

# A Case Study Of The Perceptions Of Principals Of Voucher Eligible High Schools In Florida

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A CASE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS OF VOUCHER  
ELIGIBLE HIGH SCHOOLS IN FLORIDA

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
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## ABSTRACT

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 has prompted a series of attempts to revise the educational system's outcomes. Legislative and executive reform bills have resulted in Educational Vouchers being a prime source of reform. A case study of the perceptions of public high school principals in Florida that are at Voucher Eligible high schools to those perceptions of principals at schools graded 'A' as of the 2002-03 academic school year was the focus of this study. Four public high school principals from two Florida districts were used in this study. Two schools were identified as Voucher Eligible and graded "F" and two were examples of best practices or graded "A" or "B". Analyzed data identified recurring patterns between the four schools.

Both advocates and detractors view of vouchers would be given a full historical review. Included in the research were the four major educational criteria of educational vouchers that were used in voucher development policy. The three major components of Florida's Voucher Programs, along with the No Child Left Behind Act were examined along with accountability measures and parent/student rights. The data revealed that there was a positive relationship between the minority rate of a school and the school's grade. Data also revealed that it would be beneficial for all schools and communities to work together to address the reading level issue as these programs have shown a positive relationship between the overall reading level and the school's grade.

This work is dedicated to my wife, Sally Gene Davis – Bolen, for her continuous support and dedication. To my parents, Jack Charles and June Ruth Busby Bolen for their encouragement and belief in me throughout my education. Finally, to all of my children, Nichole Suzanne Hammond, Timothy Grant Cotteleer, Brianna Hope Cotteleer, Elizabeth Anne Bolen, and the littlest one of them all, my granddaughter, Taylor Nichole Tobin.

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I would also like to thank the principals who took time out of their busy schedules to answer my questions about their current positions and their perceptions on the issue of school vouchers and how school voucher policies are effecting education today and might potentially effect education in the future. I could not have completed my research without their detailed insight.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM AND DESIGN.....	1
Introduction .....	1
Significance of the Study .....	4
Problem Statement .....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Delimitations .....	7
Assumptions .....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Methodology .....	9
Organization of the Study .....	10
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	12
Introduction .....	12
History of Voucher Programs.....	14
Advocates of Voucher Programs .....	19
Detractors of Voucher Programs.....	21
Four Major Educational Criteria .....	24
Freedom to Choose.....	25
Productive Efficiency .....	25
Equity .....	26
Social Cohesion.....	27

Policy Instruments.....	27
Finance.....	28
Regulation .....	28
Support Services .....	29
Florida’s Voucher Programs .....	32
Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP).....	34
McKay Scholarship.....	37
Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program.....	39
Features of Voucher Programs.....	40
Impact of No Child Left Behind .....	43
Impact of Voucher Programs in Florida.....	44
Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) on Low Performing Public Schools .....	44
McKay Scholarships .....	47
Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program.....	49
Effects of Voucher Programs in Florida .....	50
Effect of Vouchers on Student Achievement .....	50
Other Effects of the Threat of Vouchers .....	53
Accountability Measures of Voucher Programs .....	56
Monitoring.....	56
Enforcement.....	57
Parent and Student Rights .....	59



Summary .....	59
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	62
Introduction .....	62
Research Questions .....	64
Sample and Site Selection .....	64
Limitations of the Study .....	66
Data Collection .....	69
Data Analysis .....	71
Summary .....	74
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA .....	76
Introduction .....	76
Research Question 1 .....	79
Perception .....	79
Major Challenges .....	83
Motivated Teachers .....	86
Current Challenges and Successes .....	90
Research Question 2 .....	94
Perception .....	94
Major Challenges .....	95
Motivated Teachers .....	97
Current Challenges and Successes .....	99
Research Question 3 .....	101

Curriculum .....	101
Human Resources.....	108
Staff Development.....	113
Parental Involvement.....	120
Budgeting .....	124
Research Question 4 .....	127
Florida’s A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships .....	127
Role of FCAT.....	131
Educational Improvement.....	134
Research Question 5 .....	137
Florida’s A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships .....	137
Role of FCAT.....	140
Educational Improvement.....	141
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	144
Purpose Statement .....	144
Methodology .....	144
Population and Sample .....	144
Instrumentation.....	146
Data Analysis.....	147
Summary of the Findings .....	148
Research Question 1 .....	148
Research Question 2.....	150

Research Question 3.....	153
Research Question 4.....	159
Research Question 5.....	162
Conclusions .....	164
Implications and Recommendations for Practice .....	169
Recommendations for Future Research .....	174
APPENDIX A IRB HUMAN SUBJECTS PERMISSION LETTER .....	176
APPENDIX B PRINCIPAL LETTER .....	178
APPENDIX C VOUCHER ELIGIBLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS.....	180
APPENDIX D NON-VOUCHER SCHOOL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS.....	183
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	187

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Distribution of Schools by Grade and Year .....	33
Table 2 Florida 2005 Voucher and Tax Credit Programs .....	41
Table 3 Summary of Principal Participants (2005-2006) .....	65
Table 4 Summary of School Grades Since 2001-2002.....	68
Table 5 Summary of Research Questions and Analysis Procedure .....	74
Table 6 Summary of School Characteristics (2002-2003) .....	78
Table 7 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on School Grade .....	82
Table 8 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Major Challenges .....	85
Table 9 Summary of Principals' Perceptions of Motivated Teachers.....	89
Table 10 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Current Challenges and Successes .....	93
Table 11 Summary of Curriculum Issues.....	108
Table 12 Summary of Human Resource Issue .....	112
Table 13 Summary of Staff Development Issue .....	119
Table 14 Summary of Parent Involvement Issue .....	124
Table 15 Summary of Budgeting Issue.....	126
Table 16 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Florida's A+ Plan .....	130
Table 17 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on the Role of FCAT.....	133
Table 18 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Educational Improvements..	136

## CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM AND DESIGN

### Introduction

The election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980 began a new era in government and ultimately in education. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 marked the beginning of an education reform movement for the American public. Members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1984) began their report:

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself (p. 1).

Following the commission's report, *A Nation at Risk* inspired a movement towards national standards and increased accountability in education. The push towards further education reform continued under the leadership of former President Bill Clinton. As Governor of Arkansas, Mr. Clinton helped develop Goals 2000 (1994). Goals 2000 proposed a fundamental change to the entire educational system by recommending strategies for communities and states to use in reforming and revitalizing all local public schools.

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 established

more stringent standards in student accountability, reduced red tape in the public school system, increased teacher quality, promoted the efficiency of students of limited English proficiency, and provided education options to parents and students of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act pushed education reform policy further away from any previous policy before it.

One component of NCLB was educational options or school choice. School choice provided the opportunity for parents to have input regarding where their children would attend school. In this new movement of school choice, states were required to provide appropriate options for children attending low performing schools. One component of the school choice option was a provision for the use of educational, or school vouchers (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As of December 2003, individual state voucher programs varied based on the laws governing policy within that state. Many states developed new legislative policy allowing parents the freedom to move their children from schools not meeting adequate yearly progress in student achievement based on 2003 NCLB components. States offered a variety of voucher programs including public funding, private funding, corporate contributions, and tax credits. In addition, supporters of school voucher programs in most states fought long legal battles, challenging church and state, and the distribution of money to schools and families for educational purposes (Harris, Herrington, & Albee, 2006).

Each state implemented its school voucher policy in unique ways. Some state policies focused on retaining students in the public school system, while other state policies provided for private education choices for the family. On the other hand, some states refused to address the school choice provision of NCLB at all. Some states provided the option of allowing parents to choose the use or non-use of school vouchers as a means of choice in deciding how their child would be educated. However, ultimately there seemed to be an agreement among the public and educational policy makers that the future of education reform was dependent on families making choices about their children's education (People for the American Way, 2006).

The school voucher debate and its potential effect on the future of education reform in America appeared to have no clear answer. For over a half a century, a proposed school voucher policy had been a part of the American political system. The backbone of reform movements such as *A Nation at Risk*, Goals 2000, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 were built on a national level. However, states were given the opportunity to decide on their own how best to implement the plan. For parents to have real choice in their child's educational development required that there be ability for every family to choose equally. The future of the American education system was dependent on a fair and standard choice for all (Moe, 1995).

### Significance of the Study

The onset of parental school choice since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has raised many questions in regards to public school choice (Moe, 2001). Previous studies of school choice addressed numerous topics. Studies were conducted emphasizing the rights of parents to make the choice of where their child would be educated. Studies emphasized the amount and types of monetary funds that were directed towards educational vouchers. Studies (Bresler, 2002; Krueger, 2003) had been conducted to examine the legality of individual state voucher programs and whether the policy was a violation of church and state. Because there appeared to be no one right answer, it would seem useful for state governments, educational institutions, educational districts, public schools, private schools, and home-schoolers to have relevant information stating the most current educational choice policies. One component of the school choice movement was publicly funded school vouchers (Carnoy, 2001; Chubb & Moe, 2001).

This study collected demographic data, as well as interview data, from current public school principals in Florida of two Voucher Eligible high schools, one school with a state grade of 'A', and one school with the state grade of 'B' in the academic school year ending in May 2003. The school data were used to: (a) develop a characteristic profile of Florida of public high schools classified as Voucher Eligible by 2002-2003 Florida school choice policy; and (b) describe the type of school to which students receiving publicly funded



Opportunity Scholarships were moving. Opportunity Scholarships were payments made to families or schools in Florida with children that were attending a school that had received an 'F' on the state report card for two years out of the past four-year period. The money received from the scholarship could be used in any participating private school or another public school that had received a 'C' grade or better the previous year (Greene & Winters, 2003a). In the Voucher Eligible schools, principal interview data were used to examine the changes in the principal's current school as a result of the voucher issue. In the schools graded 'A' and 'B', principal interview data were used to examine the trends as of the 2002-2003 school year for the school to maintain that specific grade.

### Problem Statement

This study described and delineated principal perceptions of their schools as either a publicly funded Voucher Eligible school in Florida as of the 2002-2003 school year, or a school graded 'A' or 'B' by the state during the same time reference. A publicly funded Voucher Eligible school in Florida was defined as having been graded and having received an 'F' grade for two consecutive years or two of the past four years (Hadderman & Smith, 2002).

The principal of each selected school was interviewed to examine (a) what was an accurate profile of their public high school as perceived by the principals of these schools, (b) what changes in curriculum, human resources, staff development, parent involvement, and budgeting had principals made as a result

of being identified as either a Voucher Eligible high school or as an 'A' or 'B' high school, and (c) what were Voucher Eligible high school and 'A' or 'B' principals perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertained to Voucher Eligible high schools.

### Research Questions

1. What is a profile of a Voucher Eligible public high school in Florida as perceived by the principals of these schools?
2. What is a profile of a public high school in Florida graded an 'A' or 'B' as perceived by the principals of these schools?
3. What changes in curriculum, staff development, parent involvement, and budgeting have principals made as a result of being identified as either a Voucher Eligible public high school or a high school graded 'A' or 'B' in Florida?
4. What are Voucher Eligible school principals' perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to Voucher Eligible high schools in Florida?
5. What are 'A' or 'B' high school principals' perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to their school?

### Delimitations

1. The data were delimited to publicly funded school voucher programs in Florida during the 2002-2003 school year.
2. Various miscellaneous forms of school choice in Florida other than publicly funded school vouchers, such as charter schools, magnet schools, corporate tax credits, government tax credits, and home schooling were not included in this study.
3. Benefits of this study were limited to schools that either currently or may in the future offer publicly funded school vouchers as a choice option as part of their educational opportunities.
4. The data collected in this study was limited to the perceptions and opinions of the principals that agreed to participate in the semi-structured interview process.

### Assumptions

It was assumed that principals responding to interview questions posed to them did so with accurate and current information as the school leader. Further assumptions included that principals who were new to their school, since the school was identified as Voucher Eligible, attained much of their data from administrators that had remained at the school where the new principal was currently employed.

## Definition of Terms

Charter School - A public school of choice that is granted a specific amount of autonomy (determined by state law and the local charter) to make decisions concerning the structure, curriculum, and educational emphasis of the school (National Assessment of Educational Programs [NAEP], 2005).

Corporate Tax Credit – A tax credit for businesses that donate money for financial scholarships to allow low-income students to attend private schools (The Florida Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program, 2002).

Equity – Fair and impartial access to education regardless of economic or social status (Sustainable Development Indicator Group, 1996)

Goals 2000 - A set of goals for education created by the national Governors' Conference in 1989, to be achieved by the year 2000 (Human Diversity in Education, 2005)

Magnet School - A public school offering a specialized curriculum, often with high academic standards, to a student body representing a cross section of the community (Doyle & Levine, 1984).

Opportunity Scholarships – A payment made to families or schools in Florida with children in a school that received an 'F' on the state report card for two years out of a four-year period, for use in any participating private school or another public school receiving a 'C' or better (Greene & Winters, 2003a).

Private School - A school established and controlled privately and supported by endowment and/or tuition (Hanus & Cookson, 1996).

Publicly Funded Educational Vouchers – A payment the government makes to a parent or an institution on a parent's behalf to be used for a child's education expenses (Moe, 2001).

Public School - An elementary or secondary school in the United States supported by public funds and providing free education for children of a community or district.

School Choice - A public school program that allows students to choose to attend any of various participating private and public schools, usually based on a system of vouchers or scholarships (Harris et al., 2006).

Tax Credit - A direct reduction in tax liability that is not dependent on the taxpayer's tax bracket (Miner, 2002/2003).

Voucher - A negotiable certificate that can be detached and redeemed as needed (Hadderman & Smith, 2002).

Voucher Eligible School – A Florida public school that has received an 'F' letter grade for two consecutive years or two of the past four years (Hadderman & Smith, 2002).

### Methodology

This study used a descriptive case study approach to find perceptions of principals' in Florida public high schools that had been identified as either Voucher Eligible or an 'A' or 'B' public school. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) identified descriptive studies as a basic method of qualitative research, which

accounted for a substantial proportion of the research done in the field of education. The population of the study was the 356 public high schools in the state of Florida.

The sample was two public high schools in Florida that were identified as Voucher Eligible and graded an 'F' school, in accordance with the Florida Department of Education guidelines set by the Florida state legislature, as well as one public high school that was identified as an 'A' school and one a 'B' school. Profiles of the identified Voucher Eligible schools and the 'A' or 'B' school were constructed based on that school's demographic data as compiled from the state of Florida Department of Education archives and data compiled by the Common Core of Data. In addition, information was gathered from interviews of current public school principals in Florida Voucher Eligible schools and current principals of schools that were either identified as an 'A' or 'B' by the Florida Department of Education school grading policy. Interviews of principals were individual and were conducted face to face.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduced the problem and outlined the limitations of the study. Chapter 2 will present a review of the literature as relevant to the problem of the study. Chapter 3 contains a description of the context for the study and the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 contains the data and the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, the

implications for practice, the recommendations of the study, and the need for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Introduction

For the last two decades, the concern over public school performance in the United States has pushed public school reform and policy debates. School accountability, school choice, and voucher programs were among the most hotly debated issues of public school reform. The behavior and response of public schools facing these initiatives was the key to an effective policy design (Chakrabarti, 2005). These initiatives have played an important role in restructuring and improving public education (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

School choice was developed out of the need for the American public to establish a fair and equal educational opportunity for all. Reports from *A Nation at Risk* (1983) indicated that the American education system was in decline. The children of tomorrow were not keeping up with their peers in other nations. The future of America would lag behind the rest of the world in education, especially in the areas of technology, science, and math (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1984).

Americans believed in the values of equality, justice, democracy, and a positive government (People for the American Way, 2003). According to many Americans, a positive government was one that could provide the services most important to education. One form of policy was school choice, which permitted



public school students to attend another public or private school within their current district borders. In addition, public school choice would allow, as well as provide, an option for students to attend another public outside of their own district. In 2000, the Florida, Ohio, and Wisconsin public school voucher programs also allowed low-income children to attend private schools with government assistance. Voucher programs allowed parents the opportunity to choose the type of education they wanted for their child, rather than relying on political policy makers to make their decision for them (People for the American Way).

In June 1999, Florida became the first state in the nation to enact a statewide school voucher program, authorizing the use of public funds for private school (Harris & Herrington, 2006). Florida implemented a major reform of its accountability system, called the A+ Accountability Plan to invoke market forces by allowing students in low-performing schools that met specified criteria to receive vouchers that could be redeemed at any eligible public or private school (Harris et al., 2006). In addition, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required that all schools failing to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) implement a program that would allow students to choose alternative public or private schools. The accountability program was a precursor to the type of accountability systems that NCLB was to implement (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004).

Much of the controversy and debate of NCLB focused on its accountability and voucher provisions. Many of those in favor of such reforms argued that

public schooling was a closed system, unlikely to change in any fundamental way to increased competition. The basic argument was that competition would provide schools with a clear incentive either to perform well or to risk losing students to higher-quality alternatives offered at the same price. The theory that competition could improve education presumed that inefficiencies resulting from the monopoly of the public school system were the cause of low performance in American education. For a variety of reasons, however, it was not at all clear that schools would respond to increased market competition in the same way that the classic competitive model predicts for industry. Hence, they may have trouble discerning what changes would be beneficial to students or implementing effective reforms (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004).

### History of Voucher Programs

The debate on school voucher programs had been argued in the halls of schools, in the roundtable discussions of teacher unions, and in American political circles for many years (Reed & Overton, 2003). In 1955, economist Milton Friedman proposed the first national school voucher plan in an attempt to equalize the educational opportunities of American children (Reed & Overton). Friedman believed that educational resources would be allocated more efficiently in an educational market rather than schools run by the government. Friedman's proposal provided a competitive open-market education system. In Friedman's educational framework, parents would be issued vouchers in an amount equal to

the per-pupil expenditure all ready allocated in the public school system. These allocations could then be used at the school of their choice, whether public or private (Hadderman & Smith, 2002). However, the American public was not ready for sweeping changes to its time tested education system and Friedman's proposal never gained support. After Friedman's initiative, there have been many other attempts to spur a voucher movement (Johns, 1982).

In the early 1950s, racial segregation in public schools was everywhere across America. In a public school system where all schools in a given district were supposed to be equal; most believed that black schools were inferior to the white schools (Cozzens, 1995). Christopher Jencks, a sociology professor at Harvard, proposed a school voucher system that targeted disadvantaged families (Moe, 2001). As with Friedman's efforts, Jencks could not gain enough political support. In 1970, Jencks proposed a regulated voucher system, using an educational structure with choice and competition operating within the framework of government control. In the Jencks voucher proposal, all children would qualify for vouchers. The voucher program would be developed on a sliding scale with low-income families receiving bigger vouchers than everyone else. In Jencks' proposal, participating private schools would have to accept the voucher as full payment of tuition. Part of the proposal was the inclusion of free transportation for everyone provided by the government. However, his program failed to gain support. School voucher advocates were unable to sustain any real opposition to those that opposed a school voucher (Johns, 1982).

The controversy of public school vouchers in America was a constant struggle between the advocates who see the school system as a government bureaucracy, and the opponents who argue that the real effect would destroy the values of the public school system. The values included common schooling, equal opportunity for students, and a democratic control system (Moe, 2001). In 1922 (Supreme Court Decisions, 2003), the state of Oregon passed the Compulsory Education Act, which required every child 6-18 years old to attend a public school. Failure to do so was declared a misdemeanor. The Society of Sisters, a Roman Catholic organization, challenged this act and in 1925 won a United States Supreme Court decision for parents to have the right to send their children to private schools. Traditional supporters of school vouchers included many conservatives and religious sects. Opposition supporters included teachers' unions, democratic politicians, civil rights groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and other liberal coalitions. For a school voucher program to be successful, it must not only be entrenched in the culture, it must be supported politically (Johns, 1982).

American public school systems traditionally made little use of school vouchers and the free market system (Moe, 2001). Traditional public school systems were a government run monopoly that guaranteed students a free, public education. There were no consequences for schools that did not perform well for students. As a result, schools had few incentives to produce a high quality product. There was no incentive to respond to parents, to spend funds

efficiently, or to be innovative. In Friedman's plan, the government would give all parents of school-aged children a voucher to be used at the school of their choice. The voucher would be used to offset the cost of education. In the end, an atmosphere of choice and competition would be evident (Johns, 1982). Jencks demonstrated that a choice based reform movement could be functional within the structure of government. Jencks showed Americans that a school voucher program could survive outside of a complete free market education system. The purpose of government regulations in education could be to promote fairness, equity, racial balance, and performance (Coons & Sugarman, 1978).

As the end of the 1970s approached, there was generally no support for educational vouchers. However, at the very end of the 1970s, two events spurred the advancement of educational vouchers. Belief in market theory made a comeback in the United States and around the world. This new market era was based on the belief that government was a better option than the private sector. Communism was beginning to fall and market economies were being created throughout the world. The international economic system became more competitive. There was a resurgence in the idea that choice and competition was good (Moe, 2001).

In 1990, the Wisconsin Legislature adopted a pilot voucher program for low-income children in the Milwaukee School District (Harris et al., 2006). In 1995, the Ohio Legislature proposed a new voucher program for Cleveland. In 1999, Governor Jeb Bush proposed Florida's first school voucher program, the

A+ Plan. States of Milwaukee, Ohio, and Florida passed legislation permitting vouchers to be issued to students who attended failing schools (Moe, 2001).

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 established standards that were more stringent in student accountability, reduced red tape in the public school system, increased teacher quality, promoted the efficiency of students of limited English proficiency, and provided education options to parents and students of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act demanded accountability for better results from public school teachers, and students. However, those high accountability standards did not exist in many public schools and were much different in how they were applied to private schools (Elam, 1999).

The history of the voucher system was immersed in a political battle for educators, legislatures, and the American public (Chubb & Moe, 1990). In order for a public school voucher system to be successful, it was important for policy makers to know what the public was thinking. Traditionally, vouchers focused on the low-income disadvantaged child living and attending school in the inner city. The first school voucher policies were an attempt to incorporate a free market system into the public school system. Although a free market public education system would seem like a natural component of American culture, voucher policy was able to overcome stronger cultural beliefs. Policy makers must be able to understand the deep social influences that operate in the background of public

opinion. Proponents of school vouchers placed a major emphasis on social equity (Johns, 1982). Thus, the advent of voucher program generated vocal movements among both advocates and detractors (Levin, 2002).

