic school and public school parents and guardians rated their own school type verses the school type they did not select.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No basis for judgment</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.26 What is the respondent's perception of the overall quality of Catholic schools in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany?

TESTS OF ASSOCIATION FOR FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED SCHOOL PLACEMENT

I selected a T-test test to determine if associations exist between the type of school selected for a child and parents' reports of the factors that influenced the decision. The means I have compared are drawn from the twelve survey questions that related to the factors that may influence a parent’s decision in selecting a school. Survey respondent were provided with five options when responding to these questions to express the level of influence the factor had on the decision for school placement. The options were as follows; extremely influential, moderately influential, somewhat influential, slightly influential, and not at all influential. For the purposes
of this test, I have assigned the following numbers to each of the responses; extremely influential (5), moderately influential (4), somewhat influential (3), slightly influential (2), and not at all influential (1). This coding was used so that a higher value for each of these variables indicates that the respondent reporting giving it greater influence in the decision making process.

Table 4.27 is a descriptive statistics table that shows the differences between responses of parents who selected Catholic schools compared to those who sent their child to a traditional public school. This table includes count, mean, standard deviation, standard error, and 95% confidence interval for each means. The tables that related to these twelve factors earlier in this chapter (Tables 4.13 through 4.24) shows summative data for the entire respondent pool. Table 4.27 allows for the comparison of the descriptive statistics between parents and guardians who have selected Catholic schools and those who selected public schools. The differences between the means of these two groups are tested for statistical significance in the proceeding T-test.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Academic Program</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4.4902</td>
<td>.75822</td>
<td>.10617</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>4.6147</td>
<td>.78430</td>
<td>.04253</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive Time</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.5490</td>
<td>1.22170</td>
<td>.17107</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>2.8647</td>
<td>1.36515</td>
<td>.07404</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Members Attended</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.8824</td>
<td>1.46488</td>
<td>.20512</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>2.0235</td>
<td>1.42024</td>
<td>.07691</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Sex</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.1800</td>
<td>1.58681</td>
<td>.22441</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>1.0855</td>
<td>.44362</td>
<td>.02409</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.9804</td>
<td>1.44900</td>
<td>.20290</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>3.2845</td>
<td>1.54673</td>
<td>.08376</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.8824</td>
<td>1.39495</td>
<td>.19533</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>3.9412</td>
<td>1.23950</td>
<td>.06722</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral / Character Education</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4.6667</td>
<td>.79162</td>
<td>.11085</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>3.5118</td>
<td>1.24913</td>
<td>.06774</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.3125</td>
<td>.74822</td>
<td>.10800</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>1.7670</td>
<td>1.23148</td>
<td>.06688</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplined Environment</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.4400</td>
<td>.67491</td>
<td>.09545</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>3.5059</td>
<td>1.19654</td>
<td>.06508</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Reputation</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.0400</td>
<td>1.12413</td>
<td>.15898</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>4.1760</td>
<td>1.01958</td>
<td>.05521</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for Special Needs</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.1837</td>
<td>1.50932</td>
<td>.21562</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>2.2706</td>
<td>1.59748</td>
<td>.08664</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>Catholic School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.6667</td>
<td>1.45144</td>
<td>.20324</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>2.3578</td>
<td>1.36592</td>
<td>.07397</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate a significance level of (p < .05) for single sex education, moral and character education, religious education and worship, and disciplined and orderly environment. For all these factors, the means were higher for Catholic school families indicating that Catholic
parents reported these factors as more influential in their choice process than public school parents. It is not surprising to see that Catholic school families selected single sex education and religious education and worship at a higher rate than public school parents due to the lack of availability of those two factors in the public sector. It is noteworthy to mention that single sex education is available in area charter schools, but this test has not included their responses nor is it possible to know which charter school students are in single sex schools due to the design of the survey. The differences in the means for the factors described above suggest that families that select Catholic schools are seeking school factors that might not be present in their local public school option. The exception to this assertion is the factor of disciplined and orderly environment, which could certainly be present in a public school.

The results indicate no statistically significant differences between the means of the remaining factors for those who selected Catholic and public schools. These remaining factors are quality of academic program, drive time, family member previously attended the school, financial considerations, school safety, school has a good reputation, services provided at the school address the special needs of my child, and quality of the athletic program. While statistically significant differences were not found, that is a finding in itself. These findings suggest that both Catholic and public school parents were influenced in similar ways by these school factors when selecting a school.

As noted earlier, the vast majority of Catholic parents participating in this study indicated that the quality of a school’s academic program was a consideration and was extremely influential. The next analysis examines these parents’ perceptions of the overall quality of the local public and Catholic schools, which are the general pool of schools among which they are choosing.
Survey respondents were first asked to rate their perception of the overall quality of their local public school option and, then, of Catholic schools in the RCDA. For both questions, parents could respond with excellent, good, fair, poor, or no basis for judgment. The summative responses were presented in a previous section of this dissertation. Here, differences in how parents viewed each type of school are compared by whether they choose a public or Catholic school for their child. The Chi Square test will determine statistical significance between Catholic school and public schools regarding their perception of the quality of local public schools and, subsequently, of RCDA Schools.

Table 4.28 examines the perception of the overall quality of the local public school by public and Catholic school parents who participated in this study. To highlight one difference, 62.5% of parents who selected public schools for their child rated public schools as excellent in comparison to 25.5% of parents who selected Catholic schools, rating their local public schools as excellent. Therefore, we conclude that there is an association between school type selected and the perception of the overall quality of the local public school district. In addition, those Catholic parents who selected public schools tended to have a more positive view of public schools in their area than those who selected Catholic schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your perception of the overall quality of the local public school district in which you reside?</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = .000 (df = 1) p < .05
Table 4.29 shows that we can conclude that Catholic and public school parents rate the overall quality of Catholic schools in the RCDA differently. The percentage of both groups’ rating Catholic schools as excellent is noteworthy. Catholic school parents rate Catholic schools as excellent in 33.3% of the cases where public school parents rate them as excellent in 13.5% of the cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your perception of the overall quality of Catholic schools in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany?</th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>Public School</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No basis for judgment</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = .000 (df = 4) p < .05

The findings from the questions about perception are significant. The percentages clearly indicate that public school parents rate their own public schools as Excellent (62.5%) at a much higher frequency than Catholic school parents rate their own Catholic schools as Excellent (33.3%). While the differences were significant between the two groups for the Excellent category, the results are similar if Excellent and Good are combined. In that instance, Catholic school parents rate Catholic schools as Good/Excellent (93.2%) while Public school parents rate public schools as Good/Excellent (91.5%). The Chi Square results shown in Table 4.29 show that an association exists between school type selected and rating of Catholic schools. Looking at the data in a different way, Catholic school parents rate public schools as Excellent (25.5%), while Public school parents rate Catholic schools as Excellent (13.5%). This perception of overall quality is a very important factor in better understanding how parents choose schools.
The significant findings from section one relates to factors that influence parents on school placement and the perceptions that parents have on schools. The factor of academic quality has been established as the most influential factor based on the survey data. The findings were statistically similar for eight of the twelve factors selected for this study. Catholic school parents were influenced to a greater extent by religious education and worship, disciplined environment, moral and character education, and single sex education than their public school counterparts. Lastly, public school parents’ perceptions of public schools is more favorable than Catholic school parents’ perceptions of Catholic schools, at least for those who participated in this study. These findings help us to better understand factors that influence how parents choose schools.

