

Making the Decision: Factors that Affect the Information Available to Parents with Young Children about Charter Schools in Central Florida

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MAKING THE DECISION: FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE INFORMATION
AVAILABLE TO PARENTS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN ABOUT CHARTER
SCHOOLS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in the School of Teaching Learning and Leadership
in the College of Education
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at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

In the opening decades of the 21st Century, a movement towards parental choice in public schools has taken flight. One of the choices becoming more readily available to parents of young children is charter schools. Charter schools are expanding across the United States and Central Florida is representative of this growth. Parents are faced with more choices as they make decisions on their children's educational future than ever before making the availability of quality, accurate information about local schools paramount. While scholarly work on charter schools, the effects of media coverage on public opinion, and how parents make choices for their children exists, in many cases the research offers inconclusive results and rarely was there an attempt to connect all three. This paper, written from a parent's perspective, analyzes research, newspaper articles, interviews, and surveys of Central Florida's media outlets, public school representatives, and parents of young children to determine the types of information on charter schools available to parents of young children in Central Florida. The purpose of this thesis will be to investigate the information available to parents when considering a charter school for their young children by comparing the stated opinions of the local media, district school boards, and the charters themselves. It also identifies who is responsible for disseminating this information, and how the parents choose to gather and use this information.

DEDICATIONS

For all of my family, thank you for all of the support as seemingly everyone decided now was a good time to go back to school.

For my son and best buddy Jonathan, thank you for always putting a smile on my face and making me realize that I could never be too busy to go outside and play.

For my wife and best friend Amy, thank you for supporting me through thick and thin. Don't worry – a little R&R is on the horizon.

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INTRODUCTION

One issue that stays at the forefront of political debate is public education. Educational reform has become a common platform for politicians as statisticians release new and increasingly disturbing reports that place American students at the bottom of the educational ladder when compared to other highly developed nations. Parents, legislators, and in many cases representatives from public schools themselves including administrators and teachers are demanding that a change in the system occurs. While a consensus seems to have been reached that educational reform is necessary, how this will happen is a matter of debate.

The State of Florida, like many other states, has implemented numerous changes in its educational system, changes that have consistently met scrutiny from a variety of critics. With an operating budget of over fourteen billion dollars in 2012, the Florida Department of Education is a powerful force in the state (Florida Department of Education, 2013, February 25). Recent public education changes have ranged from standardized student testing to stricter teacher evaluation; these changes have been controversial, to say the least. Added to those changes has been a stronger push toward school choice programs within the more than 70 different districts that make up Florida's educational system.

In the past, legislative leaders have seemingly used a top down model for educational reform in which political leaders would make the final decisions and schools would follow their lead. While that still occurs, recent legislation has also made room for a new educational model; one in which parents and schools themselves have more decision-making power. School choice

can happen in a variety of ways. In some cases these options are based on school grades or school demographics. A student attending a poorly rated school may be given the opportunity to transfer to a better performing school or a student that represents the racial majority at their school may be able to transfer to another school in which they will be part of the racial minority. Either way, in these scenarios, the choices for these students are few and those that don't meet these parameters have no choice at all.

An alternate choice that is becoming more and more commonly available is charter schools. Students and their families can choose charter schools regardless of the demographics or overall grade of their current school. Many families may not be armed with enough valid information about their local charter schools, however, so choosing them may be a difficult decision. Local charter representatives echo these concerns stating that they operate on a very limited amount of funding, which does not leave room for advertising. Charters may then have to rely on local districts or grass roots efforts to get their names out to the public. Charter schools may be misunderstood, or not known of at all, leaving them the difficult job of carving out a niche for themselves while struggling with low enrollment numbers.

The purpose of this thesis will be to investigate the information available to parents when considering a charter school for their young children by comparing the stated opinions of the local media, district school boards, and the charters themselves. The area studied will be Central Florida, which encompasses the following 10 school districts: Volusia, Brevard, Seminole, Lake, Orange, Polk, Osceola, Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas. These districts cover the entire Central Region of Florida from coast to coast representing a very large and diverse population.

The research questions surrounding this thesis are as follows: (a) When disseminating information about local charter schools what is the role of the media?, (b) What is the role of the school district?, (c) What is the role of the charter school?, and (d) What other informational sources are available to parents?