### Advocates of Voucher Programs

Advocates argued that families needed more choices and that educational vouchers provided competition and improved school effectiveness and productivity in the spending of public dollars (Levin, 2002). Advocates of the educational choice theory believed that the foundation of the movement was the empowerment and transformation of parents into active agents (Reed & Overton, 2003). This assumed that parents would take a greater responsibility in their children's education. Vouchers instilled the ability for parents to become empowered, taking away the power of the government to send kids to inadequate schools. Parents would have the power to direct their tax dollars to the school of their choice. Supporters believed that parents should be treated like consumers and be allowed to use public funds to purchase the education of their choice for their children (Close Up Foundation, 2003). This argument focused on the ability of the low-income parent to have the same economic and financial resources to choose a good school for their child, the same as the higher income parents who could afford to move their child to better school districts or pay for private schools.

A key argument for school choice and vouchers by proponents was that they replaced an educational monopoly with competition. By forcing schools to compete for students, the discipline of market competition was expected to replace the captive audience enjoyed by most existing public schools (Levin, 2002). Additionally, Chubb and Moe (1990) argued that democratic solutions to school offerings were fraught with conflict and compromises, wrought by special interests that were often unconnected with student educational needs. Further, the diversity of student needs in any specific school environment meant that any overall solution would not be particularly attentive to the needs of individual students.

Chubb and Moe (1990) also added that the matching of students to schools through family choice would better meet the needs of all students. Friedman and others have lauded the educational marketplace as not only creating choice, but also providing incentives to improve efficiency in the delivery of educational services and innovation in education. Their view was that competition between public and private schools and among them improved the performance of all schools that remained viable in the market while eliminating those that could not survive competition. Thus, educational vouchers and other forms of market choice have been recommended as ways to increase the responsiveness of schools to family preferences and as a means of creating dramatic improvements in productivity.



A study by two Harvard University scholars, Martin R. West and Paul E. Peterson, found that voucher programs such as the A+ Accountability Plan in Florida spurred gains in student achievement. This marked the third time in five years researchers found public schools responding to the threat of vouchers by launching internal improvements that helped children improve their performance. It favorably compared Florida's reformist use of school choice with the limited public school choice approach currently backed by the federal government. Researchers found Florida's vouchers had been more effective than the choice provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in bringing about test score improvements (Holland, 2005).

Hence, voucher programs increased students' learning more than staying in government run public schools (The Fraser Institute, 2002). They served as a way for low-income parents to get their children out of failing public schools and received some immediate assistance, relieved overcrowding in the public school system, and promoted greater levels of integration in private schools (Rauch, 2002).

### Detractors of Voucher Programs

Detractors claimed that educational vouchers primarily generated business profits and marketing costs that could have been used to provide better educational services. According to detractors, vouchers also lead to increased inequities in educational outcomes, and undermined a common educational

experience necessary for democracy (Levin, 2002). It was also argued that vouchers would drain resources from struggling public schools and pull active parents out of the schools. Money put into vouchers could be spent on repairing old school buildings and erecting new ones (United States General Accounting Office, 2001). Additionally, opponents believed that there was no solid evidence that voucher systems improved schools or raised student test scores (Close Up Foundation, 2003).

Cullen and Reback (2006), Figlio and Getzler (2002) and Jacob (2002) showed that schools facing voucher threats tended to reclassify low performing students as disabled in an effort to make them ineligible to contribute to the school's aggregate test scores, ratings or grades. Jacob also found evidence in favor of teaching to the test, preemptive retention of students and substitution away from low-stakes subjects, while Jacob and Levitt (2003) found evidence in favor of teacher cheating. Teacher cheating included giving students practice questions that were exact replicas of questions found on prior standardized tests. Teachers were also found to give leading comments to students during actual testing. Figlio and Rouse (2005) found that low performing students were given harsher punishments during the testing period than higher performing students for similar crimes, once again in an effort to manipulate the test taking pool (Chakrabarti, 2005).

School-wide gains at 'F' schools did not conclusively prove that students were actually learning more. It was possible that schools were "gaming" the

system by taking such actions as excluding low performing students from test-taking or encouraging them to be absent on test day, though this kind of gaming seemed to have been held to a minimum (Peterson, n.d.). Statistically significant achievement gains for voucher students were negligible. The gains have not been consistent, have been far below projections, and have given no compelling evidence to justify expanding voucher programs (National Education Association, 2002).

Of all the arguments made by opponents against vouchers, the most important was believed to be the breach of the 'separation of church and state' principle (Close Up Foundation, 2003). In a voucher program, public tax money would be going to church-sponsored parochial schools (Close Up Foundation). Bresler (2002) believed that the majority opinion written by Chief Justice William Rehnquist in the *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris* ruling before the United States Supreme Court on the final day of the 2001-2002 term took the Establishment Clause law in a new direction. Bresler claimed that Rehnquist rejected the "wall of separation" approach first delivered by Justice Hugo Black in *Everson vs. Board of Education of Ewing* (1947) to describe the Establishment Clause. Black used the quote in *Everson* to conclude that no tax in any amount would be used in any form to support any religious activities or institutions. These monies would not be used in any form regardless of how the religious organization defined itself or whatever form they adopted to teach or practice their religion (Bresler).

Conversely, NCLB was a tool used by the public school system in an attempt to bring higher standards and some consistency to the public school system; opponents to the act argued that private schools were not faced with the same stringent guidelines (Democratic Policy Committee, 2002). Private schools did not have to take any current state or newly required annual tests for grade promotion or high school graduation. Private schools were not required to accept all students that came to their doors, regardless of circumstances, such as students with limited English proficiency, special education students, or students with a history of discipline problems (Democratic Policy Committee). Vouchers not carefully designed and regulated, could create problems for the independence of private schools and could nationalize private education. The education bureaucracy would have a difficult time keeping their rules and regulations out of private schools. Such regulations could include those found in public schools, such as criteria for hiring and firing teachers, student selection, and curriculum development (Bresler, 2002).

#### Four Major Educational Criteria

The debate over vouchers could be partially understood in terms of the general differences in perspective between libertarians or economic liberals with their reliance on the marketplace and the political liberals with their reliance on government. It could also be partially understood in terms of the valuing of the

public versus the private outcomes of education (Levin, 1997). Nevertheless, underlying these differences in perspectives were four major educational criteria that molded such debate (Levin, 2002). Often the interchange on vouchers was limited to only one of these educational criteria and rarely more than two. However, when the multitudes of exchanges on educational vouchers were explored, four criteria emerged. Each of those criteria was highly important to particular policy-makers and stakeholders: (a) freedom to choose; (b) productive efficiency; (c) equity; and (d) social cohesion (Levin, 2002).

#### Freedom to Choose

For many advocates of vouchers, the freedom of families to choose the kind of school that emulated their values, educational philosophies, religious teachings, and political outlooks was the most important issue in calling for educational change. This criterion placed a heavy emphasis on the private benefits of education and the liberty to ensure that schools were chosen which were consistent with the child-rearing practices of families (Levin, 2002).

#### Productive Efficiency

Perhaps the most common claim for educational vouchers was that they would improve productive efficiency and effectiveness of the schooling system by producing better educational results for any given outlay of resources. This

conclusion was based upon the notion that market competition among schools for students would create strong incentives, not only to meet student needs, but also to improve educational productivity. To those who believed in the efficiency of a competitive marketplace, this was almost a truism that did not require empirical proof. To those who questioned market efficiency, the issue of evidence was central (Levin, 2002).

### Equity

A claim of those who challenged vouchers was that they would create greater inequity in the distribution of educational resources, opportunities, and results by gender, social class, race, language origins, and geographical location of students. Those who would elect to allow choice in the educational marketplace would be those who were better informed and had greater resources such as access to transportation. Further, the choices themselves would further segregate the poor and disenfranchised as those with power and status would still select schools with students like themselves (Fiske & Ladd, 2000). Voucher advocates argued that the ability to choose schools would open up possibilities for students who were locked into inferior neighborhood schools and that the competitive marketplace would have greater incentives to meet the needs of all students more fully than existing schools (Levin, 2002).

## Social Cohesion

A major public purpose of schooling was to provide a common educational experience that would orient all students to grow to adulthood as full participants in the social, political, and economic institutions of our society. This was interpreted as necessitating common elements of schooling with regard to curriculum, values, goals, language, and political orientation. A democracy required that its members master the skills and knowledge necessary for civic and economic participation including one's rights and responsibilities under the law, the principles of democratic government, and an understanding of the overall economy and preparation for productive roles. The preparation for social cohesion was similar to what Friedman (1962) had called the neighborhood effects or societal benefits of education, those that justified public funding of education. Opponents of educational vouchers stressed that a market of competitive choices, without ensuring social cohesion, would lead to balkanization or fragmentation rather than social cohesion (Levin, 2002).

## Policy Instruments

It was important to note that there was not a single voucher plan, but many different ones, each with an emphasis on a somewhat different mix of priorities among the four criteria. Plans could be constructed with particular features to address each of the four policy criteria by using three policy instruments: (a) finance; (b) regulation; and (c) support services (Levin, 2002).

## Finance

Finance referred to the overall magnitude of the educational voucher, how it was allocated and whether schools could charge greater tuition than the monetary value of the voucher. With a large voucher there would be more options arising in the marketplace with greater freedom of choice and competition. If the educational voucher were differentiated by educational need such as larger vouchers for those with handicaps and from poverty backgrounds, some issues of equity would be addressed. Schools would be able to obtain additional resources, would have greater incentives to attract such students, and would be able to provide richer programs to address their needs. If families could add-on to vouchers from their private resources as Friedman proposed, there would be advantages for families with higher incomes in the educational marketplace who were able to send their children to more expensive and restrictive schools with potential increases in inequities relative to the present system (Levin, 2002).

## Regulation

Regulation referred to the requirements of schools participating in the voucher system as well as any other rules that had to be adhered to by schools and families using educational vouchers. Only schools that met certain standards



would be eligible to redeem vouchers. Some voucher plans had emphasized a common curriculum and uniform testing as a condition of school participation to ensure that students were meeting the goals of social cohesion and that schools could be compared for their productive efficiency. Admissions requirements had also been a matter of scrutiny where schools with more applicants than available places would be required to choose a portion of students by lottery to assure fairness in selection procedures. Eligibility for vouchers could be restricted to certain populations in the name of equity. For example, public and private voucher plans in the U.S. would have been generally limited to children from poor families in order to give them choices outside of their neighborhoods. The Florida legislation limited vouchers to children in public schools that had “failed” according to state criteria (Levin 2002).

### Support Services

Support services referred to those types of publicly provided services designed to increase the effectiveness of the market in providing freedom of choice, productive efficiency, and equity (Levin, 2002). Competitive markets assumed that consumers would have access to a wide variety of choices as well as useful information for selecting among them. In the United States the availability of public transportation was very limited, necessitating a system of school transportation from children’s neighborhoods to schools of choice. In the

absence of school transportation, school choices and competition for students would be limited, reducing both the competitive efficiency of schools and creating inequities for those who could not afford private transportation. Information needed to be made widely available for families to make informed choices about the schools that they selected for their children. Accurate information on school programs and effectiveness as well as other important aspects of school philosophy and practice would be collected and disseminated to parents to assist in making decisions (Rees, 1999).

Different voucher proposals have incorporated different designs that utilize these three policy instruments to achieve particular goals. For example, the original Friedman (1962) proposal focused primarily on freedom of choice and productive efficiency by establishing a flat voucher at a modest level with the ability of parents to add to the voucher for their children. No provisions were made for transportation or information and regulation was minimal. The lack of information and transportation would likely reduce opportunities especially for families with modest resources, a challenge for equity. However, these omissions would reduce costs and government intrusion, presumably raising productive efficiency. Social cohesion was addressed with the suggestion of a minimal curriculum provision that was not described further (Levin, 2002).

In contrast, the plan by Christopher Jencks prepared for the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (Center for the Study of Public Policy, 1970) placed much greater emphasis on equity, social cohesion, and freedom of choice as did the

plan suggested by Chubb and Moe (1990). It provided larger vouchers for the poor, regulation of admissions, standardized tests for common areas of curriculum, and provision of both transportation and information. Nevertheless, the high potential costs of transportation, information, and regulation suggested a sacrifice of overall productive efficiency. This proposal would put great emphasis on increasing choice, particularly for families who lacked resources, but extensive regulations would also inhibit freedom of choice more generally by imposing admissions, curriculum, and testing requirements on schools (Levin, 2002).

It was important to stress that setting out regulations and other provisions were only a few of the conditions for using finance, regulation, and support services to construct a voucher plan. Equally important was the implementation of these provisions. For example, if schools were not permitted to charge additional payments to parents or take donations, this policy was only as good as the ability to enforce it. The same was true for ensuring that a common curriculum was used or those admissions decisions were made in an equitable manner. Implementation required resources, monitoring, technical assistance, and sanctions. In the absence of the first three of these, the sanctions were not meaningful. Thus, any analysis of the use of the three policy instruments had to go beyond the formal provisions to the adequacy of the mechanisms for implementing provisions (Levin & Driver, 1997).

### Florida's Voucher Programs

In November 1995, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) released ratings to the public for each school in the state based on test scores from 1993-94 and 1994-95. Level 1 was called "critically low" and included 158 schools. The rules included non-voucher sanctions for schools that remained on this list for three consecutive years. However, these sanctions would only occur after three years and only after a series of hearings with the state Board of Education and appeals by the school district. Even if the district were found to be negligent through this process, the state board was not required to take action. Regardless, no sanctions were ever imposed (Carnoy, 2001).

Despite the apparent weakness of the sanction threat, anecdotal evidence suggested that schools worked hard to improve their scores to avoid further public embarrassment. Many schools subsequently increased their ratings through test score improvement, decreasing the number of "critically low" schools from 158 to 71 in 1995-96 and to 30 in 1996-97 (Carnoy, 2001). In 1999, the state added a provision that students in schools designated as "failing" for two consecutive years would be offered a voucher that could be used in any other school, private or public. At the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year students in two schools were offered vouchers. They were chosen based on 1998 ratings and a "long history of failure," even though the two-consecutive-year provision of the A+ program was not yet in effect. In 2000-01, no schools qualified for

vouchers; all the 1999-2000 'F' schools managed to rise to an acceptable rating (Carnoy).

The school grading system in Florida is designed to provide a measuring stick for all schools as compared to other like schools. The system is based primarily on the how students in Florida perform on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The grading system is based on a point system with schools earning percentage points for each student scoring 3, 4, or 5 on the reading portion of the test; 3, 4, or 5 on the math portion of the test; and a 3.5 or higher on the writing portion of the test. Schools are also awarded points based on learning gains made by students. Learning gains are based on each student's previous years test scores and is weighted towards the lowest 25% of the schools student population.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of school grades from 1989 through the end of the 2002 public school year.

Table 1  
Distribution of Schools by Grade and Year

School Grade	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02
A	203	579	591	894
B	314	266	413	553
C	1,236	1,165	1,120	725
D	613	397	307	185
F	78	4	0	64
Total	2,444	2,411	2,431	2,421

(Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004)

Florida adopted three voucher programs; Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), McKay Scholarship and Corporate Tax Credit scholarship Program (Peterson, n.d.). Their description follows and Table 2 shows the comparison among the three.

#### Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP)

In 1999-2000, Florida adopted the first of Florida's three voucher programs the Florida Opportunity Scholarship program (Harris et al., 2006). This program offered students a choice of private or public school if their public school failed to meet minimum standards twice in a four-year period. Florida identified a public school as eligible for participation in OSP under the Florida A+ Accountability Plan (Peterson, n.d.). The state assigned a grade, 'A' through 'F', to each school based mainly on the overall student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). If a school received a school grade of 'F' for any two years in a four-year period, the students in that school were eligible for a voucher that could be used at any public school that scored a school grade of 'C' or better or at a private school that had enrolled in the program and had available slots. Eligibility was based on overall school performance, thus individual students who scored high on the FCAT were eligible if they attended schools whose overall student performance was low (Harris et al.).

Florida's system of assigning letter grades to schools started in the year 1999, and were based on the FCAT reading, math, and writing tests. The state designated a school an 'F' if it failed to attain the minimum criteria in the three subjects of FCAT reading, math, and writing and a 'D' if it failed the minimum criteria in only one or two of the three subject areas. To pass the minimum criteria in reading and math, at least 60% of the students had to score at level 2 and above in the respective subject; while to pass the minimum criteria in writing, at least 50% had to score 3 and above (Chakrabarti, 2004).

Florida's 1999 grading system was replaced by a new system in 2002. Although the definitions of the achievement levels remained the same, the 2002 system included learning gains of students in addition to their level scores in the computation of grades (Chakrabarti, 2004). School grades 'A' through 'F' under the 2002 system corresponded to specific ranges on a point scale where higher points corresponded to higher grades. Under the 1999 grading system, the 'F' grade and movement to a 'D' depended solely on the percentages of students scoring below the minimum criteria cutoffs (Chakrabarti, 2004). Under the 2002 system, improving scores of low performing students as well as students in other ranges of the score scale increased the total number of points of schools and contributed towards a higher grade (Chakrabarti, 2005). Moreover, the 2002 system gave more weight to reading and math scores compared to writing scores. While higher scores of students in the three subjects reading, math, and writing added to the total number of points, learning gains of students in only

reading and math added to the total number of points. The rules relating to the inclusion of various special education categories in grade formation did not change (Chakrabarti, 2005).

In 1998-1999, the first year of the 'A' through 'F' grading system in Florida, four schools received grades of 'F' for two of the preceding four years. However, this number fell to two in the second year, meaning that only students in these two schools were eligible for the voucher. Of the 900 students in these two elementary schools, only 70 chose to apply for one of the 50 available slots. As of the 2004-05 school year with approximately 10,000 students eligible, 763 students utilized vouchers. Of these, the percentage of African American was considerably higher than the state average, 23 percent statewide versus 61 percent using the voucher; while the percentage of Hispanic was similar to the state average, 23 percent statewide versus 33 percent using the voucher (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

There were eligibility requirements for both the families and the private schools that accepted their children as Opportunity Scholarship voucher students (Harris & Herrington, 2006). Families had to agree to comply with the policies of the schools including provisions such as dress codes, attendance requirements, and parent volunteer expectations. In addition, the public school district in which the student lives, along with child's parents were jointly responsible for administering the state assessment annually to each voucher student. However,



the state did not specify a minimum standard nor did it publicly report individual or average scores of voucher students in private schools (Harris & Herrington).

The Florida law also established general requirements for fiscal and curricular soundness that private schools must meet in order to accept voucher students. An additional noteworthy requirement was that private schools had to accept the voucher as full payment for tuition and fees. This was important because it meant that private schools could not charge additional tuition that might prevent low-income parents from participating. In addition, private (and public) schools had to agree to admit students on a first-come, first-served basis. Schools could not refuse admission based on religious or other beliefs or require students to participate in any religious observances. Private voucher schools were still excluded from a wide variety of laws that applied to public schools, a fact that had played an important role in court challenges to the state's voucher policies (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

#### McKay Scholarship

The second of Florida's voucher programs was the McKay Scholarship, which targeted students with disabilities who attended public schools and had an individual education plan (IEP). This included students who were mentally handicapped, speech and language impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, visually

impaired, dual sensory impaired, physically impaired, emotionally handicapped, specific learning disabled, or autistic (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

Eligibility for the McKay Scholarship did not depend on student achievement of either the school or the individual students unlike the Opportunity Scholarship. Instead, parents had to simply affirm that they were dissatisfied with the public school services their child currently received. Approximately 400,000 students in the state were eligible during the 2004-05 school year (FDOE, 2006). Of these, over 15,000 Florida students used a McKay Scholarship voucher to change schools during the 2004-2005 school year (Weidner, 2005), making the McKay Scholarship the largest of the state's three programs and the largest single program in the nation (Harris et al., 2006).

The requirements for schools to be eligible to receive a McKay Scholarship voucher student were quite similar to those of the Opportunity Scholarship. The voucher had to be used at either public or private schools chosen by the parents as long as they meet the basic requirements mentioned earlier (Harris et al., 2006). The dollar amount of the McKay Scholarship depended on the amount of funds being spent on the student in his or her assigned public school or the amount of tuition at the private school, whichever was less. If the cost of the private school was greater than the amount of the scholarship, the family had to pay the difference or receive tuition assistance from the private school. Families also had to provide transportation to the private school. To provide educational continuity for the student, the scholarship

remained in force until the child returned to a public school or graduated from high school (Salisbury, 2003).

Florida's McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities forced private schools not only to accept children that were difficult to educate but to go out of their way to provide effective programs to help children with physical, behavioral, emotional, or learning disabilities. Private schools had proven their willingness to accept McKay Scholarship students, and the fact that 89 percent of McKay students re-enrolled in their scholarship schools demonstrated that most parents were satisfied with their chosen private school (Salisbury, 2003).

#### Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program

The third of Florida's programs, the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program, was adopted in 2001 (FDOE, 2005). The Corporate Tax Credit was funded by direct corporate contributions to one of three nonprofit scholarship funding organizations as designated by the State of Florida to receive and disburse funding. Over 10,000 students received vouchers in the 2004-05 school year. The legislation limited each corporate contributor to a "maximum of \$5 million in Florida corporate tax credits per eligible nonprofit scholarship funding organization with an aggregate tax credit limit for the entire state of \$50 million". The credit could not exceed 75 percent of the corporate taxes due from the taxpayer after applying all other tax credits available to the taxpayer (FDOE).

Five percent of the credits were set aside for small businesses taxpayers (Harris et al., 2006). A key feature of the Corporate Tax Credit that distinguished it from the others was that students were eligible only if they were qualified for the federally funded free or reduced-price school lunches. The eligibility of the schools under this voucher program were similar to the Opportunity and McKay Vouchers (Harris, Herrington, & Albee, 2006).

#### Features of Voucher Programs

One way in which Florida voucher programs varied was in the degree to which they targeted specific student groups based on income, achievement, or participation in other education programs as seen in Table 2 (Harris et al., 2006). The Corporate Tax Credit was targeted explicitly to low-income students. The Opportunity Scholarship targeted students in academically low-performing schools, although these schools enrolled students primarily from families that were predominantly low-income and minority. Finally, the McKay Scholarship targeted students with disabilities who came from families with relatively low achievement levels and a wide range of family incomes (Weidner, 2005).