**SECTION 3 / RESEARCH QUESTION #3**

*What types and sources of information do Catholic parents rely on when considering schools for their children?*

The third research question explores the types and sources of information that Catholic parents rely on when considering schools for their children. I identified six sources of information and included an “other” option for respondents to choose from for both questions. Table 4.30 shows the responses to survey question 27 that asked where they obtained information about the selected school prior to deciding. In question 27, survey respondents could answer yes or no to each of the six sources of information that I presented as options created for the question. They also had an opportunity to share a source of information that was not presented as an option by selecting “other,” and then writing in their source of information. Respondents were not forced to answer each question, so the total response count is different for each source of information. The source most frequently selected was friends, family, colleagues,
and other parents with 86.2% of respondents indicating that these groups were consulted prior to
the decision being made.

The source least frequently selected was “group school visit,” which was selected by
15.4% of respondents in the affirmative and 84.6% indicating that this was not a source of
information prior to the decision. The 35 respondents who selected the option of “other”
providing a wide variety of responses. Parents being employees of the school was indicated in 12
of the 35 responses in this category and 4 of the 35 responses indicated that another family
member attended the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.30 Prior to choosing the school the respondent selected, where did they obtain information about the school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer Options</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends, family, colleagues, other parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information provided by the school (example, online and brochures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from a source other than the school (example, published ratings or test scores)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal school visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group school visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 402

skipped question 64

Survey question 28 asked respondents to identify which source of information was most
useful in making the decision for school placement. Respondents could only select one response
for this question. Table 4.31 shows the sources selected by the respondents in both numeric and
percentage forms. Consistent with the results from question 27, friends, family, colleagues, and
other parents was the source most frequently selected with 37.6% of respondents indicating this
source was “most useful.” Personal school visit was selected by 20.8% of respondents and
information from a source other than the school was selected by 22.5% of the respondents. These three sources account for 80.9% of the respondents’ first choice regarding sources of information. The group school visit (1.0%) and community event (0.5%) were the sources selected at the lowest frequencies. The 38 respondents who selected the option of “other” provided a wide variety of responses. Parents being employees of the school was indicated in 7 of the 38 responses in this category and 7 of the 38 responses indicated that another family member attended the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends, family, colleagues, other parents</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information provided by the school (example, online and brochures)</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from a source other than the school (example, published ratings or test scores)</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal school visit, group visit, or community event</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.31 Which source of information did the respondent find most useful in making the decision for this child?**

**Tests of Association for Sources of Information**

Survey question 28 asks both Catholic and public school parents to indicate which source of information they found to be most useful in deciding on school placement. Parents could respond with friends, family, colleagues, and or other parents, information provided by the school, information from a source other than the school, personal school visit, group school visit, community event, or other. Those who selected “other” could provide additional information. Due to smaller response counts in some of the categories I have decided to reorganize the responses into three categories for the purposes of a Chi-square test. Friends, family, colleagues,
and other parents has adequate responses for both Catholic and public school parents to remain as a category by itself. I consolidated personal school visit and group school visit into one category, “visiting the school.” I consolidated information provided by the school, information from a source other than the school, community event, and other into one category, “other sources of information.” The summative responses were analyzed in the previous section of this dissertation. The Chi Square test determined statistical significance between the groups in regard to the three categories established for the test. The distribution of the Catholic school and public school parents’ responses appears dissimilar in some of the categories. Table 4.32 shows the descriptive statistics and results of the Chi Square test.

| Table 4.32 Crosstabulation Table School Type * Source of Information that was Most Useful |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
|                                 | Catholic School | Public School   | Count            |
| Friends                        | 21.6%           | 40.4%           | 146              |
| and Family                     |                 |                 |                  |
| Visiting the School            | 70.6%           | 14.1%           | 83               |
| School                         |                 |                 |                  |
| Other                          | 7.8%            | 45.5%           | 156              |
| Sources of Information         |                 |                 |                  |
| Total                          | 100%            | 100%            | 385              |

Chi-Square = .000 (df = 2) p < .05

I conducted a Chi Square test to determine association between these variables, which concluded that statistically significant differences exist between Catholic and public school parents. The Catholic school parents relied heavily on visits to the school, with 70.6% of the responses indicating that this was the most useful source of information. Only 14.1% of public school parents indicated that a school visit was most useful. Public school parents indicated that
family, friends, colleagues, and other parents and other sources of information were similarly useful, which 85.9% of parents selecting these option. It is also noteworthy that 45% of public school parents indicated that other sources of information were most useful in comparison to only 7.8% of Catholic school parents selecting this source of information.

SECTION 4 / OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

The conclusion of the survey includes two open-ended questions to allow respondents to express their views in narrative form. The first open-ended question invites the respondent to share additional information relevant to reasons they selected the school they chose for their child. The second open-ended question asks the respondent to share additional information about the process they used to select the school. The responses touched upon a wide range of factors that influenced the respondents’ decisions. After reading through the responses several times I created 22 categories that followed similar themes throughout the narrative responses and organized them in Table 4.33. Some of the responses were relevant to more than one of the categories, with 16 of the 195 responses having more than one code. Many of the responses did not fit a category or did not contain information that was clear. In these cases, I categorized the response into the “Other” category, which included 40 or 21% of the responses.

Financial considerations were clearly the most frequently cited factor that influenced the respondents’ decisions, which included 44 (20.9%) responses. An example of one of these responses is provided below:

“My husband and I were educated in Catholic schools but the financial piece held up back from sending our three children.”

It is clear from both the closed-ended questions and this open-ended question that financial considerations play an important role in choosing schools.
The responses also touched upon the “Overall Quality” of the local public school, which included 27 (12.8%) responses. Many of these responses indicated that parents encountered difficulties considering paying for education when they had a free and excellent option close to their home. An example of one of these responses is provided below:

“Public school has great reputation for academics it's free so didn't look further.”

Some factors that were mentioned less frequently in the open-ended responses, but were not address in other areas of the study are worth inclusion in this analysis. One parent indicated a “Civic Duty” to support and have their child attend their local public school. “Social Life” and “Friends Attending” are also factors that do not surface elsewhere in the study, but could certainly influence a decision on school placement. The factor of finances is clearly the most significant influence on selecting a school based on the responses to question 29.
The second open-ended question asks the respondents to indicate if they wished to share any additional information about how they selected their child’s school. After reading through the responses several times I created 27 categories that followed similar themes throughout the narrative responses and organized them in Table 4.34. Many of the responses were relevant to more than one of the categories. I have categorized 154 factors from 137 responses. Many of the responses did not fit a category or did not contain information that was clear. In these cases,
I categorized the response into the “Other” category, which included 44 responses and represented 28.57% of the data.