Table 2  
Florida 2005 Voucher and Tax Credit Programs

Program	Student Eligibility	School Eligibility	Number of Students Participating	Amount of Scholarship, Funder
Opportunity	Attend school with low test scores	Public or Private	763	\$4,200 From state
McKay	Disabled, IEP	Public or Private	15,000	\$4,805-\$20,703 From state
Corporate Tax Credit	Low income	Private	10,000	\$3,500 From state and non-profit

The use of targeting was not unusual for government programs. The targeting focused on those situations where failure, or at least the public perception of failure, had been greatest. Schools with low test scores and attended by large numbers of low-income students fit this description. In addition, special education programs were often criticized for being bureaucratic and for over enrolling students. The perception of failure in these cases made the application of controversial solutions such as vouchers more politically acceptable (Harris et al., 2006).

The Corporate Tax Credit was not actually a voucher program but rather a tax credit. The money being used to assign children to private schools, in this case, was “donated” with dollar-for-dollar tax savings by private corporations and therefore never passed through any government entity. For this same reason, the Corporate Tax Credit was also different from “tuition tax credit” programs being

considered in other states that allowed parents to write off a set amount of tuition costs from personal, rather than corporate, income taxes (Harris et al., 2006). In the case of vouchers, the government collected funds and gave them to participating schools. With tax credits, the government reduced its revenue by a set amount and required that this be used for tuition. While this was largely a difference in accounting, the courts indicated that there were important legal differences (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971; *Rosenberger v. Regents*, 1995). By keeping the money out of government hands, tuition tax credits further distanced the government from religion and therefore avoided some legal issues surrounding the separation of church and state. In addition to this legal difference, there was a political difference between vouchers and tax credits; because tax credits could be promoted as tax cuts whereas vouchers required the collection of revenue (Harris et al.).

Vouchers and tax credits were also different from other forms of school choice. By definition, tax credits could only be used to send children to private schools and therefore provided both choice and privatization simultaneously. In contrast, a “voucher” that was used to send children to other public schools was really public school choice. Thus, the Florida Opportunity Scholarship and McKay Scholarship programs represented both vouchers and public school choice (Harris et al., 2006)

One of the basic premises of parental choice programs was that parents would make good educational decisions for their children and that they were an

important source of oversight and accountability for the performance of schools. This parental or “market-based” accountability was distinct from “government-based” accountability in which the government attempted to measure educational outcomes and provided rewards and sanctions to students and educators based on test scores and other performance measures (Harris & Herrington, 2006). Thus, accountability measures helped both parents and government to monitor the effectiveness of voucher programs.

#### Impact of No Child Left Behind

As of 2006, the federal law’s more limited impact was almost certainly due to its very weak requirements. Opportunities to move to another school were given only to parents whose children were attending schools in Florida that had been assigned an ‘F’ grade for the previous two consecutive years. Even for these schools, the incentives to improve were minimal. Although parents were given some options under the federal program, private schools were not among them nor were public schools outside the school district in which the student was residing. Even that alternative was restricted, because only adequately performing schools (according to NCLB standards) were eligible to receive a school choice student. In 2003, three-fourths of all schools in Florida were said not to be performing adequately (Holland, 2005). Although that percentage subsequently dropped, the options under NCLB in Florida remained very limited. Although it was unknown how many parents were exercising options to attend

another school in Florida under NCLB, there was no evidence that they exceeded the nationwide rate, which in the 2003–04 school year was less than one percent of students changing to another school (Peterson, n.d.). In 2002, NCLB took effect nationwide. Under NCLB, schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward a state set level of academic proficiency for two consecutive years were found to be "in need of improvement," and their students were supposed to be given a choice of attending a better-performing public school in the same school district (Holland, 2005). West and Peterson (2006) pointed out that certain features of Florida's A+ Plan were "considerably more rigorous" than NCLB.

### Impact of Voucher Programs in Florida

#### Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) on Low Performing Public Schools

For those 159 Florida public schools that were given an 'F' and were still able to retain their identity, the OSP had a positive impact on their performance. Students at schools that received an 'F' became subject to the threat of participation in the program unless they improved the next year and often registered enough gains the next year to avoid being designated again as an 'F' school. By 2005, only 39 of these schools had become OSP eligible and just four



others had received a second 'F', but not until at least three years had gone by (Peterson, n.d.).

Some of the accomplishments must be attributed to Florida's policy of helping low-performing schools. As an incentive, 'F' schools, like other Florida schools, were awarded \$100 per pupil the next year if they improved their standing by one letter grade. These funds could be spent on teacher bonuses or other non-recurring expenses related to student achievement. In addition, 'F' schools were assigned a community assessment team made up of parents, business representatives, educators, and community activists who were to write an intervention plan for the school. Officials reported that the Florida Department of Education assigned a staff member to each school that had been given an 'F' to ensure that all steps possible were taken to improve performance. 'F' schools may also have had an incentive to improve simply to avoid a repetition of the embarrassment they had experienced (Chakrabarti, 2004). Yet, the biggest concern for those 'F' schools was that once they were given an 'F' grade for a second time, students could leave the school for other public schools or to attend a private school (Peterson, n.d.). According to a theory of Chakrabarti (2005) voucher threats were even more effective at stimulating public school performance than an actual voucher program. Under the Opportunity Scholarship Program, schools could prevent a student exodus from their own school by improving their performance enough to avoid the 'F' grade a second time, providing many schools a strong incentive to do so (Peterson, n.d.).

Events in Florida had been quite consistent with the Chakrabarti (2005) theory. When schools were threatened by vouchers, student test scores at these schools improved. The impact of the OSP program was first noted by Jay Greene in a pioneering essay that documented programmatic effects even after OSP had been operating for just one year (Greene, 2000). The year after schools received an 'F', student scores on the FCAT rose more than in very similar-looking 'F' schools that had barely escaped the voucher threat. The FCAT gains could be observed in reading and math but they were the most striking in writing. A few years later Greene and his colleague Marcus Winters repeated the analysis for a subsequent year, reporting similar results (Greene & Winters, 2003a).

Fortunately, it was now possible to assess the impacts of the more rigorous accountability program introduced in 2002 and detect whether or not the voucher threat had an impact statewide. The Florida Department of Education had developed a warehouse of detailed data that allowed qualified researchers, who complied with confidentiality regulations, to track the performance of individuals across the entire state. Analyzing this information by comparing 'F' schools to 'D' schools that had very similar test-score performances, researchers found that the students at the 'F' schools showed, on average, larger gains in student achievement on the math and reading portions of the FCAT than students at 'D' schools that closely resembled the voucher-threatened 'F' schools (West & Peterson, 2006). Based on this comparison, Peterson (n.d.) estimated that in 2002–03 students learned approximately one third of a year more in reading and

math in the 'F' schools than they would have without the intervention (Peterson). As in the case of OSP, NCLB provided parents an option to attend another school, if their child attended a school that fell below required performance standards two years in succession. NCLB's school choice provisions had not had the same positive impact on student performance in Florida as OSP had (Peterson).

#### McKay Scholarships

The premise of the McKay Scholarships was that parents were in the best position to know if their children were making academic gains and having a positive educational experience. The fact that 89 percent of McKay Scholarship students reenrolled in their scholarship school for the 2002–03 school year was evidence that the program was benefiting those students. During 2002, 2003, and 2004, Florida newspapers were full of testimonials from parents about the positive turnaround of children who were receiving individualized attention in their new schools. In many cases, those children were not receiving the same degree of help in their public schools, even though their educational plans prescribed it. Almost three-fourths of the families whose children received McKay Scholarships chose to pay some additional tuition cost beyond the amount provided by the scholarship. Those parents seemed to feel that the added value of the private school was worth an additional financial sacrifice (Salisbury, 2003).

The McKay Scholarship Program was designed to be revenue neutral. McKay students took to their new schools only those funds that would be spent on their education in the public school. At the same time, public schools experienced a decreased burden in enrollment proportionate to the loss of students and funds. Of course, public schools had fixed costs that were not reduced by slight declines in student enrollment (Salisbury, 2003).

On the other hand, McKay Scholarships came out of state funds, which constituted approximately 51 percent of total education revenues. When a student used a McKay scholarship to attend a private school, the local funds that were being used to educate that student remained in the public schools. Since local funding constituted approximately 41 percent of total education funding in the state, this would be a sufficient amount of revenue to cover a school's fixed costs (Salisbury, 2003).

By 2006, participation in the McKay Scholarship Program had more than doubled each year and was expected to grow at a similar rate for at least another 5 years. Also, in recognition of the higher operating costs in smaller districts or districts experiencing decreasing enrollment, the state's funding formula included a "declining enrollment supplement" and a "sparsity supplement" that was designed to augment funding the next few years. As the McKay Scholarship program expanded, the fiscal impact on public schools would continue to be positive. Moving more student enrollment to the private sector allowed local

school districts to focus their resources on fewer students, reducing class size, or enhancing educational programs (Salisbury, 2003).

#### Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program

In 2002, the Collins Center concluded that there would be slight declines in state tax collections caused by the \$50 million “Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program,” but that these small declines would likely be offset by increases in the amount of statewide revenue available for education or other state purposes. Using a conservative growth rate of 1.9% for future education revenues, the increase in statewide net revenues would accumulate to more than \$600 million by 2015 as low-income students left the public schools to participate in the scholarship program. The average annual net revenue increases that resulted from the “Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program” would be used to increase per pupil spending an average of approximately \$20 per child between now and 2015 or to increase state spending for other purposes (The Florida Corporate Income Tax Credit, 2002).

## Effects of Voucher Programs in Florida

### Effect of Vouchers on Student Achievement

In 1999, Florida adopted the A+ Accountability Plan, which included a provision that awarded vouchers to students in schools that “failed” repeatedly. Florida schools were graded as ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’, or ‘F’, based on the average scores students achieved on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). If a school received ‘F’s two out of four years, it would become eligible for some form of corrective action, including but not limited to the offer of vouchers to its students to attend other schools, public or private. In the school year 1999-2000 two Pensacola schools met the failing criteria and lost 53 children to private schools and 85 children to other public schools (Carnoy, 2001).

Greene & Winters (2003b) used results on reading, math, and writing tests by school for the years 1998-99 and 1999-2000 to test the notion that “performance of students on academic tests improved when public schools were faced with the prospect that their students would receive vouchers” (Greene & Winters, p.68). They found that all 78 schools that received an ‘F’ grade in 1999 (66 primary schools, 7 middle schools, and 4 high schools) received a higher grade in 2000. The gains by ‘F’ schools were also much higher than those for schools graded ‘A’ through ‘D’. To get the “voucher effect,” Greene (2001)

compared schools that were very much alike in many respects, namely higher-scoring 'F' schools and lower-scoring 'D' schools. The only thing that differentiated the two types of schools was that the 'F's had the threat of vouchers hanging over them and the 'D's did not. Greene concluded from this comparison that the higher-scoring 'F' schools did significantly better on the math and writing tests, with "effect sizes" of 0.12 for reading, 0.30 for math, and 0.41 for writing (Carnoy, 2001).

In the first independent study that examined the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) on the test-score performance of individual students, Harvard researchers Martin R. West and Paul E. Peterson at the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) at the Kennedy School of Government found that key provisions of the Florida A+ Accountability Plan were more effective than NCLB's at leveraging student achievement gains (Wendland, 2005). Under Florida's A+ Accountability Plan students became eligible for vouchers to transfer to a private school if their public school received an 'F' on accountability measures twice in a four-year period. The research, published in the March 2006 issue of the *Economic Journal*, found that fourth and fifth grade students in Florida made modest but significant gains in reading and math if their school received an 'F' grade from the state's school accountability system, a grade that placed it at risk of becoming a part of the state's school voucher program. Florida students in schools at risk of becoming subject to the public-

school choice provisions of the NCLB showed no improvement (West & Peterson, 2006).

Students in schools that received their initial 'F' in 2002 scored from 4 to 5 percent of a standard deviation higher the following year than did students in 'D' schools, which did not face an imminent voucher threat (Wendland, 2005). The stigma of publicly receiving a low grade seemed to provide some reform impetus to 'D' schools as well. Their students improved by 5 percent of a standard deviation relative to students in 'C' schools. The schools were very capable of moving forward when faced with a clear challenge either receiving a very low grade or when faced with a voucher threat (Holland, 2005). In Florida, students had the opportunity to move to another public school within their school district if their school was designated as not making adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years. Students at schools under this threat in the summer of 2003 did no better the following school year than students at similar schools not subject to the threat (Wendland).

Another study was conducted by veteran journalist Carol Innerst in 2000, just a year after the voucher program began examining public records the Institute for Justice had assembled in defending Florida's A+ Accountability Plan from a legal challenge. In this study, Innerst found many school districts with 'F' or 'D' schools had reacted with "a sense of urgency and zeal for reform" (Executive Summary, ¶ 1) in an effort to avoid losing students and money. She found school officials were switching to proven methods such as teacher-directed



instruction, phonics for beginning reading, and tutoring in the late afternoons and on Saturdays (Holland, 2005).

In 2001, a Manhattan Institute study by Jay P. Greene established that Florida's voucher program was having a clear-cut, positive effect on student achievement. Schools that had received a failing grade from the state and thus were in danger of having vouchers kick in if they received a second 'F' achieved test score gains more than twice as large as those recorded at other schools (Holland, 2005). In contrast, Peterson and West (2006) found Florida schools subjected to this public school choice threat under NCLB showed no improvements in student achievement. Two factors that may explain why NCLB's choice provisions did not have a significant impact on school performance were because the large number of schools identified as poor performers and the limited choices available to parents in those schools. In 2003, nearly 75% of Florida's schools were said to be not making adequate progress. U.S. Department of Education data showed that less than 1% of students changed from one public school to another during the 2003-04 school year (Peterson & West).

#### Other Effects of the Threat of Vouchers

The Florida voucher program made all students of a school eligible for vouchers if the school received two 'F' grades in a period of four years. Thus, the program could be looked upon as a "threat of voucher" program. Schools getting

an 'F' grade for the first time are threatened by vouchers, but vouchers are implemented only if they get another 'F' grade in the next three years. Vouchers were associated with a loss in revenue and also media publicity and visibility. Therefore the threatened schools had a strong incentive to try to avoid the second 'F', and thereby avoid vouchers (Chakrabarti, 2005).

Cullen and Reback (2006), Figlio and Getzler (2002) and Jacob (2002) showed that schools facing such threats from the system tended to reclassify low performing students as disabled in an effort to make them ineligible to contribute to the school's aggregate test scores, ratings or grades. Jacob (2005) also found evidence in favor of teaching to the test, preemptive retention of students and substitution away from low-stakes subjects, while Jacob and Levitt (2003) found evidence in favor of teacher cheating. Figlio and Rouse (2005) found that low performing students were given harsher punishments during the testing period than higher performing students for similar school code of conduct infractions, once again in an effort to manipulate the test taking pool (United States Department of Education, 2002). School-wide gains at 'F' schools did not conclusively prove that students were actually learning more. It was possible that schools were "gaming" the system by taking such actions as excluding low performing students from test-taking or encouraging them to be absent on test day, though this kind of gaming seems to have been held to a minimum (Chakrabarti, 2005). Figlio and Winicki (2002) found that schools faced with

accountability systems increased the caloric content of school lunches on testing days in an attempt to boost performance.

Chakrabarti (2005) related the effect of vouchers on public school performance. Modeling public school behavior, McMillan (2004) showed that under certain circumstances, public schools facing vouchers may have found it optimal to reduce productivity. Nechyba (1999) showed that while public school quality may show a small decline with vouchers under a pessimistic atmosphere it would improve under a more optimistic atmosphere.

Combining both theoretical and empirical analysis, Chakrabarti (2004) studied the impact of voucher designs on public school performance and found that voucher design mattered. The “threat of voucher” design led to an explicit improvement of the threatened public schools in Florida. Greene (2001, 2003b) found positive effects of the Florida program on the performance of threatened schools. Analyzing the same program and using student level data from a subset of Florida districts, Figlio and Rouse (2005) found some evidence of improvement of the threatened schools in the high stakes state tests, but these effects diminished in the low stakes, nationally norm-referenced test. Using student level data, West and Peterson (2006) studied the effects of the revised Florida program after the 2002 changes, as well as the NCLB Act on test performance of students in Florida public schools. West and Peterson found that the former program had positive and significant impacts on student performance, but they found no such effect for the latter. Based on case studies from visits to

five Florida schools (two 'F' schools and three 'A' schools), Goldhaber and Hannaway (2004) presented evidence that 'F' schools focused on writing because it was the easiest to improve (Chakrabarti, 2005).

### Accountability Measures of Voucher Programs

A typical concern in the public school reform atmosphere was the accountability for the efficacy of the voucher system. Since private schools were generally unregulated, how could the success of the program be assessed and how could fraud have been prevented? Usual methods for accountability included: (a) monitoring of schools; (b) enforcement of standards; and (c) due process rights for students and their parents (Frieden, 2003).

#### Monitoring

Once a voucher program had been initiated, participating families as well as the state had to be able to determine whether the voucher program as a whole was effective in providing school choices to families and whether each participating school was effective at improving educational outcomes for students. Some form of monitoring or assessment must therefore be included in the voucher program to determine its efficacy (Frieden, 2003). The free market enforcement model argued against any form of government regulation involving monitoring and assessment. The free market model perceived the strength of

private schools and voucher programs to flow from their freedom from wasteful and limited government regulation. Instead of regulation, free market advocates believed that the market would encourage private schools to disclose data reflecting the efficacy of their program as a means of attracting prospective students (Frieden).

Others were skeptical of this market driven disclosure since the motivation to draw students into their programs forced private schools to engage in marketing efforts rather than providing actual reliable disclosures (Frieden, 2003). Some suggestions for regulatory methods of monitoring programs and schools included reporting how voucher money was to be spent (including per pupil amounts), requiring the use of state certified instructors, reporting student scores on standardized tests, assuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and meeting state requirements for health, safety, and curriculum. Other approaches were less direct and required setting up a council to determine both the eligibility of schools to participate and to develop standards for monitoring school outcomes and efficiency (Frieden).

### Enforcement

Whatever system of monitoring was adopted, standards must be enforced when they are found to be out of compliance (Frieden, 2003). The free market approach to enforcement was merely consumer choice. If schools perform badly,

parents would take their kids elsewhere and the school would lose that income. Market motivations were directly based on the financial success of the school and only indirectly based on the educational success of its students. The actions of the school would therefore be focused on the "bottom line" in a free market. When the investment in the educational improvement of students did not have a positive cost-benefit ratio, schools would not institute improvements. For a voucher system to work there was a need to have a very strong connection between financial and educational success (Frieden).

The other common alternative of free market accountability was to require certain outcomes for continued participation in the program (Frieden, 2003). This approach would combine with a standardized monitoring system to measure one or more success criteria at each school, and expel failing schools from the voucher program. Alternately, voucher amounts could be reduced for schools that were not achieving specified standards or outcomes, but reducing funds was more likely to reduce the efficacy of such schools than improve them. A more positive approach would be to reward successful schools with bonus funds distributed based on yearly assessments of the specified criteria. The criteria could be any of those that could be monitored: teacher certifications, student achievement on assessment, post-secondary school enrollment of graduates, etc. Such positive accountability measures could also be broken out by specific targeted groups such as low-income students or students in special education (Frieden).

## Parent and Student Rights

Public schools have long extended limited rights to families, such as rights to access their educational records and have their confidentiality respected (Frieden, 2003). Private schools were bound more by contract than regulation, and thus, may not have extended the same rights to students that public schools did. However, free market ensured that no one would be limited to choices at schools that discriminated against them and that parents and students were extended any rights important enough to weigh in on their choice of school and thus affect the market. Parents choose schools based on a variety of factors; parental rights were only one factor and may not be a sufficiently determinative factor to influence the free market (Frieden).

### Summary

The decline of public school performance triggered the American government for an educational reform. One component of educational reform used was the voucher program. Voucher programs allowed parents to choose what school they preferred for their child if proven that the public school they attended performed poorly for two of the past four years. Through the use of vouchers children were eligible to transfer to another school either private or public.

In 1999, Florida supported the use of voucher programs. However, this program led to a lot of debates, controversies, and arguments not only on

schools but also to other government parties as well (Elam, 1991). Florida implemented the use of the A+ Accountability program together with NCLB giving parents a choice of school and permitting students to attend another private or public school. Advocates of voucher programs believed that voucher programs would threaten public schools with losing students and the potential of losing students could replace a monopoly, improve efficiency, motivate competition, and raise student achievement performance. However, detractors of voucher programs believed the voucher programs would only drain resources of the public school and generate profits and marketing cost for private schools leading to inequities in education (Moe, 2001).

According to Peterson (n.d.), the effectiveness of school-choice programs at challenging public schools to do better depended upon their design. The study of West and Peterson (2006) proved that the impact of student performance of voucher program improved compared to NCLB that only gave parents a choice of another public school within the same school district resulting to little or insignificant impact on school performance. Thus, a final decision on the future use of vouchers in Florida was a long way off. There was much data to be collected to determine not only the educational value of vouchers, but also their legal justification. Voucher programs seemed to be headed towards more legal battles in the future. The final outcome of these battles may determine whether vouchers were truly beneficial to the student or just a mask to the problems facing America and its educational system.



Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature as relevant to the problem of the study. Chapter 3 contains a description of the context for the study and the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 contains the data and the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, the implications for practice, the recommendations of the study, and the need for future research.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The case study methodology was chosen for this study because it best met the needs for data collection and analysis of the Florida public high schools that had been identified either as an 'A', 'B', or 'F' school by the Florida Department of Education as of the completion of the 2002-2003 academic school year.

According to Creswell (1998), there were five dimensions for comparing qualitative research. The five dimensions of a case study were focus, discipline origin, data collection, data analysis, and narrative. In addition, Merriam (1990) noted that qualitative case study research was an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena. Yin (1994) stated that case studies were the preferred strategy when the focus of qualitative research was on a contemporary issue that fell within the context of real life. Stake (2006) stated that multicase studies were appropriate in situations where cases were similar and inferences could be made between the individual cases. Stake also stressed the importance of not allowing individual cases to overshadow the research subject as a whole entity. Merriam (1990) believed that the researcher should select an interview style that would allow for the researcher to gain the greatest amount of information from the questions as possible.

The researcher chose to conduct interviews as the primary method for data collection. The researcher identified the questions in advance and developed potential follow-up questions in anticipation of having the ability to acquire additional information during the semi-structured interview. This method allowed the researcher some flexibility during the interview process, yet enabled the researcher to maintain a constant protocol among interviewees.