The purpose of this question was to invite parents to tell the story about how factors influenced their decisions. The most frequently cited concept was the influence of the “Overall Quality” of the school that was selected on the decision. “Overall Quality” was referenced in 22 of the responses representing 14.29% of the data. “Financial Considerations” was once again factored into this question with 12 respondents representing 7.79% of the data discussing the influence it had on their decision. One respondent explains below how finances and overall quality influenced their decision making:

“We had a choice when selecting a school for our children between the public school in our area and a private catholic school (which I had actually attended). Our ultimate decision came down to the fact that it would have cost an awful lot to send our children through the catholic school system. We would have done that anyway, except for the fact that the public school system in our area was held in high regard, therefore they would be getting a good education either way, so we made the decision not to strap ourselves financially. Our children were enrolled in religious education classes at that parish, received their sacraments and attended mass there as well, but did not attend the school.”

Several of the respondents, 12 representing 7.79% of the data, discussed their decision to purchase a home in a high performing public school district to ensure that quality education was available to their children at no cost other than their local property taxes. School choice is often exercised by middle and upper-class parents by selecting where they live. In many of these cases, parents may have chosen their child’s high school before they were even born. One respondent explains below how the quality of the education of the local public school was an important factor in the family selecting a home to purchase:

“When looking for a home in which to live, much consideration was given to the quality of the public school and their programming. We would not have moved into a community with a poor school district.”
Table 4.34 Additional information respondents shared about how they selected a school (Open-Ended Responses in Categories).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Response Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Data</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Not Necessary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Size</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to Get Info</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Purchase</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Consideration</td>
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<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Options</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Quality</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Works at School</td>
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<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of Staff</td>
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<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
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<td>3.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Groups</td>
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<td>State Testing</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Student's Needs</td>
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<td>5.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
CONCLUSION

The results of the survey responses, analysis of output for individual questions, and tests of association have combined in addressing the first three research questions. The limited responses regarding school types other than Catholic and public schools have limited the scope of the analysis. However, the analysis on only two school types has allowed for a focused approach to the tests of association and interpretation of the results. The analysis of this data has allowed me to reach several conclusions. First, the vast majority of parents participating in this study have selected public schools for their children. Second, the respondents as a whole value the quality of a school’s academic program more than any other factor in this survey. Third, Catholic school parents are influenced to a greater extent by disciplined environments, religious education and worship, moral and character education, and single sex education than public school parents that participated in this study. Lastly, financial considerations are clearly influencing the school choices of Catholic parents. The open-ended responses allowed respondents to expand upon ideas presented in the first twenty-eight questions of the survey and to present unique ideas relevant to school choice that were not addressed in the survey questions. These important findings will allow researchers, administrators, and those interested in school choice to better understand how parents choose schools.
Chapter 5 / Implications, Recommendations, and Discussion Regarding Research Results

INTRODUCTION

The preceding four chapters have outlined the rationale and background behind my research questions, a review of literature relevant to the research questions, an explanation of my selected research methodology, and the results of my data collection with corresponding analysis. The analysis of the data collected from the survey provides detailed information to address the research questions. I have decided to organize the fifth and final chapter of this dissertation into four sections. First, I have provided commentary on the significant findings of the study. Second, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the study from my own perspective. Third, I will discuss the implications of the findings for Catholic schools, public schools, researchers, and public policy makers. Fourth, I outline areas that could potentially be explored in future research relevant to the topic of choosing schools. The chapter closes with a conclusion that include my final ideas relevant to the study.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The first significant finding of the study is that the clear majority of Catholic parents are selecting public schools assigned by their home address for their child’s high school education. The first chapter of this dissertation outlined the history of declining enrollment in Catholic schools nationally. The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) as reported that 5.2 million students attended 12,000 Catholic schools in 1960, 2.4 million students attended 7,955 Catholic schools during the 2003-2004 school year, and 1.9 million students attended 4,594 Catholic schools during the 2013-2014 school year. The trend indicates fewer Catholic schools and students attending these schools. These statistics serve as the primary justification for the first research question which asks what types of schools are Catholic parents selecting. In the
case of this research study, 83.3% of Catholic parents are selecting their local public school, 12% are selecting Catholic schools, and the remaining 4.7% are selecting other school types. These findings address research question #1.

The second significant finding of the study is that 8 of the 12 factors that I identified as school characteristics that could influence a parent or guardian’s decision on school placement were similar for parents and guardians who selected both Catholic and public schools. In identifying significant findings relevant to this study, I would consider all the data pertinent to these factors to be useful to school leaders and researchers. In order to test for associations between school types and factors, I selected a T-test to determine statistically significant differences in the means of the factors. The outcomes of this test identified four factors, single sex education, moral and character education, religious education and worship, and disciplined and orderly environment as having statistically significant differences between public and Catholic school parents. In all cases the means were higher for Catholic school families than public school families, indicating that these four factors had a greater influence on Catholic school families.

It is reasonable to expect that differences would exist in Catholic school parents’ decision making process because single sex education, religious education, and worship services are not available in public schools in this region. However, parents could select either public or Catholic schools if they were looking for a disciplined and orderly environment or moral and character education. It is noteworthy that the means in these last two factors exhibited statistically significant differences for the two groups. These findings are important in addressing the second research question because they indicate that parents that choose different school types are influenced by different factors. Individuals interested in studying or improving enrollment
trends in Catholic schools could benefit from knowing what factors influence Catholic parents to enroll in Catholic schools.

The third significant finding of the study is that the factor of financial considerations was discussed frequently in the open-ended responses and rated third amongst the factors in terms of influencing the decision on school placement. Table 4.34. categorizes the open-ended responses and indicates that 44 responses, representing 20.85% of all responses relate to financial considerations. Table 4.34 shows the mean ratings by Catholic school parents (2.9804) and public school parents (3.2845). Although the means are different, the T-test results indicated that no statistically significant difference exists between Catholic and public school parents who participated in this study. This factor is important to both Catholic and public school parents in a similar way. It is noteworthy that other factors are listed as more influential on decision making than financial considerations. The topic of financial considerations as influencing school choice brings on many questions beyond the scope of this study. Would more Catholic families register in Catholic schools if tuition was less expensive than it is right now? If Catholic schools were free how many public school students would enroll? The list of questions could continue, but the point is that financial considerations are taken into account when Catholic families are choosing schools.

The fourth significant finding of this study is the perceptions of public and Catholic schools. Survey questions 25 and 26 ask parents and guardians to rate their overall perception of Catholic and public schools. What has been clear from the responses is that public school parents rate their own public schools as excellent (62.5%) at a much higher frequency than Catholic school parents rate their own Catholic schools as excellent (33.3%). The differences in
the responses between Catholic and public school parents, from both questions, were also found to be statistically significant.

The fact that the majority of respondents reported living in suburban communities can be a factor that influenced these findings. I conducted a test of association that determined that both Catholic and public school families report living in suburban communities at similar rates. There are many high performing public school districts in Capital Region suburban communities. I find the data relevant to these two survey questions to be the most significant findings of the entire study. Research question two is seeking factors that influence how parents select schools. Parent and guardians’ perceptions of school quality can be categorized as a significant factor that influences decisions. This finding could be useful to researchers, policy makers, and administrators equally.

The fifth significant finding of this study is the sources of information that parents are finding most useful in choosing schools. Table 4.32. shows the results of a Chi Square test, which indicates that an association exists between school type selected and sources of information that were most useful in deciding about school placement. The results show that Catholic and public school parents reported different sources of information as most useful. “Personal School Visit” was selected by 40.4% of Catholic school parents as the source of information that was most useful. “Friends, Family, Colleagues, and Other Parents” was selected by 68.6% of public school parents. The findings indicate that public school families rely more heavily on word of mouth while Catholic school parents find a personal visit to the school as most useful. It is also important to recognize that beyond the most frequently reported sources of information, Catholic schools and public school parents seek information from different sources. This data was most useful in addressing research question #3.
The sixth significant finding relates to the sample of Catholic parents, who tend to be college graduates (84%) earning more than $80,000 per year (74%) and living in suburban communities (75%). These parents tend to be primarily concerned about a school's academic quality (87% report it as a concern with 72% as an extremely influential factor), which is understandable assuming that they aspire for their child to have similar adult characteristics (i.e., to be affluent college-educated suburbanites). They tend to view their local public schools as excellent (56%), and at least equal in overall quality to the RCDA schools. While not a major factor, many of these parents do report their decision-making process involved financial considerations (50% report it as a concern with 30% as an extremely influential factor). Based on these findings, Catholic school policy makers and RCDA officials need to promote Catholic schools as a high-quality, cost-effective alternative to suburban high schools if they want to attract such parents to their schools.

**STUDY LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS**

As the author of this study and the survey associated with it, I have identified three areas that I would have done differently if I had the opportunity to do so. First, it was a great disappointment that the majority of parents and guardians who participated in the study represented only two school types, Catholic and public schools. The surveys were administered in the cities of Troy, Schenectady, and Albany, which are the areas in the diocese that have the greatest number of school choices available to parents. In retrospect, I would have been more aggressive in seeking survey respondents in these three cities with the goal of obtaining a more diversified pool of respondents. Perhaps I could have been present at some of these targeted faith formation sites on evenings when the families were present with technology that would allow the parents and guardians to fill out the survey on site.
Second, the factor of “Financial Implications” was referenced frequently in the open-ended. The multiple-choice question relevant to financial implications only allowed respondents to rate the level of influence that finances had on their decision on school placement. The issue that was identified after the administration of the survey is that parents and guardians can cite financial implications in different ways. Families could have selected one type of nonpublic school over another nonpublic school because one is less expensive. A second family could have left a private school because of a financial crisis and enrolled in a public school. A third family may have never approached a nonpublic school because their financial situation did not allow for the additional expenses. The point is that the multiple-choice question presented to the respondents boxed them into a very narrow group of choices to communicate feedback on a very complex issue. The responses to the open-ended questions were very helpful in identifying the different interpretations. While it would be very difficult to structure a survey or develop questions to address this wide array of implications it is worthy of investigation. Perhaps a qualitative study is a better approach to provide some clarity on the financial implications of choosing school.

Third, a couple of survey questions became less relevant when I realized the characteristics of the respondent pool. Without significant responses from charter schools and religious non-Catholic schools the factors of “Single Sex Education” and “Religious Education and Worship” became less meaningful. If I knew from the beginning that I would be providing analysis on two school types I would have selected other factors that were more appropriate for Catholic and public schools. Nonetheless, these factors were helpful in identifying what was important to some of the survey respondents and did influence decisions based on the survey responses.
While I identified the limitation of parents and guardians from only two school types earlier in this section, I will also frame this dynamic as an unintended strength. Working with parents and guardians from only two school types allowed for a more focused approach in the analysis of the data. If the desired outcome occurred, with parents from eight school types and an “other” option, the task of providing focused data analysis for all school types would have been challenging. As it played out, the survey data and modified analysis plan allowed for comparisons of two groups of parents that can be categorized as meaningful.

The second strength of this study is the fact that survey respondents could clearly communicate their experiences and opinions through the survey instrument. The exceptions to this statement are the areas of the survey discussed in the limitations section of this chapter. Survey participants could communicate the school they chose, factors that influenced their decisions, and where they obtained information about the school they chose. In addition, survey respondents were provided with two open-ended questions if they wished to elaborate on any of the areas covered in the survey.

The third strength of the study is found in the narrative responses provided by the survey respondents. The responses added an entirely different dimension to the responses and brought the data to life. Ideas that were not included in the study were presented in this section and respondents cited circumstances that relate to their family that might be classified as unique in comparison to other families. While the responses are not included in the text of this dissertation, the summative charts and analysis help to address the research questions.
IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section of Chapter 5 is divided into three sections to coincide with the three entities referenced in the research question. It is my hope that this study will help researchers, policy makers, and school administrators in better understanding how parents choose schools.

Educational researchers will have interest in the study for four specific reasons. Although this study is not about Catholic school enrollment, much of the data relates to Catholic parents choosing schools. I believe that the next significant wave of research relevant to Catholic school education will relate to enrollment trends and strategic reorganization of Catholic school systems to address the needs of the schools. Research will be an important component to that conversation and this study could be a significant piece of the puzzle. The enrollment trends outlined in Chapter 1 (Charts 1.1. and 1.2.) indicate declining enrollment locally and on the national stage over the past five decades. One possible reason for this trend is the majority of Catholic parents are not choosing Catholic schools for their children. The results of this survey support that claim with 88% of survey respondents indicating that they selected a school other than a Catholic school for their child’s high school education. The combination of the factors that influenced the decision on school placement and where parents obtained information about the school will assist researchers in bettering understanding why Catholic parents are selecting the schools to which they are sending their children.

This study provides researchers with information about why Catholic parents are choosing the school they select for their child. The findings relevant to the factors, perceptions, sources of information, and opinions all combine to provide researchers with unique information about how Catholic parents choose schools. One example of an important finding is the universal emphasis on the quality of a school’s academic program influence on decision making.
If Catholic school enrollment is a national issue and question, the natural progression in the world of educational research would be a study asking why Catholic parents do not select Catholic schools. A study framed around this research question would carry the advancements made by this study to the next level.