Dillman (2000) developed guidelines to provide a method for pre-testing interview questions. In accordance with Dillman's method, first, the researcher had the questions reviewed by knowledgeable colleagues. These colleagues were able to provide feedback essential to the question development process as well as the development of the follow-up questions. Second, the researcher focused on clarifying each question so that the interviewees would interpret each question in the same way. Third, the researcher asked the questions to various educational professionals to elicit responses. The responses were evaluated to determine if the question being asked was providing a response appropriate for the study. Finally, the researcher had individuals, both familiar with education and not, to objectively assess the questions and make comments for further question development.

## Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions through the semi-structured interviews:

Research Questions 1: What is a profile of a Voucher Eligible public high school in Florida as perceived by the principals of these schools?

Research Question 2: What is a profile of a public high school in Florida graded and 'A' or 'B' as perceived by the principals of these schools?

Research Question 3: What changes in curriculum, staff development, parent involvement, and budgeting have principals made as a result of being identified as a Voucher Eligible public high school or a high school graded 'A' or 'B' school in Florida?

Research Question 4: What are Voucher Eligible school principals' perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to Voucher Eligible high school in Florida?

Research Question 5: What are 'A' or 'B' high school principal's perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to their school?

## Sample and Site Selection

The sample was two public high schools in Florida that were identified as Voucher Eligible and assigned an 'F' grade according to the Florida Department of Education within the guidelines of the Florida state legislature, as well as one

public high school that was identified as an ‘A’ high school and one ‘B’ high school. Profiles of the identified Voucher Eligible schools and the ‘A’ or ‘B’ school were constructed based on that school’s demographic data as compiled from the state of Florida Department of Education archives and data compiled by the Common Core of Data. In addition, information was gathered from interviews of current public school principals in Florida Voucher Eligible schools and current principals of schools that were either identified as an ‘A’ or ‘B’ by the Florida Department of Education school grading policy. Principals were interviewed individually, audio-taped, and notes recorded. The principals that participated in this study were hesitant to agree to the interviews until approval had been granted from their respective school districts. In addition, three principals remained hesitant to participate even after school district approval until the committee chair had made personal calls to each of the principals or their superiors. The phone calls were made as an attempt by the committee chair to acquire the participation of the selected principals in the study. Table 3 summarized the four schools that participated in the study.

Table 3  
Summary of Principal Participants (2005-2006)

Principal	Gender	School District	Voucher Eligible	School Grade	Years as Principal	Years at School	Age Range
1	Male	Orange	Yes	F	10	3	55-60
2	Male	Duval	Yes	F	1	1	25-30
3	Male	Orange	No	A	11	8	40-45
4	Male	Duval	No	B	1	1	35-40

### Limitations of the Study

The researcher made modifications to the study in April 2006 due to the inability to gain approval to conduct the study in one public school district that contained four of the seven voucher eligible schools in Florida at the conclusion of the 2002-2003 school year. Upon approval of the study by the University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix A), the researcher sent research and evaluation application packets to each of the three school districts in which the Voucher Eligible schools were located. Two of the districts responded positively to the research and approved the study. One district did not approve the study. The reason given the researcher was that the study was not approved because of design concerns. The district that denied the research to be conducted in its schools had four of the original seven schools in the sample. The researcher was permitted to make modifications and reapply to the district; however, due to the time constraints of the research, modifications were instead made to the study to accommodate the approvals that had been given by the other school districts.

Under the revised study, the researcher chose to select an 'A' school in the same district as the Voucher Eligible school. The new revised study was modified to a four school case study prior to the data collection stage. As a result of not being able to gain permission into one entire school district, the researcher chose to continue the study in its revised formed used the two remaining Florida school districts that had voucher schools within their districts. As a comparison to

the voucher eligible schools, the revised study incorporated two non-voucher schools, preferably 'A' schools to use as examples of schools using current best practices. This allowed two schools within the same population markets to be compared to each other for purposes of similarities and differences. Following the above modifications, it was discovered that one approved district had no public schools that had been identified as an 'A' school for the academic year 2002-2003. The researcher then contacted a randomly selected 'B' school within that district and randomly selected one for use in the interviews. The principal of the 'B' school selected declined to participate, stating time constraints. The researcher then contacted a randomly selected second 'B' school from that district. The principal at that school agreed to participate.

After the four new schools were selected and revisions to the study had been made, the researcher faced challenges gaining access to the principals at the four selected schools. Initial attempts by the researcher to contact each principal to be interviewed were ignored. The initial attempts at reaching the principals included both emails and phone calls. In all four cases, the principals did not return phone calls nor respond to emails. The researcher contacted the committee chair and requested assistance with gaining access to the principals. Through the committee chair's emails and phone calls to both principals and district personnel, eventually all four principals contacted the researcher and consented to participating in the study. The researcher believed that the initial resentment by the principals to participate in the study was a result of two

possible causes. First, the political nature surrounding the school voucher issue continued to be a major issue with principals throughout the state. Second, the ability to possibly determine the identity of specific schools in the study as a result of the small numbers and the specific years of which the study was developed.

Due to the length of time between the 2002-2003 academic school year and the final interview process, two of the principals were not at the school in question at the time the school was assigned either the 'F' grade or the 'B' grade. In those cases, some of the data that were collected by the two principals were based on information the principal collected upon arriving at the school in discussions with co-workers and prior administrators at the school. The principals in these cases indicated to the researcher that they believed the data being given during the interview process was accurate and had been collected from not only within the school, but also from district personnel. Table 4 summarizes the four schools and their assigned grades since the 2001-2002 academic year.

Table 4  
Summary of School Grades since 2001-2002

School	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06
1	F	F	F	F	F
2	F	F	F	D	F
3	A	A	A	A	B
4	D	B	C	C	C

Retrieved from <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org>



### Data Collection

The researcher followed a modified version of Dillman's (2000) tailored design method for contacting subjects. After the Office of Research of the University of Central Florida (See Appendix A) granted permission, the researcher sent applications to conduct research to each of the school districts with potential subjects. The researcher then sent an introductory letter (See Appendix B) concerning the case study to the current principals of the identified Voucher Eligible schools and the appropriate 'A' or 'B' schools. The letter requested the participation of each principal to provide a time and date that was convenient for an interview and explained the purpose and procedures of the study (See Appendix B). The second contact method selected consisted of contacting the principals through email and thanking them for agreeing to participate in the interview and confirming the interview date and time. The third contact method selected consisted of a follow-up telephone call to the principal's secretary. In most cases, the researcher was successful in scheduling interviews with the principals after the third contact. Interviews that took longer to schedule had no effect on the outcome of the study.

All of the interviews were conducted in May 2006. The last interview was conducted May 31, 2006. The interview sessions ranged from 37 minutes to 48 minutes with an average duration of 44 minutes. All of the principals were given the opportunity to have the questions in advance; however, only one principal requested to have them in advance. The interview questions were sent to the

principal prior to the scheduled interview to allow him time to gather the data he wanted to include in the interview. All of the principals were given a copy of the interview questions at the conclusion of the interview. With the permission of the principals, the researcher audio taped the interviews and then transcribed them for use in the data analysis, eliminating any reference to names of schools or principals. As each interview was transcribed, the researcher reviewed it along with prior interview transcripts to determine recurring patterns, common themes, and unanticipated information. The researcher sent thank you letters to each of the participating principals.

Either the schools being surveyed were Voucher Eligible public high schools for two consecutive years as of the 2002-2003 academic year, or an 'A' or 'B' school as of the 2002-2003 academic year. Only public high schools were selected so that patterns, common themes, and other information could be related to each other. Academic year 2002-2003 was selected as the cut-off date to ensure each school had been identified as a Voucher Eligible school by the State of Florida for the same amount of time. The gap in time between the 2002-2003 academic school year and the interviews allowed principals the opportunity to reflect on changes made at the school, the differences the changes made, and their assessment of those changes.

Other sources of data collected were archival in nature, such as demographic information, school policies, student academic plans, and school improvement plans. These sources were obtained from the school's website, the

school district's website, the Florida Department of Education's website, the Common Core of Data website, and/or the school's administrators.

### Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data derived from the interviews and the archival data using Creswell's (1998) data analysis method. The researcher sought to identify recurring patterns in the data. Most of the responses were descriptive in nature. Once all of the data had been generated and collected, the researcher read the data to gain an overall view of what was included. The following day, the researcher read each piece to determine potential themes and highlights from the interviewees. When a key response was identified, it was listed on another paper. Once this process was completed, the compiled lists were reviewed for common themes. Once all of the pieces of data had been collected and reviewed, lists of responses were reviewed for key patterns that had been recorded in the different types of data collection. These key patterns became the themes of the data. Key responses were highlighted according to the umbrella theme under which they fell. The repeating patterns and themes, their descriptions and data sources included. The data were analyzed to answer the five research questions:

Research Question 1: What is a profile of a Voucher Eligible public high school in Florida as perceived by the principals of these schools?

To answer this research question, data from the interviews and pertinent archival data were analyzed using qualitative analysis strategies. The specific interview questions for this research question were: 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 15, 21 (See Appendix C for a list of the interview questions).

Research Question 2: What is a profile of a public high school graded ‘A’ or ‘B’ as perceived by the principals of these schools?

To answer this research question, data from the interviews and pertinent archival data were analyzed using qualitative analysis strategies. The specific interview questions for this research question were: 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 15, 21 (See Appendix D for a list of the interview questions).

Research Question 3: What changes in curriculum, human resources, staff development, parent involvement, and budgeting have principals made as a result of being identified as either a Voucher Eligible public high school or a high school graded ‘A’ or ‘B’ in Florida?

To answer this research question, data from the interviews and pertinent archival data were analyzed using qualitative analysis strategies. The specific interview questions for this research question were: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21 (See Appendix C & D for a list of the interview questions).

Research Question 4: What are Voucher Eligible school principals’ perceptions of Florida’s A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to Voucher Eligible high schools in Florida?

To answer this research question, data from the interviews and pertinent archival data were analyzed using qualitative analysis strategies. The specific interview questions for this research question were: 6, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 (See Appendix C for a list of the interview questions).

Research Question 5: What are 'A' or 'B' high school principal's perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to their school?

To answer this research question, data from the interviews and pertinent archival data were analyzed using qualitative analysis strategies. The specific interview questions for this research question were: 6, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 (See Appendix D for a list of the interview questions).

The researcher created tables to summarize the results of the analysis of the research questions. The categories on the tables related to the research questions: sub-categories emerged from the data itself and the literature review. The tables provided a graphical representation of the compiled analysis of the data from the principals of Voucher Eligible schools or the 'A' or 'B' schools. Table 5 contains the summaries of research question with the corresponding method of attainment and the interview question asked to illicit the data.

Table 5  
 Summary of Research Questions and Analysis Procedure

Research question	Methods	Related Interview Questions
1	Interview FIRN NCES	1,2,5,7,10,15,21
2	Interview FIRN NCES	1,2,5,7,10,15,21
3	Interview	3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14 19,20,21
4	Interview	6,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21
5	Interview	6,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21

Note: Information obtained from FIRN and NCES refers to the 2002-2003 school year.

### Summary

The research design, rationale, and methodology utilized for this case study have been presented in this chapter. The researcher developed semi-structured interview questions using Dillman's four stages of pre-testing and collected primary data utilizing the interview format. Principals of the two Voucher Eligible schools, the 'A' school, and the 'B' school were interviewed for this study. Archival data were collected from each school's website, the school district's website, the Florida Department of Education's website, the Common Core of Data website, and/or the school's administrators.

Chapter 3 contained a description of the context for the study and the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 contains the data and the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, the implications for practice, the recommendations of the study, and the need for future research.

## CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

### Introduction

This study was conducted to examine Voucher Eligible high schools in Florida through an interview process and to ascertain the perspective of two principals of Voucher Eligible schools and two principals of Non-Voucher Eligible schools. The Voucher Eligible schools included two 'F' schools as designated by the Florida Department of Education. The Non-Voucher Eligible schools included an 'A' school and a 'B' school as designated by the Florida Department of Education. All school grades represented were as of the 2002-2003 school year.

Principal 1 had been the principal of Voucher school 1 since the 2003-2004 school year. He had been a principal for a combined total of ten years. Principal 1 had replaced the principal at School 1 when after the school had received an 'F' grade the previous two consecutive years.

Principal 2 had been the principal of Voucher school 2 since the 2005-2006 school year. Principal 2 was completing his first year as a principal. Principal 2 was the second principal to be assigned to School 2 since being identified as a Voucher Eligible school.

Principal 3 had been the principal of Non-Voucher school 3 for the past eleven years, eight of which at his current school. Non-Voucher school 3 had been designated an 'A' for seven of the eight years he had been at school 3.



School 3 was designated a 'B' school during the 1998-1999 school year, the first year Principal 3 was assigned to School 3. Principal 3 had been at School 3 the entire time the school was an 'A'.

Principal 4 had been the principal of Non-Voucher school 4 for the past year. Principal 4 was completing his first year as a principal. Although School 4 was designated a 'B' school for the purposes of this study, it had been designated a 'C' school since the 2003-2004 school year. Principal 4 was the second principal to be assigned to School 4 since becoming a 'C' school.

The following data contained within this study were collected from interviews conducted by the researcher with the principals described above. All recounts of facts, figures, and comments are either direct quotes from the interviewees or paraphrased summaries made by the researcher based on the interviews. Chapter 4 was divided into five sections based on each research question. Each research question was then sub-divided into the individual questions the principals were asked. The response of each principal to the sub-question was recounted through direct quotes and a summary of responses. A table summarizing each principal's response was included either within the section that a particular question was asked or at the conclusion of a section that involved a response from all four principals. Table 6 provided a summary of the four identified schools and the corresponding schools characteristics.

Table 6  
Summary of School Characteristics (2002-2003)

School	School District	Level	School Grade	# of Students	% Free and Reduced Lunch	Minority Rate	% of Lowest 25% Making Gains in Reading	Total Points Earned
1	Orange	Secondary	F	1141	50	99	38	247
2	Duval	Secondary	F	1146	23	96	51	270
3	Orange	Secondary	A	3508	14	33	56	436
4	Duval	Secondary	B	2037	13	53	64	387

Florida Department of Education. (2006). School grades. Retrieved June 14, 2006, from <http://www.firn.edu/doe/schoolgrades>

### Research Question 1

What is a profile of a Voucher Eligible public high school in Florida as perceived by the principals of these schools?

#### Perception

Interview Question 3: *“Why was your school identified as a Voucher Eligible school?”*

#### School 1

According to Principal 1, School 1 was Voucher Eligible because “... our students lacked the necessary skills to perform at a certain level on the FCAT.” Voucher School 1 was hurt by the desegregation order that “... allowed students that were in a majority at one school to transfer to another school.” Principal 1 estimated that Voucher School 1 “... loses between 200 and 300 students every year as a result of the desegregation order. Parents that understood the rules were able to move their children to other schools.” Within that transfer of students, “... many good students were lost also.”

In addition to desegregation, many students did leave School 1 once the students at the school became Voucher Eligible; which was after the 2001-2002 school year, the third consecutive year of failing grades for School 1. According to Principal 1, after the 2002-2003 year as a Voucher Eligible school, many of the students returned to the school. Data showed that many of the students that

remained at Voucher School 1 had performed better on the FCAT than those students who chose to leave. Voucher School 1 "... now had programs in place to address the lack of skills they had, and was better equipped to help the student be successful than the other school of choice." Voucher School 1 had four percent of their students reading at grade level prior to be assigned a failing grade. According to Principal 1, "... that's ninety-six percent of our students were below grade level in reading, a crime."

Before becoming a Voucher Eligible school, School 1 was mainly "... a portable city." The buildings were not in the best of condition. "We did not have the new building that you are in here today." School 1 did not have a standard curriculum designed for all faculty members to follow. Teachers were teaching what they believed to be important and assessing students on what the individual teacher believed was necessary to have learned.

## School 2

Principal 2 believed that much of his school's challenges arose from "... public perception." According to Principal 2, "... the community had lost confidence in the school." Principal 2 believed that the community did not believe that the school's faculty could educate its children based solely on the fact that the state of Florida had given the school a failing grade. According to Principal 2, once school grades had been released to the public, "... it created a perpetual downward motion for the school." In addition, School 2 was academically

performing below grade level. According to Principal 2, "... only eleven percent of our students were reading at grade level." Although math scores "... were not overly impressive, they were not an embarrassment either." School 2 had a real need to focus on moving students to read at grade level. According to Principal 2, "... until our students were on grade level in reading, all subjects and test scores were going to suffer."

Due to the length of time that Principal 2 had been at the school, he could not give a good description of what a classroom looked like prior to becoming a Voucher Eligible school. Also no current administrators on staff were at the school prior to it being identified as a Voucher Eligible school. The school had experienced many changes since first being designated an 'F' school. From conversations with fellow staff and previous administrators at the school, Principal 2 imagined that there was a "... extraordinary amount of direct instruction going on in the classroom." Table 7 summarized each principal's responses to his perceptions of why their school had been designated an 'F' school.

Table 7  
Summary of Principals' Perceptions on School Grade

Interview Question 3	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
Why was your school identified as either voucher eligible, 'A' or 'B'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students lacked the necessary skills to perform well on the FCAT</li> <li>• Hurt by desegregation movement</li> <li>• Loss of students as a result of school grade</li> <li>• A portable city</li> <li>• No standard curriculum to follow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of confidence in school as a result of school grade</li> <li>• School was academically performing below grade level</li> <li>• Only 11% of students were reading at grade level</li> <li>• Large amounts of direct instruction going on in the classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the criteria set forth by the state</li> <li>• We have been able to reach our lowest 25% of students on a continuous basis</li> <li>• More data driven</li> <li>• Educational decisions are based on individual student data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching practices were very traditional and direct</li> <li>• Demographics of school have changed over the past ten years</li> <li>• Increased minority rate in surrounding neighborhoods</li> <li>• Increase in magnet schools at other local schools</li> </ul>

## Major Challenges

Interview Question 5: *“What were the major challenges your school was facing prior to being identified as a Voucher Eligible school?”*

### School 1

The challenges of School 1 prior to becoming a Voucher Eligible school were the same as many other schools around the country. The school was dealing with students in low socio-economic groups. According to Principal 1, “... I am not talking about poverty as in race or color.” School 1 had a significant number in the population that “... lacked the financial resources to prepare their children to be adequately educated.” School 1 was struggling as a school because of a “... lack of preparation.” Many students attending School 1 came from unstable and/or single parent homes. Principal 1 believed that students could do academically better in a stable home environment. One example given was of a small child (2 year old) that the principal observed. The baby was on the computer with the primary care giver and going through Baby Einstein computer programs. The program was teaching the child to communicate in three languages. According to Principal 1, “... this baby was going to be better prepared in life, in school, than another baby that was not receiving this same type of instruction.” According to Principal 1, “... this country needs a great pre-K program – to better prepare all of our kids for the future.”

## School 2

The challenges of School 2 centered on the community. There "... is no community buy-in at this school." Students had no pride in their school prior to becoming a failing school. There was no culture, there was "... no identity to the students as a student body." There was a lack of community pride among the residents. Students went to other schools to get away from their neighborhood school. Most students did not "... show any school spirit away from the hours they were made to be here for class instruction." Table 8 contains the summary the principal's perceptions of what they believed to be the major challenges of their school prior to being identified as Voucher Eligible.



Table 8  
Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Major Challenges

Interview Question 7	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What were the major challenges your school was facing prior to being identified as voucher eligible, 'A' or 'B'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faced with lots of financial poverty</li> <li>• Struggled with a lack of student preparation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No community buy-in for the school</li> <li>• No pride in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population size</li> <li>• Goal for students to earn credits, stay focused, and graduate</li> <li>• Larger student goals were met by meeting smaller goals on a more consistent basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaming</li> <li>• Divide the school into smaller and a more workable size</li> <li>• No specific direction in curriculum</li> <li>• We teach too many things in American schools</li> </ul>

## Motivated Teachers

Interview Question 13: *Give an example of a motivated teacher at the school and what you might see if you walked into that teacher's classroom.*

### School 1

According to Principal 1, "... all of my teachers are highly motivated."

Principal 1 believed that he has many "highly motivated" teachers in his school.

Principal 1 gave an example of one of his reading teachers, "... her room just jumps out at you." When you go in this "highly motivated" teacher's room, you would see word walls, books, useful strategies displayed, benchmarks visible to everyone in the room, and student recognition prominently displayed. In another "highly motivated" teacher's room, you would see "... three things going on at one time." Her students were engaged in activities that interested them. They are learning in groups. According to Principal 1, "Some people would go in her room and think no learning is going on because it was so loud, but that was not the case. Students were learning because they were engaged in an activity that they could relate to." Another "highly motivated" teacher, a math teacher, was a graduate of this particular school. Now, she was board certified, she had students practicing reading. Most people would not find and would not expect to find "... reading going on in a math classroom." However, the kids' love the books and they all were math related. In addition to reading, as with the other teacher examples, a daily agenda was on the board so that all students knew what was

expected of them. The benchmarks were visibly displayed. According to Principal 1, "... there was a misconception that a classroom had to be quiet for learning to be taking place. That is not true. Most likely if the room is quiet, nobody is doing anything."

### School 2

Principal 2 believed he had many "highly motivated" teachers. He stated, "I have been in many classrooms getting to know the faculty and the students. I see lots of things going on that are good signs for the future of our school." One example of a "highly motivated" teacher was a French teacher. This teacher was School 2's Teacher of the Year for 2005-2006. She was one of the few teachers that had remained at the school through several staff and administrative changes. In this teacher's classroom, students were only allowed to speak French. They were "... engulfed in the subject and not allowed to deviate throughout the semester." The teacher set expectations, believed in the students, and showed a caring attitude towards each student. Principal 2 believed that the students could feel that the teacher's enthusiasm was real, it was "... not a gimmick." Another "highly motivated" teacher at School 2 taught reading. This class was being watched by the principal, other faculty members, and the district. It was her students that were noticed if they did not do well. When the FCAT scores were released, it was this teacher that everyone looked to explain why scores were low or why students were not doing well. However, in the classroom,

this teacher set high expectations for the students, gave them numerous ways of reaching those expectations, and then demanded that they meet her expectations. According to Principal 2, "... our students have a way of reaching whatever level we set for them. If we set the bar too low, then we get low results. If we set the bar too high, we get better results, even if they are not the highest results we initially desired." Table 9 contains the summaries of Principal 1 and Principal 2's responses to their perceptions of highly motivated teachers at their respective schools.