Much of this study was modeled on and rooted in the work of Schneider, Marschall, and Teske (2000). In their book, *Choosing Schools: Consumer Choice and the Quality of American Schools*, the researchers outline their study of how parents choose schools. A significant portion of the study was devoted to how school characteristics influence parents’ decisions and how parents prioritize those characteristics. The researchers identified 11 characteristics of schools for the purposes of the study which included: teacher quality, high test scores, class size, special programs, discipline, values, same race, economic background, diversity, location, and safety. The factors or characteristics selected for this dissertation were modified to better fit the research questions and frame of the study. However, it could be concluded that this study took the ideas from the Schneider, Marschall, and Teske (2000) survey in a different direction. It also created a new path in research relevant to choosing schools by isolating the concept to one religious group within a participant pool. This study has demonstrated that those who choose a religious school may place an emphasis on factors that are less important or not present in the public school world. Future studies could explore this concept with other religions. This base of research established in this study can now serve a starting point for similar research. A researcher could establish a study exploring how parents of different faith traditions select schools for their children.

The second research question will add to the established research literature on how parents choose schools. This question calls for an analysis of factors or school characteristics
that potentially influence a parent or guardian’s decision on school placement. This data will be of interest to researchers interested in school choice because it reflects the priorities of parents when selecting schools. The fact that I could compare the results of those who selected public and Catholic schools should be of interest as well. The similarities and differences on levels of influence for these factors also reflect areas in which the school types are strong or weak. These factors should not only be of interest of researchers interested in non-public schools. With the emergence of public school choice programs over the past thirty years schools in the public sector now have a vested interest in how parents choose schools. Parents who select charter schools over traditional public schools divert funding from the district they are assigned based on their residential address to the charter school. In this example both the public school and charter school have a financial interest in how parents are selecting schools and factors that influence their decisions. Researchers can apply the principles of this study to the larger question of how parents choose schools.

Survey questions 25 and 26 focus on the perception of parents and guardians on the overall quality of both Catholic and public schools are likely to be of greatest interest to school choice researchers. While both Catholic school and public school parents and guardians rated the school type that they choose as higher than the other option, Public school parents and guardians rated public schools more favorably than Catholic school parents and guardians rated Catholic schools. The results from these questions should cause researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to consider further exploring parent perceptions of the overall quality of schools. While this has proven to be useful information in this specific study, great opportunity exists for researchers to explore perception issues in many areas of education. Potential studies could emerge regarding higher education, urban areas with multiple school options, prep schools, and
on-line learning. I will elaborate on some of these ideas in the future research section of this chapter.

Policy makers in public and Catholic schools could include a wide array of groups. In some cases, such as the New York State Education Department (NYSED), the single entity could be interested in both types of schools. In exploring ways in which this study would be of interest to policy makers I have identified three main areas that would relate to the work of policy makers.

First, if the current trend of fewer Catholic parents selecting Catholic schools continues, public schools need to prepare for increased enrollments. In this scenario both civic and public school leaders need to prepare for additional students which will require additional resources to educate. The additional resources include staffing, funding, and additional infrastructure. The first chapter of this dissertation reported enrollment data that showed a decline over a fifty year period. In isolating the data from 2003-2004 to 2013-2014, Catholic schools realized a 509,674 reduction in student enrollment nationally and 3,889 locally in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. While this is obviously of concern to Catholic school advocates, it also poses a challenge to public schools and civic leaders. Catholic school parents and guardians in New York pay both property taxes to subsidize local public school education and tuition at their Catholic school. When student populations shift from private to public schools the need arises to provide services and education to these students who enroll in public schools without any additional funding. It is fair to conclude that an additional 509,674 students in public schools without additional funding sources could cause stress on public school resources and infrastructure. This would be of great concern to these policy makers.
The findings of this study should be of great interest to officials who are policy makers in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany and national Catholic school officials. The national officials would include groups like the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). With the enrollment trends framed as they are in this study, these officials will have interest in the schools that Catholic families are choosing, factors that influence the decision for school placement, and where parents are obtaining information about schools that they choose. This study allows officials that are looking at some of the issues that relate to Catholic schools from a unique vantage point to hear directly from parents and guardians about what is important to them when selecting schools. These policy makers could utilize this research in shaping policy and strategic planning to address enrollment issues in Catholic schools.

It was necessary that I requested assistance from those responsible for faith formation and youth ministry programs in the RCDA. I received a great deal of cooperation from administrators at the diocesan and parish levels in administering the survey. These administrators are the people who granted me access to the parents and guardians that participated in the study. Many of these administrators requested that I share the results from the study when I concluded for use in shaping policy in their programs. Apparently, faith formation and youth ministry administrators are also interested in what parents’ value in education. In particular, they are interested in factors that influenced parental decisions on school placement. The administrators who spoke with me indicated that they could better develop programs that families would value to a greater extend if they had access to the results from this study.

The last group of individuals that I will include in this section is local school leaders. It should be noted that the term local school leaders could have different meaning depending upon
the school type we are discussing. School leaders could include school building leaders, school board members, and school district leaders. I have identified four areas that could be categorized as implications for local school leaders.

First, with the development of the school choice movement, particularly over the last thirty years, all school leaders have had to consider how parents perceive their schools. In many cases, school leaders have also been burdened with the task of marketing their schools. School leaders that preside over schools, public or private, that exist in areas that have several educational choices available to them are competing for students. Non-public school leaders are well acquainted with this concept. They must constantly be concerned with parent perception and marketing in order to manage enrollment. Although this is a newer concept for public school leaders, they are now concerned with losing students and funding to other options families have like charter schools. The outcomes of this study provide school leaders with valuable information about how parents choose schools, factors that influence parents’ decisions, and where parents obtain information about schools. These outcomes could be very useful for local school leaders if they wish to better understand how these decisions are made and how parents perceive their school type.

Second, school leaders are typically engaged with at least one school improvement strategic plan. While many of these planning processes include a component of self-study that is guided with a tool specifically designed for the process, many seek evidence from outside sources as indicators. This study could guide discussions in public and Catholic schools as to reasons why parents selected a particular school type. In addition, the study can assist leaders by informing them of the criteria that parents explore to gain information about the school. Lastly, the study can help leaders to understand the overall quality of schools. In the case of strategic
planning, the information from this study can provide a benchmark of information for schools to compare their own communities.

In order to address the last two implications of the findings of this study I have identified two areas that would be of interest to Catholic school leaders and public school leaders individually. Two of the school factors, “Single-Sex Education” and “Religious Education and Worship,” demonstrated statistically significant differences in the means when comparing Catholic and public school parents and guardians. This was indicated by the T-test discussed in Chapter 4. Catholic school parents and guardians indicated that "Character and Moral Education" and "Disciplined and Orderly Environment" were more influential on their decision on school placement than public school parents and guardians. While this outcome is not the result of an analysis of programs or school characteristics in public or Catholic schools, it does represent the reasons that parents have selected a school. Public school leaders could use this information to consider areas in which they can develop these factors and inform parents of great things that are already in place. In terms of Catholic school leaders, the outcomes related to the questions on perceptions of Catholic schools and public schools should be noteworthy. The fact that public school parents rate their own schools at a higher frequency of "Excellent" should be a discussion starter for Catholic school leaders. Efforts to improve the perception of families already in the Catholic school system could assist with enrollment objects to attract those that are currently not in the system.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The experience of researching this topic, developing a study, conducting the study, and analyzing the results has allowed me to gain a unique perspective on this specific area of school choice. As I worked through the process of completing this dissertation ideas for new studies
surfaced. I have developed five tangible areas that relate to this study and could transform into legitimate research studies in the future.

One of the shortcomings of this study was the lack of participation from families that selected schools other than Catholic or public schools. The school types that were represented at lower rates were home school, private non-religious, private school affiliated with a religion other than Catholic, public charter school, public magnet school, and virtual school. It is very possible that these schools were proportionally represented in an accurate manner through this study. A potential new study could target areas that geographically have many or all of these options available to Catholic parents such as the City of Albany. The recruitment of the participants could strategically target the groups that were represented in lower numbers in this study. The research questions for this new study could be very similar for most of the groups. However, the homeschooled and virtual education groups could require questions worded in different ways or questions more appropriate to their unique situation. The decision to homeschool or educate virtually, in the opinion of this researcher, may include different factors that influence the decision on school placement as well as sources of information relevant to this model of education.

The second area of potential research stemming from this study is to explore why Catholic parents do not select Catholic schools. The aims and objectives of this study have been to explore reasons for selecting a school. Soliciting information on why parents do not consider or select a certain school type is a different study altogether. A study, specifically designed for Catholic parents whom do not select Catholic school could be designed to gather the data. As discussed earlier, both diocesan officials and local Catholic school leaders could use the data from this survey in the creation of marketing plans for Catholic schools. A study that explored
why Catholic parents were not selecting Catholic schools could assist diocesan and school leaders with quality improvement and strategic planning processes. A more in-depth analysis of the financial considerations would be an important component to this study.

One area of the data that I found to be important, and was also found to have statistical significance, was the questions that related to perceptions of overall quality of public and Catholic schools. The potential study that could stem from this outcome could dig a little deeper on why perceptions of quality were reported as they were. A similar candidate pool could be recruited and asked to rate their perceptions in various areas of a given school’s program. It would be useful to researchers, policy makers, and school leaders to better understand parents’ perceptions in more specific areas of each school type. Perhaps different types of scales and responses could be made available to parents and guardians to allow for a greater range of statistical tests and measurements. Now that perceptions of quality have been identified as different for the two school types included in this study the potential to take this question to the next level appears to be a prudent next step. Of the five areas of potential future research presented in this section I feel this is the most important area to explore that will produce the most useful data for those interested in this area of school choice.

This study targeted parents and guardians who had placed their children in grades 10-12 into a high school within the geographic boundaries of the RCDA. The entire study was created with the idea the decision being analyzed related to middle school parents and guardians placing their child into a high school. It is also important to understand how parents and guardians choose an elementary school for their children. A similarly structured survey could be utilized with some different characteristics and factors that would be more appropriate for elementary school placement. One could assume that parents and guardians seeking quality kindergarten
programs while their child is four years old may have different priorities than that of a parent or guardian seeking 9th grade placement for their thirteen-year-old child. Nonetheless, the outcomes of a survey as described could assist researchers, policy makers, and school leaders in similar ways to this study.

While this study does examine how parents choose schools, it does not address parental aspirations for their children. Parental aspirations for children could include a wide variety of personal characteristics and accomplishments. A future study could analyze how parent aspirations for their children can be associated with placement in a certain school type or other types of educational decisions. In a conceptual framework similar to this study, the research could compare parent aspirations and decision making based on the type of school they placed their child in.

Future studies could also relate to additional analyses of the data collected for this study. For example, a factor analysis would allow for an investigation into various considerations relate to each other to develop profiles of different types of parents. Categorizing parents into groups, such as those “focused on academics” verses “those focused on social issues” would allow for analysis not included in this study. In addition, other multivariate analyses, such as logistic regression, would allow for analysis of more than one factor at a time.

**CONCLUSION**

The objectives of this study were to provide results that advance this area of school choice research, provide educational policy makers with useful data to guide important decisions, and inform school leaders with legitimate research to guide decisions relevant to how parents choose different types of schools. While shortcomings of the study did surface throughout the process, the study did meet these objectives. Data and analysis from this study reveal important
findings about contemporary issues of school choice, factors that influence decisions, and where individuals obtain information about schools. These three areas all have a place in the body of literature that relates to school choice. While this concluding paragraph does signify the end of this study and dissertation, it is not the finish line. The ideas outlined in the potential future studies section of this document are of great interest to this researcher. The design of a conceptual framework and development of research questions for a new study are my next steps in better understanding how parents and guardians choose schools.
Bibliography


Fairlie, Robert. 2006. *Racial Segregation and the Private / Public School Choice*, University of California, Santa Cruz.


Table 206.10


December 16, 2016

Mr. Christopher Bott
Catholic Central High School
625 Seventh Avenue
Troy, NY 12182

Dear Mr. Bott:

Thank you for meeting with me on December 13, 2016 to review the research study you have proposed in order to finalize your doctoral dissertation. It is my understanding that the proposed project has been approved by the doctoral candidacy board at the University at Albany.

In your research you intend to focus on the parents of Catholic students in grades 10 – 11 and possibly 12, inquiring of them the following questions:

1) In what types of schools are children of Catholic parents in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany enrolled?
2) What factors contribute to Catholic parents’ selection of schools for their children?
3) What types and sources of information do Catholic parents rely on when considering schools for their children?
4) What are the implications of the research findings for researchers, policymakers and school leaders?

You have requested permission from the Diocese to contact pastors and parish life directors to notify them of your project and to request permission to survey parents through the assistance of catechetical leaders.

I am grateful to learn of this project and have brought it to the attention of Bishop Scharfenberger who is quite interested in it as well. He requests that you include the parents of home schooling parents in your survey.

Permission is granted to pursue your inquiries with parish leaders, personnel and parishioners as you propose. I look forward to learning what you discover.

May you enjoy a blessed Christmas and holy new year.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Simcoe
Diocesan Chancellor
Director, Catholic Faith Formation and Education

CC: Very Rev. Donald Rutherford, Very Rev. Robert Longobucco; Mr. Giovanni Virgiglio

We are God’s people sharing a responsibility to witness God’s unconditional love and to bring Christ’s healing presence to our world.
Appendix B
Cover Letter to Pastors and Parish Life Directors

February 1, 2017

Dear ___________________

My name is Christopher Bott and I serve as the Principal at Catholic Central High School, located in Troy, NY. I am pursuing a doctoral degree from the State University of New York at Albany in Educational Policy and Leadership and wish to ask for your assistance in the collection of data for my doctoral dissertation.

The objective of my dissertation is to examine how parents choose schools for their child(ren) in our Diocese. The parents I am specifically interested in surveying reside in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany and have a child or children in grades 10-12 enrolled in a Catholic Parish Faith Formation / Youth Ministry Program. I aim to learn about the different factors that shape parents’ decisions to place their child or children in a particular school.