Table 9  
Summary of Principals' Perceptions of Motivated Teachers

Interview Question 13	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
Give examples of motivated teachers and what you might see if you walked into that teacher's classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All teachers are highly motivated</li> <li>• Word Walls</li> <li>• Useful strategies displayed</li> <li>• Student recognition displayed</li> <li>• Multi-learning going on in classroom</li> <li>• Not necessarily a quiet classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many highly motivated teachers</li> <li>• Students engulfed in learning</li> <li>• Teacher sets expectations and believes in students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All teachers are fairly highly motivated</li> <li>• Teachers work as facilitators in the classroom</li> <li>• Decrease lecture learning</li> <li>• Increase individual learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many highly motivated teachers</li> <li>• Student is most important element in the classroom</li> </ul>

## Current Challenges and Successes

Interview Question 17: *“What has been your greatest challenge as the leader of a Voucher Eligible school and what has been your greatest positive as principal of a Voucher Eligible school.”*

### School 1

According to Principal 1, the greatest challenge for his school in the coming years was making the “... priorities of the community the same as the school’s.” School 1 had a rich historical tradition in the community. They prided themselves on many things associated with the school, one of which was not necessarily academics. According to Principal 1, “... academically, we were not there yet.” The community wanted to ask about how the football team did Friday night or how the band did at competition last weekend. “I needed to get them on the same mental playing level academically, as they were for the arts.” Principal 1 stressed that he was not trying to say that the arts and extra-curricular activities were not important, but that it would be nice to get academics to be as an important part of their lives as these other activities. According to Principal 1, “When mom makes homework first, then our community will then be on its way to being academically focused.”

The greatest positive at School 1 was that “... the students over time had started to accept the fact that academics were important.” Principal 1 believed that you got a new feeling when you walked down the halls of the school. School

1 had less than 200 students graduating this upcoming year, but the atmosphere was improving. In June, Principal 1 believed "... there will be lots to celebrate about at School 1. Our data tells us that we are on the right road."

### School 2

According to Principal 2, the greatest challenge facing School 2 was "... convincing our students that the perceptions of them in the public were not what defined them." Many of our students also believed "... that this was a failing school." The students treated the school as a failing school. They showed no school pride. They left trash around the facilities. They did not participate in extracurricular activities. According to Principal 2, "... the effects of being a failing school perpetuated a continual failing attitude among the students." According to Principal 2, before changes could be made in the classroom, "... we needed to get the mindset of the students' right." The students needed to believe that they could thrive and that they could learn at their school. This was the most important job of the current administration and faculty. When the students were ready to learn, then they could begin to make gains in the classroom.

Principal 2 believed that "... we needed to re-evaluate topics in education on a consistent basis." Principal 2 stated that, "Every two or three years, we must take a look at our programs, our initiatives, and see if they are working." Are the changes being made in education and the roads education are following "... taking our profession as a whole down the right road." Principal 2 believed that If

the changes that were made in education were not working than educators must not be "... afraid to back up and do something different." According to Principal 2, "... we give a program enough time to work, but evaluate it." Principal 2 believed that we should not continue down the same path if we were not making any progress. Principal 2 believed that the voucher system had been guilty of this. He believed that policy makers were "... not willing to look at it objectively and see if true progress is really being made." Principal 2 was open to any program. According to Principal 2, "... if the system works, let it run. If it was going to move the kids further down the road, make the community stronger, and in turn the country stronger, then do it." However, Principal 2 believed that if "... all we are doing is causing divisions and breaking the moral and spirits of both children and adults, then let's revisit it." Table 10 contains the summaries of the perceptions of Principals 1 and Principal 2 in respect to current challenges and successes in education.



Table 10  
Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Current Challenges and Successes

Interview Question 17	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
<p>What has been your greatest challenge as the leader of a voucher eligible, "A", or "B" school and what has been your greatest positive as principal of a voucher eligible, "A", or "B" school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making priorities of community the same as the school</li> <li>▪ Get academics to be as important as the extra-curricular activities</li> <li>▪ Students are beginning to believe in academics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convincing the students that the community perception of them is not what defines them</li> <li>▪ Students show no school pride</li> <li>▪ Effects of a failing school perpetuates a failing school</li> <li>▪ We need to re-evaluate topics in education on a consistent basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining the "A"</li> <li>• Most students have bought into the system</li> <li>• Every year all bets are off</li> <li>• Changed the way the teachers teach in the classroom</li> <li>• System has created more board certified teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to reach our students on a more consistent basis</li> <li>• Increase the number of students taking AP classes</li> <li>• Better way to use parent resources in the school</li> <li>• Prepare school to be competitive in the future</li> </ul>

## Research Question 2

What is a profile of a public high school in Florida graded an 'A' or 'B' as perceived by the principals of these schools?

### Perception

Interview Question 3: *"Why was your school identified as an 'A' or 'B'?"*

#### School 3

According to Principal 3, his school was identified as an 'A' school because of the criteria set forth by the state of Florida. The state of Florida had made the decision that any school, which performed well on the FCAT test, especially in their lowest twenty-five percent of students, would receive an 'A' grade for that year. According to Principal 3, "... we have been able to reach our lowest twenty-five percent of students on a continuous basis." "Our lowest twenty-five percent of students have been able to perform steadily above their previous levels on the FCAT and therefore their scores have allowed school 3 to remain an 'A' school."

According to Principal 3, prior to the FCAT, School 3 had "... never really identified who were our lowest twenty-five percent of the students." School 3 was "... probably like all the other schools out there teaching to the middle of the pack." In hindsight, Principal 3 believed that "... we were probably not making a connection to the lowest performing students in our school." Since the inception of the FCAT, School 3 had become more data driven. According to Principal 3,

“... we now look at each student on an individual basis and make educational decisions based on the data.”

#### School 4

Although Principal 4 was not at School 4 during the 2002-2003 school year, he had developed a set of beliefs on why School 4 was given a ‘C’ grade prior to 2003. First, according to Principal 4, “... the teaching practices were a very traditional stand and delivery method.” In addition to the teaching practices, the demographics at School 4 had “... changed dramatically over the past 10 years.” Second, the neighborhoods around School 4 had a higher minority population today compared to the same neighborhood a few years ago. Lastly, the increase in magnet programs at neighboring schools had taken many of the top students away from School 4. According to Principal 4, “... we have not kept up with the schools around us in offering current programs for our students.” Principal 4 believed that if you did not provide the services that students were looking for, then they would go elsewhere to get them. Tables 7 summarizes Principal 3 and Principal 4’s responses to their perceptions of why their school had been designated with an ‘A’ or ‘B’ grade.

#### Major Challenges

Interview Question 5: *“What were the major challenges your school was facing prior to being identified as an ‘A’ or ‘B’ school?”*

### School 3

According to Principal 3, the major challenges facing School 3 prior to being designated an 'A' school was "... the population size." The student body at School 3 was so large that students "... were lost in the masses." According to Principal 3, even before the issue of school grading, "... we were trying to find ways to break our student body down into more workable learning communities." School 3 developed academies for students. According to Principal 3, the challenge for our students was "... to earn credits, to stay focused, and to graduate." Principal 3 believed that the initial success of School 3 was attributed to these smaller learning communities and the ability of the school to keep students focused on smaller goals. According to Principal 3, "larger student goals were accomplished by meeting smaller goals on a more frequent basis."

### School 4

According to Principal 4, the major challenges facing School 4 prior to becoming a 'B' school was "teaming." In addition to teaming, Principal 4 believed that "... our school was too large." School 4 needed to "... divide the school into smaller, more workable sizes, and then probably divide it again."

School 4 had no specific direction in curriculum. According to Principal 4, "... educators had no idea what was essential, what were the core elements that needed to be taught, and what extra can we teach if we have the time." Principal 4 believed that the TIMS study supported his claim. According to Principal 4, "...

in America, we teach too many things.” Principal 4 believed that the school was “... caught up in how many minutes of contact time we had, rather than the quality of that contact time.” Table 8 summarizes the Principal 3 and Principal 4’s perceptions of what they believed to be the major challenges of his school prior to being identified as either an ‘A’ or ‘B’ school.

### Motivated Teachers

Interview Question 12: *Give an example of a motivated teacher at the school and what you might see if you walked into that teacher’s classroom.*”

#### School 3

According to Principal 3, “... all of my teachers are fairly highly motivated.” Principal 3 believed that he had a great group of teachers on his faculty that work tremendously hard to help his/her students be successful. According to Principal 3, his most motivated teachers “... are working as facilitators in the classroom.” These teachers have found a way to NOT make every day in the classroom a “... boring monotonous ritual.” One example given by Principal 3 was a math teacher. According to Principal 3, when you enter this teacher’s room, “... you find lots of cooperative learning going on.” Although you still see some direct instruction, the amount of class time taken with the direct instruction was limited. Principal 3 gave a counter-example of a classroom that was directed by a not so highly motivated teacher. According to Principal 3, “... in some of our less

successful classrooms, we still find lots of skill and drill.” Principal 3 believed that you could see a big difference in the results of students between those students that had been fortunate to have the “highly motivated” teacher and those that had not been as fortunate. According to Principal 3, “... we must find a way to move all of our teachers away from the lecture and individual learning in the classroom, and lead them more towards discovery learning.”

#### School 4

Principal 4 had many “highly motivated” teachers in the classroom. One example given was of a language arts teacher that was part of the AVID program (see description of AVID on page 69). Principal 4 believed that a “highly motivated” teacher “... made the student the most important element in the room.” Principal 4’s language arts teacher was “... always student driven. This teacher would call me on the weekend with ideas.” One of the things Principal 4 looked for in his teachers was “... the contact with the kids. The kids know if you know your material. The kids know if you believe in them. The kids know if you are connected to them.” Principal 4 did not believe that you could fake the contact. According to Principal 4, the only problem with the “motivated” teacher was his “... inability to tell which teacher was the motivated one during the interview process. If I could do that, then I would have all great, highly motivated teachers.” Table 9 summarizes of the responses of Principal 3 and Principal 4 to their perceptions of highly motivated teachers at their respective schools.

## Current Challenges and Successes

Interview Question 17: *“What has been your greatest challenge as the leader of an ‘A’ or ‘B’ school and what has been your greatest positive as principal of an ‘A’ or ‘B’ school.”*

### School 3

According to Principal 3, the greatest challenge facing School 3 was “... maintaining the ‘A’.” Students that had transferred into School 3 “... changed the way the school looked.” Principal 3 believed that School 3 had been lucky in that “... most of the students have bought into the system.” According to Principal 3, students at School 3 believed in their teachers, they believed that their classes were preparing them for something better in the future; they believed that the teachers had the student’s best educational interest at the forefront of everything they do. Just as School 3’s greatest challenge had been in trying to maintain the ‘A’, Principal 3 believed that his greatest success had been “... maintaining the ‘A’.” According to Principal 3, “... we have had a nice long run of success as an “A” school.” However, Principal 3 was quick to point out that “... every year, all bets are off.” According to Principal 3, “... every year we have to put in the work with the new kids to get the grade. They just don’t hand it out.”

In general, Principal 3 believed personally that the school grading system “... is a bunch of hoey.” However, the process had “... probably made a difference in the way our teachers teach today, especially our veteran teachers.”

Principal 3 believed that maybe some of the veteran teachers have looked more closely at their curriculum and made better decisions on what needs to be taught. Principal 3 believed that "... maybe some of our veteran teachers have gotten away from teaching what they think is important and focusing on what might be important for the class as a whole." Furthermore, Principal 3 believed that the school voucher system and school grading specifically had helped create more board certified teachers. Principal 3 believed that "... we have made a great impact on the educational training of our teachers. Over the long haul, our students and our educational system may be better off for it."

#### School 4

According to Principal 4, the major challenge facing School 4 in the future was developing our teachers to be able to "... reach our students on a more consistent basis." In the future in the classroom and in the curriculum, School 4 would attempt to increase the number of AP classes it currently has by "... 300 to 400 percent." To increase student learning, Principal 4 believed that "... relevant professional development must be brought in to assist our teachers in gaining the skills necessary to be successful." In addition to preparing our teachers, School 4 must "... find a way to better use the parent resources to improve the school." Finally, Principal 4 planned to utilize its partnership with the University of Florida to "... help our students and our teachers continue to grow." Principal 4 believed that School 4 had "... a lot of hard work ahead. We need to prepare our entire



school, from top to bottom, to be successful for the future.” Principal 4 did not mind the competition, but he did believe that “... if the students at schools are being hurt by the competition, then we need to address how to make changes in those schools for the better.” Table 10 has summaries of the perceptions of Principals 3 and Principal 4 in respect to current challenges and successes in education.

### Research Question 3

What changes in curriculum, human resources, staff development, parent involvement, and budgeting have principals made as a result of being identified as either a Voucher Eligible public high school or a high school graded ‘A’ or ‘B’ in Florida?

#### Curriculum

Interview Question 6: *“What changes have you made in curriculum or instruction as a result of your school grade?”*

#### School 1

The principal of Voucher School 1 indicated that they had implemented one new program, the Continuous Improvement Model (CIM). This program allowed for teachers, each week, to focus on one specific FCAT curriculum area that the students had tested low on, and to stress the skills necessary to master

the concept. Students worked 10-15 minutes every day in each of their classes on the concept. Tests were administered every Friday to check or assess for mastery. Students who mastered the concept of the week moved on to a new concept for the next week. Students who did not master the concept were given the concept again in their reading classes. Students continued with the weekly skill instruction throughout the semester, re-learning concepts as needed.

Voucher School 1 also implemented a tutoring program. The results of the tutoring program were very disappointing the first year. Principal 1 indicated that "... it just did not work." There was no by-in from the students." Modifications to the tutoring program were made after the first year and the school implemented a new style of tutoring known to the faculty, staff and students, as "blitzes". These "blitzes" occurred randomly throughout the year and generally were held after school. Students who attended received pizza. According to Principal 1, "Students are always motivated by free pizza." Each "blitz" was attended alternately by a math teacher and then a reading teacher. Students were required to complete the tutoring exercises first, before pizza was handed out. The school did determine that tutoring sessions were not successful on Saturdays.

Furthermore, Principal 1 required all Florida benchmarks for a subject to be visible in every classroom. "Students should know what is expected of them in the classroom." Teachers were expected to have an agenda on the board of daily activities. It was expected that if anyone should walk into that classroom, that

person should be able to tell what was presently happening, where the students had been, and where they were going.

Finally, Principal 1 required a major change to lesson plans. Lesson plans were modified to be completed and submitted on-line and reformatted to include all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's Taxonomy was developed by Benjamin S. Bloom and a group of educational psychologists in 1956 (Office Port, 2006). Bloom's Taxonomy was a tool that had been used for classifying skills in education since the 1950's. Skills were divided into the six classifications: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Principal 1 anticipated the new on-line version of the lesson plan would allow teachers to become more structured. The new lesson plans would "give the teachers a little more direction as to what needed to be on the lesson plan and what would be expected to be on the lesson plan."

### School 2

Presently, Voucher School 2 was planning many changes in curriculum and instruction. According to Principal 2, the teachers would begin teaching "... in more collegiate style instruction" this upcoming year. Teachers would "... act more as facilitators in the classroom rather than instruction givers."

Voucher School 2 planned to implement a school-wide writing program. The program was designed to give students more relevant instruction in proper writing styles and practice in learning the skills necessary to be successful on the

FCAT. In the reading classes, Principal 2 asked teachers to focus more on specific vocabulary in their readings. According to Principal 2, vocabulary "... tends to be a barrier with our children."

Principal 2 believed that teachers needed to help students comprehend what was being read. Students at School 2 "... do not understand what the questions are asking." In order for School 2 to become a "passing grade" school, the teachers "... must begin to get into each student's mind and assist him in overcoming his challenges."

### School 3

According to Principal 3, the most evident change in curriculum was the initial move away from the WISE committee. Principal 3 could not remember the exact acronym for WISE; however, the WISE committee was designed to increase student scores across the curriculum. Students at School 3 who participate in the WISE program are enrolled in an additional English class that requires the completion of a project to receive credit. The program requires students participating in the program to participate in a hands-on experience in the community, complete a research project, maintain a journal, attend weekly mentoring meetings, and present a final presentation to a committee. The WISE committee was replaced by the Academy of Reading program. The Academy of Reading program was a comprehensive reading program developed between 1986 and 1990 by Fiedorowicz and Trites that could be used by schools to

complement their reading instruction (Education Commission of the States, 2002). The program was designed to be able to apply different teaching methods to different students based on their learning styles. The Academy of Reading program was predominately a computer based learning program. According to Principal 3, this program allowed School 3 to place more emphasis on "... reading instruction" than in the past. Students who participated in the Academy of Reading program were given an additional half credit towards graduation. The Academy of Reading program ultimately provided students with a structured 2 hour reading and writing block.

In addition to the Academy of Reading program, School 3 placed more emphasis on the lowest twenty-five percent of their student population. The identified lower twenty-five percent of students were required to enroll in a one hour block of language arts strategies. In addition to the reading and language arts strategies classes, emphasis was placed on the school's dropout prevention program. School 3 made an effort to keep students in school and on pace for graduation.

#### School 4

One of the first curriculum changes made by Principal 4 was the formation of teams. According to Principal 4, "... each new 9th grader coming into the school in August 2007 would be placed on a team with a permanent math teacher and a permanent English teacher. Science and social studies teachers

would be rotated in and out of the teams.” According to Principal 4, the math and English teachers would have common planning periods so that “... they can correlate their lesson plans to complement each other.” In addition to aligning the teachers, each team was given data on their students and the data was analyzed by the team. Principal 4 believed that training teachers to be able to look at the data of their own students and make decisions on how to best use the data was an important step in the teaching process. According to Principal 4, “... the best way for a teacher to benefit his students was to know that student’s strengths and weaknesses first hand.” Teammates at School 4 would work together to “... drill down to the real needs of their students.”

New ninth graders to School 4 would “... work on an action plan” for graduation from the first day they attend classes. Principal 4 believed that “... many times ninth graders get stuck and never get unstuck.” Furthermore, Principal 4 believed that not all ninth graders know how to make a plan for graduation and do not realize that the plan must start from their entry into high school. In order to reduce discipline problems and drop out rates, Principal 4 planned to “... put a lot of energy and resources into our ninth graders.” In addition, Principal 4 planned to initiate Spring Board. Spring Board was a program developed by The College Board, whose goal was to promote higher academic standards in teaching and learning. Spring Board was an interactive math and language arts curriculum that was current with the standards of today’s educational system.

Principal 4 planned to pilot a program known in education as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). The AVID program was a 25 year old proven program that could be found being implemented in many states around the country, including Florida (California Student Aid Commission, 2006). The AVID program was designed to increase school wide learning and performance. The mission of the AVID program was to ensure that all students, especially those students that were scoring in the middle of the school population, were given opportunities to participate in a rigorous curriculum, and have an opportunity to increase their chances at entering a four-year college upon graduation. Over the summer of 2006, 80 students that would be entering School 4 would be identified by their middle schools to participate in the program. School 4 had identified AVID teachers for the program, each of whom had gone through the teacher training in 2005. Students that participated in the AVID pilot program at School 4 would continue to take their four core classes of math, English, social studies, and science, but then would take the AVID classes as an elective. Students would receive tutorials in their AVID classes as well as make college visits and attend Socratic seminars throughout their high school years. According to Principal 4, the AVID program would "... prepare our students to go to a four year college when they graduate from high school." Table 11 contains the summaries of the curriculum issues faced by each of the principals.

Table 11  
Summary of Curriculum Issues

Interview Question 6	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What changes have you made in curriculum or instruction as a result of either your school grade?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented Continuous Improvement Model (CIM)</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Visible benchmarks in every classroom</li> <li>• Lesson plan modification (on-line)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collegiate style instruction</li> <li>• School-wide writing program</li> <li>• Increase reading comprehension programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abolish the WISE program</li> <li>• Implement Academy of Reading program</li> <li>• 1-hour language arts block for lowest 25%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of teams (with a permanent math and English teacher on each team)</li> <li>• Graduation action plans for incoming 9th graders</li> <li>• Implement Spring Board program</li> </ul>

### Human Resources

Interview Question 7: *“What changes have you made in human resources as a result of your school grade?”*

#### School 1

The principal of Voucher School 1 made numerous changes in staffing. First, more teachers were added to the staff to teach reading remediation. Second, Principal 1 requested and received a community resource person from the district. Third, Principal 1 recruited new mentors for the students. In the first



year of the program over 200 mentors were recruited and assigned to help students. By the second year, that number had grown to over 300. Fourth, new clubs were developed to encourage learning, but to have fun doing it. One example was a reading club for girls. Principal 1 indicated that the “club” concept “... came from the students. Students love to be in clubs.” The reading club provided free books on a first–come–first–serve basis. When announcements were made that books were available, “Girls would come running.” The principal concluded that the students just needed, “... someone to get them in the habit of reading.”

### School 2

The principal of Voucher School 2’s main concern regarding human resources was “... identifying teachers that are not in sync with the school’s plans.” School 2 evaluated their teachers on a yearly basis and continued to do so to ensure that all teachers at the school were working towards the common goal. In addition, Principal 2 planned to look at adding additional reading and writing teachers in not only the core subject areas but also for remediation. Principal 2 planned to “... assign staff to the best possible position for the school.” Principal 2 stated an important aspect of making academic improvements within the school was to ensure that each teacher was in the classroom setting that best fit their experience and their teaching level.

### School 3

The addition of a testing coordinator at School 3 was one of the major changes in staff made by the school. The new testing coordinator position was developed and implemented to "... provide a consistent person to be in charge of all of our testing needs." The testing coordinators duties were not limited to the FCAT, but he/she also monitored the administration of the test, was in charge of administering the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the American College Testing (ACT), the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), and all other monitored type tests that were given by the school throughout the year. The testing coordinator was given an additional clerk. In order to create the testing coordinator position, School 3 eliminated the Assistant Principal of Instruction (API). The API's duties were shifted from the instruction side of the position to overseeing all testing, including the testing coordinator. In addition to the testing coordinator position, additional reading teachers were hired by School 3 to provide enough teachers for the additional reading classes.

### School 4

Changes in staff and human resources were a constant at School 4. According to Principal 4, "... we have taken a lot of time participating in employment fairs looking for the right person for the job." According to Principal 4, "... our elective courses have suffered the most because we have our students in so many reading and language arts classes, they don't have time for the arts."

Principal 4 had to "... struggle to keep his arts classes and other electives alive" at the school.

A second factor for School 4 was the class size amendment. According to Principal 4, "... the class size amendment has been a real obstacle to us. Governor Bush was dead on when he said that the voters had no clue what they were passing." According to Principal 4, "... if you look at our master schedule, every square foot of this school is being used for classroom space. We have had to incorporate team teaching into our classrooms to make the numbers work." School 4 would need 20 additional classrooms just to meet the standards that were currently required by the legislature. According to Principal 4, "... not only has the class size limited the number of choices of classes I can offer, but by having to double up my language arts instruction, my possibilities for other classes that are important to kids are limited." According to Principal 4, "... so far I have only had to drop home economics and a business course; luckily I was able to do that through teachers retiring instead of having to let teachers go." According to Principal 4, "... in striving for academic excellence – which no one argues with – we don't have the funding to give kids those hands-on classes they love." Principal 4 believed we all know the benefits of the music, art, and shop class, but the ability to offer those classes was becoming less and less of an option these days. Principal 4 gave one example of a friend of his that enjoyed shop class in high school more than any other class or subject. That friend went on to own his own garage and does very well for himself. According to Principal

4, "... without the shop class that friend may not be as successful today as he is. There are all kinds of people out there and all kinds of jobs out there. We need to keep the elective classes open as an option for some of our students." Table 12 contains the summaries of the human resource issues faced by each of the principals.

Table 12  
Summary of Human Resource Issue

Interview Question 7	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What changes have you made in human resources as a result of either your school grade?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff changes</li> <li>• Increase in reading remediation teachers</li> <li>• District community resource</li> <li>• Mentoring program</li> <li>• Reading clubs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify teachers not in sync with school goals</li> <li>• Assign staff to best possible fit in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addition of a testing coordinator</li> <li>• Eliminated API position</li> <li>• Increased number of reading teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff changes through employment fairs</li> <li>• Keep elective classes functioning</li> <li>• Meet class size amendment requirements</li> <li>• Incorporate team teaching</li> </ul>

## Staff Development

Interview Question 8: *“What changes have you made in staff and professional development as a result of your school grade?”*

### School 1

Initially, at Voucher School 1, staff development was “... shoved down their throats.” Staff development occurred every Tuesday after school in the media center. All teachers were required to attend. Initially the staff development was centered on the new Continuous Improvement Model (CIM) the school adopted. However, each weekly meeting also centered on specific topics to hopefully help teachers become better teachers. One month, benchmarks were stressed. Teachers were given instructions on how to present instruction that actually supported the benchmarks. All of the teachers of School 1 were given the appropriate information during the Fall. Principal 1 tailored the information to his liking and to what he believed was the most important aspects for School 1 to focus. The teachers were then able to take the information they learned during training and determine how to best use it in their classroom. According to Principal 1, “... for the first half of the year, it was my way or the highway”. In the spring, writing teams were formed. Writing teams were developed to “... get “buy-in” from the teachers.” A good base was established in the first part of the year, now it was “... time to let individual teacher creativity cultivate the ideas further.”

Although the focus of School 1 every week in staff development was the CIM program, other staff development was interwoven with it. The school as a whole worked on developing instructional calendars and focused on what should be taught in every classroom. Outside presenters were brought in to assist teachers in developing their calendars and to assist with brainstorming for other ideas. Principal 1 was "... very aware of not pushing the envelope when it comes to staff development. The teachers had to come voluntarily, yet I could give them small incentives such as free food and limited compensatory time." In the second year after being identified as a voucher school, "... we developed our own teachers into the presenters." This resulted in School 1's own teachers becoming more involved in School 1's staff development process. Teachers from School 1 became the presenters for the material and developed their own in-depth additions to the basic structure.

Furthermore, during the 2005-2006 school year, teachers were paid stipends to attend "Write for the Future" workshops. "Write for the Future" was a process for teachers to use in the classroom to assist in improving student writing overall and specifically on the FCAT. Principal I believed that having teachers trained in the "Write to the Future" process, would allow them to be better equipped to assist students in the classroom.

## School 2

Principal 2 believed that School 2 "... is very strong right now in terms of the basics." Voucher School 2 had addressed many performance areas, for both students and teachers as a result of being identified as a voucher school. The two major performance areas that were of most concern to Principal 2 included "... reading and writing." According to Principal 2, "... we needed to go more in-depth in each area." School 2 addressed all areas of curriculum within their staff development training; however, the main concern was being able to provide information that would be useful for the teachers in their classroom with students. Principal 2 planned to continue to "... focus on the four column method" for answering multiple choice questions. The four-column method was developed as an organizer for students to increase their ability to answer extended response questions. The method identified the four columns as a) what I know, b) what I must do, c) what are the facts, and d) how does this relate to other things (Keeney et al., 2002). Principal 2 also planned to "... continue with the item analysis work" that the school started last year." The item analysis method was a process of looking at a test and determining at what level each student was performing.

In professional development, School 2 was committed to participating in the Florida Reading Initiative (FRI). Teachers and school officials were trained over the summer of 2005 in the reading process. Throughout the year, the school

would continue to receive "... professional development workshops to assist teachers in evaluating their students on a continuous basis."

In addition to the FRI, School 2 planned to continue working with the University of Florida through an alliance for reading. Students and staff from the University of Florida provided "assistance and training on a regular basis" for the teachers. This program "... provides a great support and resource not only for our reading teachers, but also for other teachers."

### School 3

Staff development for School 3 mostly included "... strategies for reading." With the addition of the Academy of Reading, reading was the main focus of the faculty and staff throughout the school year. Teachers and administrators attended many reading workshops and in-service programs to increase their knowledge of reading in the classroom. Teachers at School 3 participated in workshops to learn how to proof-read. Teachers were given many opportunities to "... read actual student work, grade the work, discuss the work with their colleagues, and learn from the experiences." Teachers were not only trained on how to grade writing, but also on how to write themselves. Teachers at School 3 were trained by language arts teachers from throughout the county on writing rubrics. These writing rubrics were designed specifically to grade FCAT type writings. These rubrics were developed in trainings that were "... part of the school district's overall professional development plan. By the end of the year,



teachers at School 3 were being used to conduct their own training workshops to their own co-workers.

In addition to the staff development on reading and writing, School 3 provided faculty and staff with in-services training on recent brain research. Speakers were invited to give the teachers insight on "... how the brain works." School 3 increased their technology training for their teachers. Technology training included instruction not only for increasing student FCAT skills, but also for integrating more technology into the classroom for general student learning.

#### School 4

School 4 trained a full time standards coach for the 2006-2007 school year. During the summer of 2006, School's 4 leadership team would attend a retreat to "... lay out the entire year's needs." Principal 4 had already conducted a needs analysis to determine what teachers wanted. One outcome of the needs analysis was the need for curriculum mapping. Principal 4 believed that "... it is important to determine what is essential in a course for a student to know." Part of School 4's staff development was "... training the teachers how to make that determination on their own in their classroom, within their subject matter." Another outcome of the needs analysis was the need to be able to break down the Sunshine State Standards. According to Principal 4, "... many of our teachers can read the Sunshine State Standards, but knowing how to develop them into what they teach is still the missing element." According to Principal 4,

“...developing the ability to teach the standards will be important to the success of our school in the near future.” Principal 4 indicated that the school as a whole will “... be learning the skills to know what to teach, how to teach it, and how to assess properly to know that the kids mastered the skill that was taught.” Table 13 contains the summaries of the staff development issues addressed by each of the principals.

Table 13  
Summary of Staff Development Issue

Interview Question 8	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
<p>What changes have you made in staff and professional development as a result of your school grade?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly</li> <li>• Principal initiated</li> <li>• Centered on Continuous Improvement Model (CIM)</li> <li>• Created writing teams</li> <li>• Developed instructional calendars</li> <li>• “Write for the Future” trainings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressed school-wide reading and writing concerns</li> <li>• Focus on “column method” for taking multiple choice tests</li> <li>• Continue item analysis work</li> <li>• Participate in Florida Reading Initiative</li> <li>• Reading alliance with University of Florida</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading strategies</li> <li>• Participation in proof-reading workshops</li> <li>• Training with writing rubrics</li> <li>• Participation in brain research trainings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained a full-time standards coach</li> <li>• Leadership team retreat</li> <li>• Implement curriculum mapping</li> <li>• Breakdown Sunshine State Standards for individual classrooms</li> </ul>

## Parental Involvement

Interview Question 10: *“What changes have you made in parental involvement as a result of your school grade?”*

### School 1

School 1 had very limited success in the area of parental involvement. However, Principal 1 did feel that “... the school was developing more of a feel for culture now.” According to Principal 1, “... the focus of our parents is on supporting the family.” School 1 had many households of single parents. The single parents may work two or three jobs “... to pay the bills each month.” Furthermore, Principal 1 noted many of the students at School 1 live with extended family members or may live in households where more than one family unit is currently residing. Single parents and guardians that are supporting large families as head of household are “... exhausted at the end of the day.” Although Principal 1 believed that parental involvement in the school had increased some, there were “... no quick fixes to solve all the problems.” Principal 1 believed that much of the problem lay in the inability of families to plan properly. “Students need a plan to graduate in the 9th grade, not in the last week of their senior year.” According to Principal 1, “... students should be picking up summer school credits throughout their high school years, to serve as insurance at graduation time.” Principal 1 had students, one week from graduation, just realizing they were that one credit short for graduation. “We can not let these students fall

through the cracks. We must prepare them for the end product, from the beginning.” We must “... help parents plan better for their children.”

### School 2

Parental involvement at School 2 was “... very low.” The school had little support over the years from the community. Furthermore, once the school was identified as failing, the “... low support we had went to almost non-existent.” One goal of Principal 2 was to get the community and especially parents involved with the school again. Principal 2 believed “... we are turning a corner.” Students at School 2 were beginning to regain some pride in their school. Principal 2 thought he “... can see differences in the way students are beginning to conduct themselves on campus.” Principal 2 admitted that the lack of parental involvement at School 2 “... was like nothing compared to any other schools he had worked in before.” Increased parental involvement continued to be a major focus in the upcoming year. Principal 2 believed that the success of parental involvement “... begins with increased communication.” The response Principal 2 received from the community when he would go out and interacts was, “Well, we did not know.” Principal 2 believed that the key to increased communication depended on his ability to “... become a public relations specialist.” In today’s society, the word about School 2 must be “... delivered on the radio, in the news media, anywhere we can get the word out.” One example given by Principal 2 was band camp. In the past, band camps at School 2 had always been very

successful. Recently, the numbers of attendees had dropped and was due to the fact that fewer students could take band now because of the need to have students in reading and math classes year round.

### School 3

School 3 had tremendous parental involvement in past years. Over the years, parents of School 3 had created a foundation that had the primary goal of "... fundraising for the school." In recent years, the majority of fundraising activities had been centered on the effort "... to keep the 'A'." The foundation had raised over \$12,000 to provide incentives to students to maintain the "A" designation. Money from the foundation had been used to maintain a reading focus by providing the necessary funds for School 3 to hire a reading person and to develop additional reading classes. To assist with the reading focus initiative, the program purchased items as "giveaways" to the students. Examples of giveaways given by Principal 3 included movie tickets, compact discs, and I-Pods. Students received these rewards not based solely on their FCAT score, but on individual improvement. Students that either maintained their FCAT level or increased receive a reward. The foundation provided a "... real support line to the school. It allows us to do extra things for the students that we might not otherwise be able to do."

#### School 4

Parents had been very involved in School 4 over the years. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) had been very active in the school. According to Principal 4, "... the PTA is a very functional group here at our school." Likewise, the School Advisory Committee (SAC) had been functional and supportive. Principal 4 would like to "... recruit one tutor for every 7 students on campus by the end of the school year." Principal 4 planned to provide training for interested tutors to teach them how to tutor and what to expect from the students when tutoring. Principal 4 believed that the tutor program needed to "... be more than just a once a month hello, how are you doing type of service." He believed that the tutoring program should be tailored around something more comparable to the elementary school 'homeroom mother' setup. According to Principal 4, "... if we can link a person to every classroom, then they will have an outside resource to ask for things, get additional help, and be in a closer relationship." Principal 4 believed that "... a 'homeroom mother' situation would get more use and reach more students on a week to week basis than individual tutors for random students across the campus." Table 14 contains summaries of the parent involvement issues faced by each of the principals.

Table 14  
Summary of Parent Involvement Issue

Interview Question 10	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What changes have you made in parental involvement as a result of your school grade?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a new culture</li> <li>• Focus on parent support of the family</li> <li>• Problem arises from inability of parents to plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very low</li> <li>• Increase pride in school</li> <li>• Increase parent communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue parent foundation</li> <li>• Support has always been good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)</li> <li>• Active School Advisory Committee (SAC)</li> <li>• Recruit 1 tutor per 7 students</li> <li>• Link each tutor to a specific classroom</li> </ul>

### Budgeting

Interview Question 12: *“What changes have you made in your school budget as a result of your school grade?”*

#### School 1

The principal at Voucher School 1 was very thankful for the support of the district and the superintendent. “Our budget has not been affected. Vouchers



have not slowed me down.” If the principal from School 1 needed something, he asked for it, and got it.

### School 2

Principal 2’s school budget increased “... not necessarily in money, but in resources.” The school district contributed many resources to School 2. Principal 2 indicated that “... our ability to reach needed resources has increased.” If the principal from School 2 wanted something, he asked for it, and as long as it benefited the students, he got it.

### School 3

According to Principal 3, his school budget had not been directly affected by the school voucher program or by being an ‘A’ school; however, additional funds had been added indirectly to the school budget as a result of the school grade. Each year School 3 had an ‘A’ grade, resulted in additional approximately \$300,000 extra revenue for the school. This was money awarded by the state to the school on a per student basis. The principal of School 3 organized a committee that was given the task of deciding how the money should be spent. The committee had discretion on how the money could be spent. Once the committee had developed some different plans for the money, the plans were given to the faculty as a whole and voted on. Once a final decision was made by the faculty, then the final recommendation was voted on by the SAC. School 3 liked to have SAC make the final approval in order to keep their participation in

the process positive and meaningful. During the 2004-2005 academic school year, the state of Florida had said that "... schools may not spend their awarded money in the general fund or on assessment." According to Principal 3, "... although the money provided by the state for our 'A' has not really improved our school budget, it has given us some money for special purposes that we might otherwise never have had."

School 4

Principal 4 did not see any real effect on the school budget as a result of the school voucher program. According to Principal 4, "... we get things from the school district when we ask for them. Our budget over the past three years has remained about the same and is projected to be about the same again next year." Table 15 contains the summaries of the budgeting issues faced by each of the principals.

Table 15  
Summary of Budgeting Issue

Interview Question 12	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What changes have you made in your school budget as a result of your school grade?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No impact</li> <li>• Receives district assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget increased</li> <li>• Receives district assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect budget increase</li> <li>• "A" school money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No impact</li> <li>• Receives district assistance</li> </ul>

#### Research Question 4

What are Voucher Eligible school principals' perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to Voucher Eligible high schools in Florida?

#### Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships

Interview Questions 15 &16: *"What do you know about Florida's A+ Education Plan? How would you describe Opportunity Scholarships?"*

#### School 1

Principal 1 believed that Florida's A+ Plan was "... trying to close the achievement gap." The state made a formal commitment to closing this gap and to addressing "failing schools." However, the achievement gap was not "... necessarily a direct result of poor teaching." There were many other factors in a "failing school," such as demographics and poverty. Principal 1 would describe the A+ Plan to a new administrator coming to Florida or their school as an attempt to "... put quality teachers in front of students to present quality instruction." Teachers could not teach like we were "... taught in the old days." Although there was no substitution for direct instruction, a teacher must rely on other resources to be successful in the classroom.

Principal 1 stressed that "... too many people get cocky over Opportunity Scholarships." According to Principal 1, "You are not always going to get a better

education at a school because they hang an 'A' over it." Students must still do the work if they are going to be successful at school. Many students left School 1 on Opportunity Scholarships when they became a Voucher School. Some returned, but most did not. Of the students that had returned, most did no better at their new school than they were doing at their home school. One example given was of a student that attended middle school a few years ago where the same high school principal was assigned. The student scored a 4.3 on the 8th grade FCAT writing test in middle school. The student left the Voucher Eligible school to attend a local 'A' school within the district. That same student scored a 2.3 on their 10th grade FCAT writing. "Same kid, lower score. What makes the difference?" An 'A' school "... does not mean it is better than an 'F' school in instruction..., it means that you have more students performing on grade level."

### School 2

Principal 2 believed that Florida's A+ Plan moved "... towards accountability." The plan was an effort by the state to provide "... all schools with a standard." This standard was one by which "... we can measure ourselves." Principal 2 believed that we must be able to "... break down a school into areas of concern and make a determination as to what is vital to its future success." The A+ Plan was designed to "... keep everyone on the same page and moving forward." According to Principal 2, "if we can all get on the same playing field, then we can 'grow' our students together."

According to Principal 2, the voucher system "... was a system of choice." Principal 2 believed that "... Opportunity Scholarships provided alternatives for parents or families that were disenchanted with their assigned school or their neighborhood school." Opportunity Scholarships provided opportunities for change to the families that were not happy. Principal 2 did not believe that vouchers "... are necessarily a bad thing, but simply a choice." According to Principal 2, only about 12 students had left the school on Opportunity Scholarships. Of those 12, none had returned to the school. Table 16 contains the summaries of each principal's perception of Florida's A+ Plan.

Table 16  
 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Florida's A+ Plan

Interview Questions 15 & 16	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What are principals' perceptions on Florida's A+ Plan as they pertain to voucher eligible schools and Opportunity Scholarships?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying to close the achievement gap</li> <li>• Goal to put quality teachers in front of quality students to provide quality instruction</li> <li>• Do not always get a better school because they hang an "A" over the door</li> <li>• Some students left as a result of opportunity scholarships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move towards increased accountability</li> <li>• State to provide a standard for all schools</li> <li>• Keep everyone moving in same direction</li> <li>• Vouchers are a system of choice</li> <li>• Opportunity scholarships are an alternative</li> <li>• Only 12 students left school as a result of opportunity scholarships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created a new accountability</li> <li>• Change is good based on everyone reaching for the same standards</li> <li>• About 310 students have attended the school on opportunity scholarships</li> <li>• About 90 remain at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An attempt to drive an increase rigor</li> <li>• Allows standards to be identified</li> <li>• Allows groups of students needing assistance to be identified</li> <li>• Allows us the opportunity to reach the middle student</li> <li>• Number of students on opportunity scholarships has decreased</li> </ul>

## Role of FCAT

Interview Question 13: *“What role does the drive to increase FCAT scores have towards motivating the faculty and students of the school?”*

### School 1

The principal of Voucher School 1 believed that the FCAT had “... placed an unnecessary stigma on how awful a school is.” According to Principal 1, “... it has become a political issue.” It was important to determine what percentages of students were making progress, and that schools should be graded on the number of kids making progress. This he believed, “... makes the playing field even.” At Voucher Eligible School 1, 90% of the students scored at a Level I in reading and math. Principal 1 believed that one of the major ways to make a change in these numbers was through the addition of magnet programs. Voucher School 1 would add four magnet programs in the next couple of years. These programs would include instruction in Medical Arts, IT Finance, Performing Arts, and an International Baccalaureate (IB) program. According to Principal 1, “In five years we will look a lot different.” The school, with the addition of these magnets, would begin to create separate distinct learning communities that had commonalities between them. These learning communities would “... set the student up for success.” According to Principal 1, “... teachers have been the most effected by the FCAT test.” It is “... obviously more difficult to work with a Level I student versus a Level IV student.” Teachers have had to make that

adjustment in the classroom and be able to "... justify what and how a student is learning."

### School 2

The FCAT had played a major role in the daily operation of School 2. Every school received a perception cast based on the grade that it received from the state. According to Principal 2, "... the grade doesn't matter that much." It is important to look at what else is going on in the school. Unfortunately, all the public remembered was the assigned yearly grade. The public "... looks for that grade as a sign of things to come at your school." Principal 2 believed "... that no matter what else is going on; the grade was the only thing the people see." When the grade was the only thing that seems important to the public, then "... it begins to drive what we are doing as a school." At some point we will reach a certain grade and it "... will allow us to do what we want in our own building." The Principal of School 2 looked forward to a time in the future when the school could once again run the programs it wanted and not worry about interference from outside forces like band and the arts. Table 17 has each principal's perception of the role of the FCAT summarized in it.



Table 17  
 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on the Role of FCAT

Interview Question 13	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What are principals' perceptions on the role of the FCAT?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unnecessary stigma placed on schools</li> <li>• Political issue</li> <li>• Should be based on percentage of students making gains</li> <li>• Increase number of magnet programs</li> <li>• Teachers must make adjustments in the classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negatively effects the perception of school in the community</li> <li>• Public only sees the grade – not the good things</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major motivator</li> <li>• Incentive of 'A' school money from state</li> <li>• School has remained data driven</li> <li>• Increased enrollment in AP classes and DE students</li> <li>• Encourage students to push their limits in academics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tries to downplay scores</li> <li>• Students need to be prepared to pass all standard academic tests given through college</li> <li>• Teach all students communication and computation skills</li> <li>• Does not drive instruction or change instruction</li> </ul>

## Educational Improvement

Interview Question 18: *“How has the implementation of school grading impacted education as a profession?”*

### School 1

Principal 1 believed it was too early to tell if education had benefited from the school voucher initiative. He believed that numbers would continue to fluctuate over the next five to six years. Principal 1 did believe that a strong Pre-K program, as well as a K-16 curriculum was needed in the United States. Vouchers had made everybody in education “... much more cognizant of the fact there is accountability and we are all being held accountable.”

### School 2

Principal 2 believed that the school voucher movement had “... created or drawn a line.” This line had created two sides of the issue, one that believed in the system and one that did not. The voucher system had made people, whether they were in the education system or not, take a side and support that side. According to Principal 2, the more lines drawn on a subject, “... the more separation you get between groups of people.” The teaching profession was divided on the issue of school vouchers. Educational professionals were asked repeatedly their views on the voucher system. These repeated questions required that a decision be made as to which side of the issue to support, thus creating friction between colleagues committed to supporting that belief.

According to Principal 2, "... this is the friction that has been created, none of which moves the student any further along." Table 18 contains summaries of each principal's perception on educational improvements.