I would like to gain your permission to survey parents that have children enrolled in your faith formation / youth ministry program. I have gained approval from Elizabeth Simcoe to conduct this survey and included a copy of her approval letter in this packet for your review. My survey meets all State University of New York standards related to surveys and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) at the University at Albany. The supervisory professors for my study are Dr. Kathryn Schiller (kschiller@albany.edu) and Dr. Sandra Vergari (svergari@albany.edu).

If you authorize the administration of the survey in your parish I intend to ask the person responsible for your faith formation / youth ministry program to send an email (which I will provide to them) to your parents which explains the study and provides a link to the survey for parents. A week after this email is sent, I will ask them to send a second reminder email (which I will provide to them). The survey will be open for three weeks to your parents. In the event your parish does not have email capabilities with your faith formation families, I will provide paper copies of the survey and reminder.

I have enclosed a simple form for you to complete indicating your ability to assist me and a stamped envelope to return it in. Feel free to contact me at 518-470-2453 or cbott@albany.edu if you have any questions. I thank you in advance for your consideration and eagerly await your response.

Sincerely,

Christopher Bott
CCHS Principal and University at Albany Doctoral Student
Pastor and Parish Life Director  
Consent Form

Please complete this form and return it in the addressed and stamped envelope that has been included in this packet.

Select one of the following:

________ I grant permission to Christopher Bott to survey parents who are members of our parish.

________ I do not grant permission to Christopher Bott to survey parents who are members of our parish.

Name of the person I should work with at the Parish: _________________________________

Their Phone Number: __________________________________________

Their Email Address: __________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
Parish Name

_____________________________________________________________________
Administrator or Pastor’s Name (Printed)

_____________________________________________________________________
Signature

_____________________________________________________________________
Date
Appendix C
Cover Letter or Email Sent to Parents (Potential Research Participants)

February 8, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians:

My name is Christopher Bott and I serve as the Principal at Catholic Central High School, located in Troy, NY. I am pursuing a doctoral degree from the State University of New York at Albany in Educational Policy and Leadership. I am in the process of writing my dissertation and wish to ask you to participate in my study by completing a brief survey.

The objective of my dissertation is to examine how Catholic parents choose schools for their child(ren) in our diocese. The parents I am specifically interested in surveying reside in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, have a child or children enrolled in grades 10-12 in a school or homeschool, and are also enrolled a Catholic Parish Faith Formation / Youth Ministry program. I aim to learn about the different factors that shape parents’ decisions to place their child or children in a particular school.

Your responses will be confidential. The survey meets all State University of New York standards related to surveys and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) at the University at Albany. The study has also been approved by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. The online survey instrument is located at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BottDissertationSurvey

Feel free to contact me at cbott@albany.edu if you have any questions regarding the survey. The supervisory professors for my study are Dr. Kathryn Schiller kschiller@albany.edu and Dr. Sandra Vergari svergari@albany.edu.

I thank you in advance for your participation and assistance.

Sincerely,
Christopher Bott
CCHS Principal and University at Albany Doctoral Student
Appendix D

Reminder letter to parents who are potential research participants

Date

Parents
Address 1
Address 2

Dear __________________:

My name is Christopher Bott and I serve as the Principal at Catholic Central High School, located in Troy, NY. Last week you should have received either an email or paper invitation to participate in a study I am conducting regarding how parents choose schools for their child(ren) in our Diocese. The study will conclude in one week and I would like to ask for you to consider participating if you have not done so already.

As a reminder, your responses will be confidential. The survey meets all State University of New York standards related to surveys and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) at the University at Albany. The online survey instrument is located at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BottDissertationSurvey

A paper copy can be obtained by emailing me at cbott@cchstroy.org. If you complete the paper version of the survey please return it to your parish administrator. Feel free to contact me at my email address if you have any questions regarding the survey. The supervisory professors for my study are Dr. Kathryn Schiller (kschiller@albany.edu) and Dr. Sandra Vergari (svergari@albany.edu).

I thank you in advance for your participation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Christopher Bott
CCHS Principal and University at Albany Doctoral Student
Appendix E
Survey Instrument

Mr. Bott Dissertation

Welcome to My Survey

Informed Consent

The title of this study is: Faith, Education, and Choice: A Study of the Educational Choices of Catholic Parents in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, N.Y.

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a parent or guardian who has made a decision regarding the placement of your child(ren) in a school within the geographic boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany and have a child enrolled in a Catholic parish faith formation program. The objective of my dissertation research is to examine how parents choose schools for their children in our Diocese. I am aiming to learn about the different factors that shape parents’ decisions to place their child or children in a particular school. You are being asked to participate in this study because you (1) are a parent or guardian who has made a decision regarding the placement of your child or children in a school within the geographic boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany (RCDA), (2) have a child enrolled in a Catholic parish faith formation program, (3) and your child is enrolled in the range of grades 10 – 12. If you have multiple children enrolled in this grade range, please answer the questions as they relate to the youngest child enrolled in grades 10-12.

This study is being done to for my University at Albany (SUNY) graduate student dissertation work. The purpose of the study is to increase our understanding of parental decision making regarding the placement of children in schools.

Participants will be asked to complete a survey that consists of 30 questions regarding parental decision making regarding the placement of children in schools.

It may take about 15-20 minutes to complete the survey.

There are no known risks for research participants. The survey will require approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. In the event that a participant experiences any harm, distress, embarrassment, or a breach of confidentiality, they should contact Christopher Bott at cbott@albany.edu. If the participant wishes to contact someone other than Christopher Bott, they should contact the supervisory professors, Dr. Kathryn Schiller (kschiller@albany.edu) and/or Dr. Sandra Vergari (svergari@albany.edu).

You will be providing valuable information to the body of research on how parents choose schools. There does not appear to be any direct benefit to you other than contributing to a study that will help society to better understand issues relevant to school choice. Schools, educational policy makers, and educators will learn from the findings of this study. Upon completion of the study, I would be pleased to send you the research report if you wish to review the results.
There are no payments or fees for participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. In addition, the Institutional Review Board and SUNY at Albany professors responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Even after you agree to participate in the research, you may decide to leave the study at any time.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. The supervisory professors are Dr. Kathryn Schiller (kshiller@albany.edu) and Dr. Sandra Vergari (svergari@albany.edu). I can be reached at (cbott@albany.edu).

Research at the University Albany involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office for Pre-Award and Compliance Services at 1-866-857-5459 or hsoncerns@albany.edu.

* Do you agree to the above terms? By clicking Yes, you consent that you are willing to answer the questions in this survey.