Table 18  
 Summary of Principals' Perceptions on Educational Improvements

Interview Question 18	Principal 1 Voucher	Principal 2 Voucher	Principal 3 'A'	Principal 4 'B'
What are principals' perceptions on educational improvements as a result of school vouchers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too early to tell</li> <li>• United States needs a strong Pre-K program as well as a strong K-16 education program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawn a line in the sand on the issue</li> <li>• Created a separation within the education profession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both positive and negative results of school grading</li> <li>• Made teachers more aware of student data</li> <li>• Teachers are being held accountable for what students are learning in the classroom</li> <li>• We have become a test driven society</li> <li>• Need to get the balance back</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both positive and negative results of school grading</li> <li>• Move the state towards a state-wide curriculum</li> <li>• Evens the education playing field by providing resources to all teachers</li> <li>• School vouchers have hurt the system because of labeling</li> </ul>

### Research Question 5

What are 'A' or 'B' high school principal's perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to their school?

#### Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships

Interview Question 15 & 16: *"What do you know about Florida's A+ Education Plan? How would you describe Opportunity Scholarships?"*

#### School 3

According to Principal 3, Florida's A+ Plan had provided schools and public education with "... new accountability." Principal 3 believed that the accountability issue was a good one. According to Principal 3, "... it was time for all schools to be held accountable for the same things." Principal 3 stated that for years, one school would do one thing and another school would do a different thing, and no one said whether that was right or wrong. A principal could make any decision he or she wanted to in their school. If the decision worked out well for the students, the "... parents were happy and the school was deemed to be successful." When a principal did something different at a school, and it did not produce the desired results, the "... parents were unhappy and the school was deemed to not be successful." However, "... when the parents were unhappy, nothing necessarily had to change." Today, Principal 3 believed that things "... do change and they change quickly." If a school is not being successful, then "... old

administrations go away and new ones come in.” According to Principal 3, “... a change is made.” The effects of that change may not be “... felt for years down the road,” but the change was made and a new path was begun. Principal 3 believed that most administrators coming into a new administrative position in Florida can relate “... fairly well with the plan.” Principal 3 believed that the plan follows No Child Left Behind close enough to allow a new administrator to make “... the basic comparisons adequately.”

School 3 had a large number of students who attended the school on Opportunity Scholarships. According to Principal 3, “... overall we have had about 310 students attend the school on an awarded scholarship.” Of the 300 students that have enrolled, about 90 still remained at the school. The remainder left the school for numerous reasons including graduation, return to home school, dropout, and family has moved away. The students that have enrolled have come from “... mainly two local schools that have received an ‘F’ grade for two consecutive years.”

#### School 4

Principal 4’s perception of Florida’s A+ plan was “... an attempt to drive and increase rigor.” According to Principal 4, the plan and the options for parents and students alike was “... absolutely a rational idea.” The No Child Left Behind Act, and, by default, Florida’s A+ Plan had “... allowed us to identify standards and groups of students that need or needed to be addressed.” According to

Principal 4, "... we have begun to focus on both the top and bottom student more as a result of these state initiatives." In the past, Principal 4 argued that "... the top fifteen to twenty percent of our students received the best education and the best resources. Then, in the last twenty years or so, the special education kids started to receive the best resources." According to Principal 4, "... during this time, the middle kid's were just floating." Principal 4 believed that Florida's A+ plan has found a way "... to reach the middle student and begin delivering the necessary resources to them."

At the end of the 2003 school year when School 4 was a 'B' school, Opportunity Scholarships were a significant part of the school. Since the end of the 2003 school year, School 4 had been a 'C' school and the number of students attending the school on Opportunity Scholarships had "dwindled." According to Principal 4, "... the first year that Opportunity Scholarships were in our school, they had a positive impact on the building." However, since the numbers have gone down, Principal 4 did not believe that the same corresponding negative impact had affected the school. According to Principal 4, "... when students attended on Opportunity Scholarships they made a difference; however, when they left and went elsewhere, we did not decline as much in our FCAT scores as we had increased originally." Table 16 contains the summaries of each principal's perception of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships.

## Role of FCAT

Interview Question 13: *“What role does the drive to increase FCAT scores have towards motivating the faculty and students of the school?”*

### School 3

The FCAT had been a major motivator at School 3. According to Principal 3, “... teachers like the possibility of receiving the money for maintaining the ‘A’.” Receiving money was “... one of the greatest incentives of people there is.” At School 3, the FCAT had allowed the school to remain data driven. According to Principal 3, “... we put the data in the hands of our teachers and they analyze it.” Teachers at School 3 had been trained to look at their own data in the classroom and made decisions about how to best meet the needs of their students.

According to Principal 3, “our teachers receive the raw data and tailor it to their classroom.” In addition to the data, all of the teachers at School 3 taught a variety of classes. Principal 3 believed that “... every teacher should have the opportunity to teach a high level, a middle level, and a low level class.” Principal 3 believed that this kept his teachers “... focused on the overall goal and teachers do not get burned out quickly because they are teaching the low level students all day long.” Principal 3 believed that the FCAT had helped “... increase enrollment in advancement placement (AP) classes and dual enrollment (DE) classes.” At School 3, students were “... encouraged to push their limits academically.”



#### School 4

Principal 4 tried to "... downplay FCAT scores." Principal 4 did not believe education should be "... about passing the test. It should be about acquiring the skills necessary to be successful. Within those skills should be the skills required to pass the test." Principal 4 believed that not only should the skills to pass the FCAT test be acquired during high school, but also the "... skills necessary to master other more important assessments, such as the SAT, college entrance exams, and vocational exams." According to Principal 4, the most important skills to be taught were communication and computation. Principal 4 believed that "... schools that just focused on the FCAT did so generally because there was a crisis." At School 4, the FCAT "... does not drive instruction and it does not make a substantial change in the school." Table 17 has the summaries of each principal's perception of the role of FCAT.

#### Educational Improvement

Interview Question 18: *"How has the implementation of school grading impacted education as a profession?"*

#### School 3

Principal 3 believed that there had been both positive and negative outcomes from the school voucher issue and, specifically, school grading. On the positive side, school grading had "... made our teachers more aware of the data."

Teachers at School 3 knew "... exactly what their class needs to work on from the beginning" and "... what exactly their students in their classroom need work on from the beginning." According to Principal 3, education, in general, had also benefited because "... teachers are now being held accountable for the learning or lack of learning going on in their classroom." If a teacher was not doing his job, everyone was aware of it and the situation was investigated. On the negative side, Principal 3 believed that we "... have gone completely to a test driven society." According to Principal 3, "... we need to get back on balance." Principal 3 believed that education was headed in the right direction.

#### School 4

Principal 4 believed that there had been both positive and negatives in education as a result of the school voucher program. Positively, school vouchers had "... kind a moved the state towards a state-wide curriculum." Principal 4 believed that not only would a state-wide curriculum be beneficial to many schools; but to make real progress, we should be "... striving towards a national curriculum." Principal 4 believed that "... by putting everyone on the same page, we even the playing field and make the resources more available to a greater number of teachers and students." Negatively, Principal 4 believed that the school voucher system hurt the educational system through labeling. According to Principal 4, "... labeling is unfair to the schools. The public is not educated to a point of being able to understand what the label means. Our students, teachers,

and neighborhood schools are hurt with labeling.” Table 18 contains the summaries of each principal’s perception on educational improvements.

Chapter 4 contained the data and the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, the implications for practice, the recommendations of the study, and the need for future research.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Purpose Statement

This study described and delineated principal perceptions of their schools as either a publicly funded Voucher Schools in Florida as of the 2002-2003 school year, or as an 'A' or 'B' school during the same time period. The principal of each selected voucher school was interviewed to examine (a) what is an accurate profile of their public high school as perceived by the principals of these schools, (b) what changes in curriculum, human resources, staff development, parent involvement, and budgeting have principals made as a result of being identified as either a Voucher Eligible high school or as an 'A' or 'B' high school, and (c) what are Voucher Eligible high school and 'A' or 'B' high school principals perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to Voucher Eligible high schools. The interview questions appear in Appendix C & D.

### Methodology

#### Population and Sample

This study used a descriptive case study approach to identify perceptions of principals' in Florida public high schools that had been identified as either a

public Voucher Eligible high school or as an 'A' or 'B' high school. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) identified descriptive studies as a basic method of qualitative research, which accounted for a substantial proportion of the research done in the field of education. The population of the study was the 356 public high schools in the state of Florida.

The sample was two public high schools in Florida that were identified as Voucher Eligible and assigned an 'F' grade according to the Florida Department of Education within the guidelines of the Florida state legislature, as well as one public high school that was identified as an 'A' high school and one 'B' high school. Profiles of the identified Voucher Eligible schools and the 'A' or 'B' school were constructed based on that school's demographic data as compiled from the state of Florida Department of Education archives and data compiled by the Common Core of Data. In addition, information was gathered from interviews of current principals of public high schools in Florida that were identified as Voucher Eligible and current principals of high schools that were graded as either an 'A' or 'B' by the Florida Department of Education school grading policy. Principals were interviewed individually, audio-taped, and notes recorded.

The schools being surveyed were either 'F' high schools for two consecutive years as of the 2002-2003 academic year, or an 'A' or 'B' school as of the 2002-2003 academic year. Only high schools were selected so that patterns, common themes, and other information could be related to and compared and contrasted. Academic year 2002-2003 was selected by the

researcher as the cut-off date to ensure each school had been identified as an 'F' school by the state of Florida during the same academic years. The gap in time allowed principals an opportunity to reflect on the changes made, the differences the changes made, and their assessment of those changes.

### Instrumentation

The researcher followed a modified version of Dillman's (2000) tailored design method for contacting subjects. After the Office of Research of the University of Central Florida (See Appendix A) granted permission, the researcher sent applications to conduct research to each of the school districts with potential subjects. The researcher then sent an introductory letter (See Appendix B) concerning the case study research to the current principals of the identified Voucher Eligible schools or the appropriate 'A' or 'B' school. The letter requested the participation of each principal to provide a time and date that was convenient for an interview and explained the purpose and procedures of the study (See Appendix B). The second contact method selected consisted of contacting the principals through email and thanking them for agreeing to participate in the interview and confirming the interview date and time. The third contact method selected consisted of a follow-up telephone call to the principal's secretary. In most cases, the researcher was successful in scheduling interviews

with the principals after the third contact. Interviews that took longer to schedule had no effect on the outcome of the study.

All of the interviews were conducted in May 2006. The interview sessions ranged from 37 minutes to 48 minutes with an average duration of 44 minutes. In one case, the interview questions were sent to the principal prior to the scheduled interview to allow him time to gather the data he wanted to include in the interview. With the permission of the principals, the researcher audio-taped the interviews and then transcribed them for use in the data analysis, eliminating any reference to names of schools or principals. As each interview was transcribed, the researcher reviewed it along with prior interview transcripts to determine recurring patterns, common themes, and unanticipated information. The researcher sent thank you letters to each of the participating principals.

### Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data derived from the interviews and the archival data using Creswell's data analysis method. The researcher sought to identify and analyze recurring patterns in the data. The principal's responses were descriptive in nature. Once all of the data had been generated and collected, the researcher reviewed the data to gain an overall view. The following day, the researcher read each interview to determine potential themes and highlights from the respondents. When a key response was identified, it was

listed in a table. Once this process was completed, the compiled lists were reviewed by the researcher for common themes. Once all of the pieces of data had been read, the lists of responses were reviewed for key patterns that had been recorded in the different types of data collection. These key patterns became the themes of the data. The next step involved grouping the acquired information. Key responses were identified according to the umbrella theme under which they fell. The repeating patterns and themes, their descriptions and data sources cited were included in tables. The data were analyzed to answer the five research questions. The researcher created tables to summarize the results of the analysis of each of the research questions. The categories in the tables related to the research questions. Sub categories emerged from the data and the literature review. The tables provided a graphical representation of the compiled analysis of the data from the principals of Voucher Schools and 'A' or 'B' school in Florida.

### Summary of the Findings

#### Research Question 1

*What is a profile of a Voucher Eligible public high school in Florida as perceived by the principals of these schools?*

The principals were at very opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to experience. One had been a principal for 10 years, the other only 3 years.

However, both principals believed that many of their challenges in their school



stemmed from the environment of the school that the students attended. Both principals acknowledged that the community had an effect on the success and failure of the school. Another factor that appeared to be common among both Voucher Schools was their high minority population. Both schools were in the high 90 percent range in minority population in 2003. In addition to high minority rates, both Voucher Schools had a significant number of students receiving free and reduced lunch. A fourth similarity between the two schools was the large number of students reading below grade level. School 1 had 89% of their students reading below grade level and School 2 had 96% reading below grade level. Neither Voucher Eligible school had lost a large number of students as a result of Opportunity Scholarships.

Both Principal 1 and 2 felt that they had very talented and motivated teachers in the classroom. Both principals gave numerous examples of teachers doing good work and making great efforts to motivate their students to do better in the classroom. Furthermore, each principal was aware that not all teachers were focused and motivated towards a common school goal. Teachers at both schools continued to be monitored and assessed on a yearly basis and changes were planned for the future.

The principal and faculty of School 1 were working towards enlisting community support for the upcoming year and making the coordinating of the communities priorities with the school's priorities one of its primary goals. Principal 1 believed that the extra-curricular activities were an important part of

the education process, but it could not be the most important part of the school, nor its end product. Academics needed to be the focus of the students, the faculty, and the community. School 2 faced the challenge of re-energizing the students of the school. The students at School 2 had no pride and no belief in their school. The students had let the public perception of them negatively affect their entire school culture.

#### Research Question 2

*What is a profile of a public high school in Florida graded an 'A' or 'B' as perceived by the principals of these schools?*

Much like the principals at the Voucher Schools, the principals at the 'A' school and the 'B' school were also at very opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to experience. The 'A' school principal had been a principal for 11 years and at his current school for 8 years. The principal of School 'B' had only been at his school for one year and was completing his first year as a principal. Both School 3 and 4 had low percentage rates of students receiving free and reduced lunch (13 and 14 percent respectively). Furthermore, School 3 had a minority rate well below 50 percent and School 4's was just above 50 percent.

Prior to becoming an 'A' school, Principal 3 indicated that they had never really looked at the students that made up their lowest performing 25 percent. Principal 3 believed that his school was like most of the rest of the schools across America a decade ago. Attention was paid to the students in the majority,

rather than the students in the minority, who were falling to the low side academically. Both principals at the Non-Voucher Schools took a hard look at the raw data of their students. Teachers received the information for all of their students and analyzed the relevant data on their specific students. Principal 4 believed that some of the blame for a low grade (before becoming a 'B' school) was the overwhelming use of the direct lecture method of instruction in the classroom by teachers. In addition, Principal 4 believed that the increase in magnet programs at schools in the same district as School 4 negatively affected his school by reducing the number and type of student that remained at the school.

Both principals at the Non-Voucher Schools addressed the issue of size as a factor in their school grade; however, the issue was not the same for both of them. Principal 3 believed that his student body population was too large to effectively meet the needs of all students. Principal 4 believed that the students were not connected enough and that the student population needed to be divided into more manageable working groups called teams. Principal 4 also believed that the school had no direction regarding curriculum. The teachers at School 4 did not know what was essential to teach and what supplemental enrichment was.

Principal 3 and Principal 4 believed that overall their staff were "highly motivated". They were happy with the effort being put forth in the classroom, in staff development, in new methods of curriculum instruction, and in student test

score data. Both principals agreed that highly motivated teachers found ways to make learning less monotonous. According to West and Peterson (2006) and Holland (2005), instruction that is varied helped keep students interested and engaged in the topic. Principal 3 wanted to have his teachers move more towards discovery learning and Principal 4 wanted his teachers to be able to make a personal connection with their students.

According to Principal 3, the greatest challenge facing School 3 was being able to maintain the 'A' grade year after year. Principal 3 knew that each year new data was collected. According to Principal 3, a principal must be able to keep up with the newest ideas and changes in education. Personally, Principal 3 was not a proponent of school grading, however, he understood that this was what was mandated by the state in education and that he must continue to work within the given system to be considered successful. Principal 4's greatest challenge was being able to reach the students on a consistent basis. Principal 4 planned to accomplish this by increasing the number of advance placement classes, increasing the use of parent resources in the community, and strengthening the schools partnership with the University of Florida. Principal 4 did not mind the competition with other schools for grades and students, but he wanted to make sure the competition was fair and beneficial to the students. If it was not, then the system needed to be modified and new ideas needed to be considered.

### Research Question 3

*What changes in curriculum, human resources, staff development, parent involvement, and budgeting have principals made as a result of being identified as a Voucher Eligible public high school or a high school graded 'A' or 'B' in Florida?*

For all four schools a change in curriculum was important to the educational process implemented by each of the principals. The two principals who had been at their schools the longest continued to evaluate and assess their curriculum needs and make changes based on the future needs of the school. The two newest principals had done needs assessments upon coming to the school and were prepared to make changes based on that assessment in the upcoming school year. Principal's 1 and 4 made curriculum changes that moved towards a recognized national program for instruction. Principal 1 changed to the Continuous Improvement Model, which had been implemented and been successful in other schools across the country. Principal 4 implemented the AVID program, designed to give special assistance to pre-selected ninth graders enrolling in the school for the first time. The AVID program also had been implemented in other schools throughout the country and had a successful record.

All four principals placed more emphasis on reading, writing, and math as a result of the FCAT or the issue of school grading. Each of the principals assigned new teaching positions to address reading initiatives. Some of the teaching positions were newly created; some were re-assigned from other faculty

positions within the school, and others re-assigned administrators to oversee the reading program. School 1 used a mastery skills concept to teach specific portions of the FCAT test and tested the students on the skills on a weekly basis. School 3 used the Academies of Reading program to place a greater emphasis on student reading and comprehension. Students at School 3 were placed in 2-hour long reading and writing blocks and given additional high school elective credit for their efforts. Principal 4 created teams for the incoming ninth graders with permanent math and English teachers on each team. Students rotated through the rest of their schedule to various science and social studies teachers, but remained connected to permanent teachers.

Student tutoring was an issue for three of the four principals. Principal 1 attempted to reach students for the purposes of tutoring by offering free food and gifts for students that attended after-school tutoring programs. Principal 3 provided extra tutoring through the Academies of Reading program. Principal 4 provided additional tutoring through the AVID program. Principal 2 had not indicated any additional tutoring efforts that had been tried in the past or that might be in the plans for the upcoming year.

Each principal also made changes that were specific to their school and not necessarily found among all the other school principals. For example, Principal 1 made changes in teacher lesson plans to make them more consistent and to assist the teacher in having better control over their lessons. Principal 2 made a change in teaching style, requesting that the teachers act more as

facilitators in the classroom rather than lecturers. Principal 3 made an effort to reach the students in their dropout prevention programs and help them to stay on track and possibly graduate. Principal 4 created action plans for every incoming ninth grader. These action plans gave direction to freshman and helped to put them on a path for graduation from the day they walked through the front doors of their high school.

Each principal, regardless of school grade, made adjustments in human resources that affected the entire school. In all four schools, teacher additions were made in one form or another to add reading classes. School 1, with the help of the district, identified a community resource person to help with a new mentoring program and to develop new clubs for the students. Principal 2 planned to hire new teachers to assist with remediation classes in hopes of bringing the lowest level students up to reading grade level. Principal 3, in addition to shifting a person on staff over to a testing coordinator position, also hired additional teachers in an effort to increase the number of reading classes that could be offered at the school. Principal 4 made changes in the classroom by teaming some reading classes, in an effort to meet the class size reduction initiative. Principal 4 made multiple master schedule changes in order to utilize every available space in the school for instruction. As a result, many of the elective classes that students enjoyed had been dropped from the course schedule. Through retirements and good fortune, Principal 4 had not had to dismiss any of these elective teachers.

All four of the principals interviewed had made strong efforts in having teachers directly be involved in analyzing student data and making decisions as to what was the best instruction to meet their students' individual needs. The principals at each of the schools were the leaders of what would be mandated at the school as a requirement of everyone and what would be left as an option for the teacher. Principal 1 indicated that when he came into the school, teachers had no choices as to what was going to be implemented. Principal 1 made all the decisions and let staff know from the beginning that it was going to be done his way or their services at the school would no longer be needed. After the initial input, teachers were then asked to make suggestions and offer input on how things could be modified for the future. Most of the staff development form Principal 1 was centered on the reading benchmarks for FCAT improvement. Similar to Principal 1, Principal 3 also stressed reading strategies in staff development trainings. Teachers as well as administrators participated in numerous staff development trainings on reading. School 3 also took part in a county wide initiative, which trained teachers on how to grade FCAT writings using a rubric similar to those found on the FCAT. Teachers at School 3 also participated in workshops to learn how to proofread student work more effectively. Teachers were given multiple opportunities to grade FCAT assigned essays.

Principal 2 believed that his school was currently very strong in staff development. He planned to address two major areas - reading and writing.



Principal 2 committed his school to participating in the Florida Reading Initiative, training teachers in the reading process over the summer. In addition to in-depth reading and writing strategies, Principal 2 planned to continue focusing on the four column method associated with helping students to be more effective at answering multiple choice questions. Similar to Principal 2, Principal 4's staff development plan included planning out an entire year's worth of instruction and creating calendars for each subject. Once the curriculum mapping was completed, teachers and staff decided what was important to teach, what they wanted to teach, and what would have to wait and be taught if there was time available at the end of the school year. Principal 4 wanted to stress to his teachers the importance of looking at the curriculum and making decisions on what should be taught and what should not be taught when time was short.

Both School 1 and School 2 had very limited parental involvement and very little support from the community. Both schools indicated a lack of community support for the school. Principal 1 believed that most of the problem was a result of the family structure of the students attending School 1 as well as the inability of the parents to assist their children in planning for the future, specifically graduation. Principal 2 indicated very low parent involvement and his inability to get the word out to the public about the needs of the school. The community surrounding School 2 was unaware of the problems and issues in the school that needed their attention. Both principals at School 1 and School 2 recognized a need to re-educate the parents and the community about the

importance of an academic education. Both principals discussed having a more than adequate student participation in their extra-curricular activities, such as sports and band competitions. The following for academic related activities was low.

Principal 3 and Principal 4 indicated that they had good parent support over the years and that the support continued today. School 3 had a foundation whose purpose was to fund academic activities and provide the school with the necessary financial or in-kind resources necessary to be successful. Principal 4 indicated that he had a very strong and active PTA and SAC in the school. Principal 4 indicated that he would like to increase the parent and community support one step further, by utilizing the adults of the community in the role of tutoring. Principal 4 would like to see his high school adopt an elementary school concept of assigning homeroom parents to each of the classrooms.

All four principals indicated that they had seen no real effects on their school budgets as a result of the school voucher initiative. Principal 1, Principal 2, and Principal 4 all indicated that if they needed something for their school that would improve students' achievement, the school district was readily available to provide the necessary funds or resources requested. Although Principal 3 also indicated that his school budget was not directly affected by the voucher issue, he indicated that the school did receive a substantial amount of money for the school from the state each year. Although the awarded money did not go directly into the school's budget, it was put into a fund where a committee decided how

the money would be spent. Most of the time, a portion of the money was used for activities directly relating to student achievement.

#### Research Question 4

*What are Voucher Eligible school principals' perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to Voucher Eligible high school in Florida?*

Florida's A+ Plan received both positive and negative comments from both voucher school principals. Principal 1 and Principal 2 believed that the plan was a good move towards increasing accountability and making an attempt to close the achievement gap among all students. Principal 1 believed that the plan was designed to put quality teachers capable of providing quality instruction in front of as many students as possible. Principal 2 believed that the plan gave everyone a tool to grade them and to make a determination of whether they were meeting school grade. Principal 1 felt that the A+ Plan made teachers be a little more resourceful in the classroom than they had been in the past. Principal 2 believed that if the standards of the plan could place schools on the same page, then maybe the educational system could move forward together.

The Opportunity Scholarship initiative appeared to have no real effect on either School 1 or School 2. Although both schools admitted that students had left the school as a result of being identified as voucher eligible, neither principal indicated that any real negatives had occurred as a result of students using

Opportunity Scholarships. Principal 1 could not give an exact number and Principal 2 indicated that only about 12 students had left his school on Opportunity Scholarships. Of the students that had left, Principal 1 believed that some had returned but indicated that most had remained away. Principal 2 did not know how many students had returned to the school. Principal 1 did not feel that Opportunity Scholarships were necessarily the answer to his schools problem. He believed that the students still had to do the work, regardless of what school they attended. Principal 1 indicated that test scores showed that some students who left did no better when they were gone. In fact, he pointed out that School 1, as a result of being identified as a voucher school, might actually have more programs in place to help the low achieving student than the other school the student chose to attend. According to Principal 2, the Opportunity Scholarship option was simply a matter of providing an element of choice for the parents. Principal 2 did not believe that vouchers were a bad thing, but simply a choice for parents who were not happy.

Both Principal 1 and Principal 2 believed that the FCAT had placed an unfortunate stigma on the field of education and schools specifically. According to both principals, all the public hears about in education from the media was how a school was graded. Principal 1 believed that it was good to measure students on a regular basis. However, he believed that we should measure the gains being made on a “per student” basis. For example, was Student X improving and making individual gains from one year to the next? According to

Principal 1, that was making progress. Principal 1 also believed that if we grade our schools on individual student progress that we ultimately make the playing field equal and then schools could be fairly compared to each other. Principal 2 believed that the only thing the public sees when it comes to education is the school grade. The public believed that the school grade told them where the school had been and where it was going. Principal 2 believed that it was important to look at what else was going on in the school before making the determination that a school was ineffective based solely on the grade assigned by the state.

Principal 1 believed that the future of education in the state of Florida as a result of the FCAT, the A+ Plan, and Opportunity Scholarships was still too hard to gauge. The programs in effect have been modified on a yearly basis, making comparisons from one year to the next somewhat challenging. Principal 1 believed that we needed a strong Pre-K program as well as a national curriculum in place within the United States. Principal 1 believed that these programs are needed to create some consistency in schools throughout the country. Principal 2 believed that the voucher movement had created a “line in the sand” for every educator. According to Principal 2, every educator had to make a decision as to whether they supported schools vouchers or not. Once that decision was made, then they must support that position. Together the two sides would continue to debate the pros and cons of the issue, but ultimately, no good could come of the

school voucher issue until a consensus was made and a single direction was indicated.

#### Research Question 5

*What are 'A' or 'B' high school principal's perceptions of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships as they pertain to their school?*

Much like the two principals of the voucher schools, Principal 3 and Principal 4 believed that there were both positive and negative attributes of the school voucher issue. Principal 3 believed that the school voucher issue had created a new accountability among Florida schools. According to Principal 3, for many years schools across Florida did whatever they wanted to in the classrooms and in their schools. Now, all schools were being held accountable for the same types of things and most were making progress towards reaching those same standards. Principal 3 believed that things change much more quickly in education today. If a school was not making adequate progress, then the current administration was removed and a new administration comes in. Schools at all levels must make changes and stay current with new policy and new initiatives to be successful.

Principal 4 believed that the A+ Plan had helped educators find a way to reach the middle student. According to Principal 4, a student's needs were being addressed and plans were being put into place to get the student's necessary resources to be successful. Principal 4 believed that the A+ Plan and the FCAT

helped drive schools forward on a more rigorous pace. Principal 4 believed that the first year students who attended School 4 on Opportunity Scholarships had a positive impact on the school culture. Since School 4 had become a 'C' school, the positive impact had diminished somewhat; however, it had never dropped back to what it was before being identified as a 'B' school.

Principal 3 and Principal 4 basically agreed that the FCAT had made their school more data driven. School 3 spent a large amount of time analyzing data and making daily decisions about the school. School 4 analyzed the data to identify the weak spots of each student and made changes to curriculum and other school programs based on the data. Principal 3 believed that his teachers should all teach at least one high, one middle, and one low level class. He believed this schedule kept teachers from getting burned out teaching only low level students all day long. Principal 4 believed that skills should be taught to the students that, not only will allow them to master the FCAT, but also master other assessments they may encounter throughout their educational career. Principal 4 tried to downplay how much affect the FCAT actually had on his school.

Both Principal 3 and Principal 4 felt the role of FCAT had been affected both positively and negatively by the school voucher movement. On the positive side, schools, specifically teachers, were taking a closer look at what each individual student was doing in the classroom and making curriculum decisions based on that information. Teachers were being held accountable for what goes on in their classroom; and if they were not doing the job, changes were being

made. Principal 4 believed that School Vouchers had moved the state in a more unified direction. We had started to drift towards a state aligned curriculum and we need to continue that process towards an even more nationally aligned curriculum. On the negative side, Principal 3 believed that we had gone to a mainly “test driven” society. He believed that we needed to get back in balance. Principal 4 believed that we had hurt the educational system through labeling with school grades. He believed that the public was not educated enough to know and understand what the label meant. We needed to educate the public to better benefit the entire educational system.

### Conclusions

The findings of this research study showed whether or not the implementation of school vouchers in Florida had an impact on the schools that had been identified as Voucher Eligible by the state. The researcher conducted four interviews of high school principals in the state of Florida. Two of the principals interviewed were currently at Voucher Schools, one principal was at a Non-Voucher ‘A’ school, and the fourth principal was at a Non-Voucher ‘B’ school. Through the interviews, the researcher attempted to create a profile of each of the schools, indicating similarities and differences between Voucher Eligible schools and Non-Voucher eligible schools. The researcher also attempted to gain an understanding of changes principals made in five main areas. The five areas were curriculum, human resources, staff development,



parental involvement, and budgeting. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to understand the perceptions of each of the principals as they pertained to Florida's A+ Plan, Opportunity Scholarships, the role of FCAT, and changes in the educational system as a result of these programs. Based on reported data collected for the 2002-2003 academic school year, and the interviews of current principals at the identified schools, the researcher reached the following conclusions.

1. There was a positive relationship between a Voucher School and the school's minority rate. Voucher Schools in the study had a minority rate above ninety percent compared to the Non-Voucher Schools which had minority rates between thirty and fifty percent. Although the amount of poverty found in a school may be an influence or a factor on a school's grade, this study did not address the poverty issue.
2. There was a positive relationship between the percent of students reading below grade level in the Voucher Schools. Both Voucher Schools indicated that between eighty-nine and ninety percent of their students were below reading level.
3. There was a positive relationship between the Voucher Schools and the lack of community participation. Both principals indicated a lack of community support towards academics and a high poverty rate in the neighborhood from which the school drew its students.

4. There was no relationship between the principal's perceptions of "highly motivated" teachers and a school's grade. All four principals indicated that they believed they had highly motivated teachers at their school. More emphasis was placed on redirecting some of those teachers into more appropriate curriculum areas or in learning appropriate teaching strategies.
5. There was consensus among all four principals in Voucher and Non-Voucher schools that reading classes were vital to the future success of the school and the subsequent impending school grade. Each principal designated, in one form or another, additional reading classes for their school and programs to teach reading for teachers.
6. All four principals in Voucher and Non-Voucher schools believed that tutoring was beneficial to every student on campus. Various programs were put in place at each school to address the tutoring issue with different levels of success. Some tutoring programs were added directly into the instruction and others were supplemental to the curriculum. Some schools struggled initially with implementation; however, eventually they were able to get the programs started within the respective schools.
7. All four principals agreed that the hiring of additional staff to implement additional reading classes was significant to the success of the school. Principals used numerous methods to reassign and recruit additional

reading teachers to the school; however, each principal made significant changes and continued to make yearly changes in his/her reading departments. Other staff changes continued to be made based on the needs of the school.

8. All four principals believed it was important for teachers to receive data on their students and to be adequately trained to decipher that data and make curriculum decisions in the classroom based on that data. Proper analyses of individual student data were important to the successes of each individual student.
9. All four principals agreed that staff development was necessary to keep all faculty and administrators abreast of current best practices in reading. All four principals provided staff development opportunities either through their own school, through the district's professional development programs, or through outside agencies. Many of their programs evolved to allow staff to eventually lead their fellow staff members in the staff development.
10. There was a positive relationship between the amount of parent involvement in a school and the school's grade. Schools in the study that were identified as Voucher Eligible had lower parental involvement than the schools in the study identified as either 'A' or 'B'.

11. There was no relationship between a school's grade and its impact on the school's budget. All four principals indicated that the school budget was not affected by the school vouchers.
12. There was a positive perception among the two Voucher Eligible school principals on Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships. Both principals perceived that the education plan helped lead the state in a positive direction towards more accountability and made an attempt to close the achievement gap among all students.
13. There was a negative perception among the two Voucher Eligible school principals on the role of the FCAT in the state's education plan. Both principals believed that the grade given by the state created a negative impact on the credibility of the school, yet they seemed to have made changes because of the grade.
14. There was consensus among the four principals that the education process as a mechanism for teaching children was too large. The principals believed that many schools were too big and that many students and their families got lost in the bureaucracy of the system. Education as a whole entity needed to be broken down into smaller parts to better address the individual needs of the students. Each principal addressed this in a variety of ways. One created learning communities; one created academies; one added advance placement classes; and one created magnet programs.

15. There was consensus among all four principals in Voucher and Non-Voucher schools that school vouchers and specifically the Opportunity Scholarship was not the major factor in a school's grade. The school must change and correct its practices from within before real change can be expected to make an impact. Each principal acknowledged that constant change based on evaluation of programs was necessary to ultimately benefit the students at each school.

#### Implications and Recommendations for Practice

In the study, implications and recommendations were based on the findings of the researcher:

1. Since there was a positive relationship between the minority rate of a school and the school's grade, it would be beneficial to the schools that have been identified as Voucher Eligible to create programs in the curriculum to attract students of other races from outside their attendance zone. The research (Center for the Study of Public Policy, 1970; Weidner, 2005) suggested that school voucher programs took students out of the failing schools and relocated them into 'A' or 'B' schools. This study found that not to be the case. Although some students relocated to other schools, the majority remained and continued their education at their home school.

2. Since there was a positive relationship between the overall reading level of a school and the school's grade, it would be beneficial for all schools to continue to address the reading issue and work together to create reading programs that have a greater impact on the student body at all levels, especially prior to high school. Each principal in the study recognized the importance of reading classes and made increases in either the number of reading classes offered or the length of contact time a student received in a reading class. In addition, each principal made multiple changes in the staff assigned to reading classes and programs and developed training programs for teachers or dedicated more class time for reading instruction. The research (Education Commission of the States, 2002; Harris & Herrington, 2002) suggested that increasing the number of reading programs in schools would bring individual FCAT reading and writing scores up to acceptable levels as defined by the state of Florida. These individual increases when combined would eventually raise a school's grade. This study found that not to be the case. Although some student's individual FCAT scores rose, the two Voucher Eligible schools in this study had not raised their school grade from an 'F' as a result of implementing the additional reading programs.
3. Since there was a positive relationship between a school's community and the subsequent school grade, it would be beneficial for schools to

work together with government and community officials to increase the overall atmosphere surrounding the school. The research (Chakrabarti, 2004; Johns, 1982; Levine & Driver, 1997; Peterson, n.d.) suggested that schools in low economic areas have a higher likelihood of receiving a lower school grade than schools from higher economic areas. The prospect of principals being able to get the communities that surrounded their schools seemed to increase the chances that the school would become stronger within the community and as a result, stronger within itself.

4. Although there was consensus among all the principals that tutoring programs are beneficial to the student, there was no clear mathematical or archival data to support the claims. The research (Cullen & Reback, 2006; Harris & Herrington, 2006; Keeney et al., 2002) suggested that increasing the number of tutoring opportunities in schools would increase individual FCAT reading, writing, and math scores. These individual increases would eventually raise a school's grade. This study found that not to be the case. Although some student's individual FCAT scores rose, the increase could not be attributed to the impact of tutoring programs. Furthermore, the two Voucher Eligible schools in this study had not raised their school grade from an 'F' as a result of implementing additional tutoring opportunities. However it would seem prudent to assume that any additional

instruction, whether in the classroom or through tutoring programs, would be beneficial to both the students and the school.

5. There was consensus among principals that it was important for teachers to analyze their own student data, therefore it seemed it would be beneficial for school districts to provide staff trainings in data analysis for all teachers. The research (Chakrabarti, 2005; 2004; Figlio & Rouse, 2005) indicated that Level I students lacked the necessary skills to be successful on the FCAT. The only way for students to increase their level on these skills was to have schools, and more specifically teachers, focus on these skill areas in the academic classes. To determine the effectiveness of their assessments and to measure student improvement, the teachers needed to learn to analyze student data.
6. Since there was a relationship between the amount of parent involvement in a school and the school grade, it was beneficial for the education community as a whole to find creative ways to involve parents in the school and in the classroom. The research (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Salisbury, 2003) indicated that low parent involvement was a major factor in the success or lack of success in a school. In order to create more positive parent support, school officials must work together with the community to draw parents into the culture of the school. Principals must find ways to let parents see that their



involvement in the schools and in their child's education was beneficial both to the growth and successes of the student and the school.

7. Since the interviewed principals had a positive perception of Florida's A+ Plan and Opportunity Scholarships, it seemed that it would be beneficial for lawmakers to continue to address each of the issues and make adjustments in both programs as necessary. In the research, (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Johns, 1982; Levin, 2002) proponents of school vouchers believed that schools would ultimately close the achievement gap and improve education. The interviewed principals seemed to support that overall position, although they would caution against relying solely on the FCAT as a determinant of their school's future.
8. Since there was consensus among all four interviewed principals that the education system today was too large to address the needs of every student, it would seem lawmakers and education policy makers should address the issue of size and how best to accommodate the increasing number of students in our schools. The research (Salisbury, 2003) indicated that smaller schools do a better job of meeting the educational needs of students. Voters in Florida passed the class size reduction bill to facilitate the reduction of students learning in one place. Therefore, we must find viable cost effective ways to decrease the number of students in the classroom and still reach the

overwhelming number of students that come through our educational system.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations in the study were based upon the major findings of the researcher:

1. Examining the percentage of students that are on free or reduced lunch and the school's grade and how or if these students were correlated to the lower level performing students. The schools with grades of 'F' appeared to have significantly higher free and reduced lunch percentages than the schools with grades of 'A' or 'B'.
2. Examining the rate of minority students and the school's grade and how or if these students were correlated to the school's assigned grade. The schools with grades of 'F' appeared to have significantly higher minority rates than the schools with grades of 'A' or 'B'.
3. Examining the relationship between the reading levels of students and the school grade and determining if a school's overall student reading level was correlated to the school's assigned grade. Schools with the greatest number of students reading at levels below grade seemed to have a significant impact on the school's assigned grade.
4. Examining the size of classes and or programs, such as magnets, Advance Placement classes, and Dual Enrollment classes, and assess

their impact on the educational process and if the number of higher level classes made an impact on a school's grade.

5. Examining the relationship of a school's grade and whether the school met its annual yearly progress.
6. Examining the relationship of FCAT scores and SAT and ACT scores.  
Is there a positive relationship or correlation between a student's FCAT score in high school and their SAT or Act score prior to entering college?
7. Examining parent involvement through the number of PTA memberships, the number of parents that attended open house, the number of parents that were room helpers in the primary schools, and the number of conferences called by parents and if these numbers were correlated to the school's grade.
8. Follow-up on 'D' and 'F' schools for trend data on student enrollment and special programs and its effect on future school grade.
9. Examine student gains in 'D' and 'F' schools as a result of a change in leadership.

APPENDIX A  
IRB HUMAN SUBJECTS PERMISSION LETTER



Office of Research & Commercialization

March 14, 2006

Robert Bolen  
2300 Jessica Lane  
Kissimmee, FL 34744-6454

Dear Mr. Bolen:

With reference to your protocol #06-3273 entitled, "**A Case Study of the Perceptions of Public School Principals of Voucher Eligible Schools in Florida,**" I am enclosing for your records the approved, expedited document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office. **This study was approved on 3/13/06. The expiration date will be 3/12/07.** Should there be a need to extend this study, a Continuing Review form must be submitted to the IRB Office for review by the Chairman or full IRB at least one month prior to the expiration date. This is the responsibility of the investigator. **Please notify the IRB office when you have completed this research study.**

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board through use of the Addendum/Modification Request form. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 407-823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Ward".

Barbara Ward, CIM  
UCF IRB Coordinator  
(FWA00000351 Exp. 5/13/07, IRB00001138)

Copies: IRB File  
Rosemarye Taylor, Ph.D.

BW:jm

APPENDIX B  
PRINCIPAL LETTER

Date

Principal  
High School  
Address  
City, FL Zip Code

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me earlier today regarding voucher eligible high schools in Florida. This letter is to confirm that I will be at your school on DATE AND TIME to conduct the interview. I appreciate you setting aside a few moments of your day to allow me to come and personally speak with you about your perceptions as a high school principal at a voucher eligible school in Florida and your perceptions as principal of the school. Please be assured that the data collected will be included in an overall discussion of perceptions and in no way will the name of your school or your name as principal be identifiable to the reader. Your input and perceptions are an important part of my research that I am conducting as part of my dissertation for my Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership.

As I mentioned during our phone call, the interview questions I will be asking you are in regards to the public school voucher movement in Florida and your perceptions as a principal in a voucher eligible school. Enclosed with this letter, please find a copy of the interview questions that I will be asking. I hope that by including the questions ahead of time, it will give you a chance to think about some of the issues I am addressing as well as expedite our time together so as not to take too much of your time.

The study I am conducting will provide very important information regarding the perception of principals regarding vouchers in Florida, the changes taking place at voucher eligible schools because of their status as a voucher eligible school, and the current profile of voucher eligible high schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It is only with the generous support of people like you that my research will be successful.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Bolen  
Doctoral Graduate Student  
University of Central Florida  
407-744-0070  
[rbolen@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rbolen@cfl.rr.com)

APPENDIX C  
VOUCHER ELIGIBLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS



## Principal Interview Questions of Florida Voucher Eligible Schools

1. How long have you been a principal?
2. How long have you been a principal at this school?
3. Why was your school identified as a Voucher Eligible school?
4. What did your school look like in the classroom before being identified as a Voucher Eligible school? How does your school classroom look today?
5. What were the major challenges in your school was facing prior to being identified as a Voucher Eligible school? What are the major challenges facing your school today?
6. What changes have you made in curriculum or instruction since being identified as a Voucher Eligible school? How were these changes made? How are you implementing these changes?
7. What adjustments in the use of your human resources have been made since being identified as a Voucher Eligible school?
8. What changes have you made to staff development and the implementation of staff development programs since being identified as a Voucher Eligible school?
9. What professional development has your school participated in since being identified as a Voucher Eligible school?

10. How has parental involvement in your school changed, if at all, since being identified as a Voucher Eligible school? How do you know? Can you give me an example?
11. What changes have you made to enhance the level of parent involvement since being identified as a Voucher Eligible school?
12. How has being identified as a Voucher Eligible school affected your school budget?
13. Can you give me an example of a highly motivated teacher here at this school? What role does the drive to increase FCAT scores have towards motivating the faculty and students of the school? How is this addressed by the school? Do you have to address this as principal of the school?
14. Have any students that left your school on an Opportunity Scholarship returned?
15. What do you know about Florida's A+ Education Plan?
16. How would you describe Opportunity Scholarships?
17. What has been your greatest challenge as principal, as the leader, of a Voucher Eligible school? What has been your greatest positive?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Voucher Eligible schools?

APPENDIX D  
NON-VOUCHER SCHOOL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS

## Principal Interview Questions of Florida Non-Voucher Schools

1. How long have you been a principal?
2. How long have you been a principal at this school?
3. Why was your school identified as an 'A' school?
4. What did your school look like in the classroom before being identified as an 'A' school? How does your school classroom look today?
5. What were the major challenges your school was facing prior to being identified as an 'A' school?
6. What changes have you made in curriculum or instruction since being identified as an 'A' school? How were these changes made? How are you implementing these changes?
7. What adjustments in the use of your human resources have been made since being identified as an 'A' school?
8. What changes have you made to staff development and the implementation of staff development programs since being identified as an 'A' school?
9. What professional development does your school participate in as an 'A' school?
10. How has parental involvement in your school changed, if at all, since being identified as an 'A' school? How do you know? Can you give me an example?
11. How has being identified as an 'A' school affected your school budget?

12. Can you give me an example of a highly motivated teacher here at this school? If I were in his/her classroom, what would I see?  
How many of the teachers work at that level of motivation?
13. What role does the drive to increase FCAT scores have towards motivating the faculty and students of the school? How is this addressed by the school? Do you have to address this as principal of the school?
14. Have any students come to your school on an Opportunity Scholarship? What percentage of those students have remained at your school?
15. How would you describe the A+ plan to someone from out of state? Would you say anything differently if you were describing the plan to a new administrator transferring to your school? From your perspective, how is education in Florida different today because of the A+ Plan?
16. How would you describe Opportunity Scholarships to someone from out of state? Would you say anything differently if you were describing the scholarships to a new administrator transferring to your school? From your perspective, how is education in Florida different because of Opportunity Scholarships?
17. What has been your greatest challenge as principal, as the leader, of an 'A' school? What has been your greatest positive as principal of an 'A' school?
18. How has the implementation of school grading impacted education as a profession?

19. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding 'A' schools and vouchers?

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