☐ Yes
☐ No
You are being asked to participate in this study because you (1) are a parent or guardian who has made a decision regarding the placement of your child or children in a school within the geographic boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany (RCDA), (2) have a child enrolled in a Catholic parish faith formation program, (3) and your child is enrolled in the range of grades 10 – 12. If you have multiple children enrolled in this grade range, please answer the questions as they relate to the youngest child enrolled in grades 10-12. The objective of my dissertation is to examine how parents choose schools for their children in our Diocese. I am aiming to learn about the different factors that shape parents’ decisions to place their child or children in a particular school. Your responses will be confidential. The survey meets all State University of New York standards related to surveys and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) at the University at Albany.

1. type(s) of schools did you attend in grades Kindergarten through 12th Grade? (Check all that apply)

☐ Home School
☐ Private Catholic School
☐ Private Non-Religious
☐ Private School Affiliated with a Religion other than Catholic
☐ Public Charter School
☐ Public Magnet School
☐ Public School Assigned Based on Residential Attendance Zones
☐ Virtual Education
☐ Other (please specify)
2. What is your family's household income?
   - Less than $20,000
   - $20,000 to under $50,000
   - $50,000 to under $80,000
   - $80,000 to under $110,000
   - $110,000 or more
   - Prefer not to answer

3. How would you describe your attendance at Roman Catholic Church services?
   - I attend weekly
   - I attend most weekends
   - I attend on holidays and special occasions
   - I do not attend

4. What is your level of education?
   - High School
   - Some College
   - Associate's Degree
   - Bachelor's Degree
   - Graduate Degree

5. I would describe the community in which I reside as _________.
   - Urban
   - Suburban
   - Rural
6. How many children ages birth – 18 years old reside in your home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+
Questions 7-30 relate to the placement of your child, who is currently enrolled in grades 10-12, into a school and factors that influenced that decision. If you have multiple children enrolled in grades 10 – 12 please answer the questions as they relate to the youngest child enrolled in grades 10-12.

7. What type of school does your child attend?
   - Home School
   - Private Catholic School
   - Private Non-Religious
   - Private School Affiliated with a Religion other than Catholic
   - Public Charter School
   - Public Magnet School
   - Public School Assigned Based on Residential Attendance Zones
   - Virtual School
   - Other (please specify)

8. Has your child attended this type of school since Kindergarten?
   - Yes
   - No

9. Who had the greatest influence on the decision to send your child to this school?
   - Mother
   - Father
   - Mother and Father Equally
   - Student
   - Student and Parents Equally
   - Other (please specify)
10. When you were selecting this child's school, how many schools did you consider?

☐ Only the school selected
☐ 2 schools
☐ 3 schools
☐ 4 or more schools

11. What is the distance between your home and the school most recently selected for this child?

☐ Less than 5 miles
☐ 5 miles to under 10 miles
☐ 10 miles to under 15 miles
☐ 15 miles or more
12. Below are some factors that may have shaped your decision to select a particular school for your child. Please select all that contributed to the selection of a school for your child.

☐ Quality of academic program
☐ Drive time between home and school
☐ Family members previously attended the school
☐ Single sex education
☐ Financial Considerations
☐ School safety
☐ Moral and character education
☐ Religious education and worship
☐ Discipline and orderly environment
☐ The school has a good reputation (friends, family, colleagues, other Parents)
☐ Services provided at the school address the special needs of this child
☐ Quality of the school’s athletic program

Rate the following school characteristics in terms of the extent to which the factor influenced your decision in selecting your school of choice.

13. Quality of academic program
   ☐ Extremely influential
   ☐ Moderately influential
   ☐ Somewhat influential
   ☐ Slightly influential
   ☐ Not at all influential
14. Drive time between home and school
   - Extremely influential
   - Moderately influential
   - Somewhat influential
   - Slightly influential
   - Not at all influential

15. Family member previously attended the school
   - Extremely influential
   - Moderately influential
   - Somewhat influential
   - Slightly influential
   - Not at all influential

16. Single sex education
   - Extremely influential
   - Moderately influential
   - Somewhat influential
   - Slightly influential
   - Not at all influential

17. Financial Considerations
   - Extremely influential
   - Moderately influential
   - Somewhat influential
   - Slightly influential
   - Not at all influential
18. School Safety
- Extremely Influential
- Moderately Influential
- Somewhat Influential
- Slightly Influential
- Not at all Influential

19. Moral and character education
- Extremely Influential
- Moderately Influential
- Somewhat Influential
- Slightly Influential
- Not at all Influential

20. Religious education and worship
- Extremely Influential
- Moderately Influential
- Somewhat Influential
- Slightly Influential
- Not at all Influential

21. Disciplined and orderly environment
- Extremely Influential
- Moderately Influential
- Somewhat Influential
- Slightly Influential
- Not at all Influential
22. The school has a good reputation (friends, family, colleagues, other parents)
   - Extremely Influential
   - Moderately Influential
   - Somewhat Influential
   - Slightly Influential
   - Not at all Influential

23. Services provided at the school address the special needs of this child
   - Extremely Influential
   - Moderately Influential
   - Somewhat Influential
   - Slightly Influential
   - Not at all Influential

24. Quality of the school’s athletic program
   - Extremely Influential
   - Moderately Influential
   - Somewhat Influential
   - Slightly Influential
   - Not at all Influential
25. What is your perception of the overall quality of the local public school district in which you reside?
   ○ Excellent
   ○ Good
   ○ Fair
   ○ Poor
   ○ No basis for judgment

26. What is your perception of the overall quality of Catholic schools in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany?
   ○ Excellent
   ○ Good
   ○ Fair
   ○ Poor
   ○ No basis for judgment
27. Prior to choosing the school you selected, where did you obtain information about the school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends, family, colleagues, other parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information provided by the school (example, online and brochures)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from a source other than the school (example, published ratings or test scores)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal school visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group school visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)

28. Which source of information did you find most useful in making the decision for this child?

- [ ] Friends, family, colleagues, other parents
- [ ] Information provided by the school (example, online and brochures)
- [ ] Information from a source other than the school (example, published ratings or test scores)
- [ ] Personal school visit
- [ ] Group school visit
- [ ] Community event
- [ ] Other (please specify)
29. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your reasons for selecting a school?

30. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the process you used for selecting your child’s school?
Survey Monkey Inc.
www.surveymonkey.com
For questions, visit our Help Center
help.surveymonkey.com

Re: Permission to Conduct Research Using Survey Monkey

To whom it may concern:

This letter is being produced in response to a request by a student at your institution who wishes to conduct a survey using Survey Monkey in order to support their research. The student has indicated that they require a letter from Survey Monkey granting them permission to do this. Please accept this letter as evidence of such permission. Students are permitted to conduct research via the Survey Monkey platform provided that they abide by our Terms of Use, a copy of which is available on our website.

Survey Monkey is a self-serve survey platform on which our users can, by themselves, create, deploy and analyze surveys through an online interface. We have users in many different industries who use surveys for many different purposes. One of our most common use cases is students and other types of researchers using our online tools to conduct academic research. If you have any questions about this letter, please contact us through our Help Center at help.surveymonkey.com.

Sincerely,
Survey Monkey Inc.