In order to address the questions above, Chapter Two will provide a backdrop for the study by taking a look at the research of others, and then the subsequent chapters will examine the roles of the individuals identified in the questions. Chapter Three will focus on the role of the media, Chapter Four will identify the role of the school district, Chapter Five will look at the role of the charter school, and Chapter Six will examine other sources of information available to parents. Following these chapters the conclusion will identify how all these variables work together and will identify possible solutions to problems discovered throughout the study.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

Research on charter schools is available, but in many cases is still in an infantile state. Historically charter schools were the answer to the question of how to improve student success in large inner city areas with a history of poor performing schools. Large cities such as Washington, D.C. wanted to give underperforming inner city schools more freedom to alter their teaching methods in order to better serve their student population. Giving these schools the option to operate outside the normal parameters of the district allowed them to make gains in high minority schools with historically poor academic achievement. The first charter legislation was passed in Minnesota in 1991, legislation that would unexpectedly begin a tremendous shift in national education reform (Kelly & Loveless, 2012).

The initial charter school movement has expanded the idea of schools that offer differentiated learning into the suburbs of many American cities and towns. By 2010 approximately 1.7 million students had chosen the charter option across the nation, a number that is continually on the rise (Kelly & Loveless, 2012). Similar growth can be seen in 2002 in the state of Florida where 223 charter schools were in operation, a number that grew by more than double within 10 years with 579 charters operating in 2012 (Florida Department of Education, 2013, February). Unfortunately, charters are such a new phenomenon that little conclusive research has been done into how they are affecting the public education system and the public in general.

Perhaps the biggest factor when it comes to parental consideration of a charter is the overall parental opinion of the school. Local charter representatives agree that word of mouth is

the main form of charter advertisement and they also agree that almost no one speaks as loud or as often as do the parents of children in both traditional public and charter schools. Kathleen Galotti and Carey Tinkelenberg published a study in *The American Journal of Psychology* in 2009 that focused on why parents choose the schools that they do for their small children. The study consisted of approximately 1200 parents that were 92% Caucasian. Parents with a graduate degree comprised 38% while those that had only completed high school or a two year degree comprised 21%.

What they found was that despite the fact that these demographics resemble the target demographics of many new suburban charter schools, parents were rarely considering them as options for their children. According to the survey, 92% of parents participating in the study said that traditional public schools were the first option they would consider for their children. Only 44% reported that charters were an option at all, nearly all of those saying they were a second or third option (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009).

A key question that emerges is whether parents are critical of charters or did they just not think of them when considering a school for their child? Surprisingly, despite the high percentage of well-educated parents in the study, it was the latter that was the case. Convenience was the number one factor in parents school choice, carrying a staggering almost two to one lead over the other highest factors which included curriculum, teacher characteristics, and test scores (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009). Even though local charters may have high test scores and extremely well qualified teachers, they may find difficulty meeting enrolment goals because of parents' perceived inconvenience of sending their students there.

If local charter representatives agree that word of mouth is one of the largest factors in charter growth, negative press about any charter school can prove damaging for charters across an entire region. A charter that has failed to live up to expectations can contaminate the entire system. Searching a regions media outlets for stories and reports on local charter schools could offer revealing insight into why the local community views the charters as they do. The media are not the only ones influencing parents with their educational decisions for their children, however. Parents may also be more than willing to give their opinions about the local educational options to other parents with small children.

Unfortunately, for charters, research from Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, and Branch in a 2005 *National Bureau of Economic Research* study found that charters often are subject to far more parental scrutiny than traditional public schools. Parents of children in traditional public schools, who are often unaware of other alternatives, are more accepting of a year of slow academic process and assume that it will improve the following year. The same is not the case in charter schools. Parents of charter students routinely research all the local educational opportunities available to their children and have little patience for any reduction in academic progress. As a result, charter school parents respond to quality concerns faster and far more frequently than parents of students in traditional schools, often withdrawing students to move them to a more favorable situation (Hanushek, et al., 2005).

While higher academic quality lowers charter exit rates for students in higher socioeconomic situations, in some cases the reverse is true for lower income families. Too much pressure or too different of a system can lead low income families to move their students away

from charters and back to the familiarity of traditional schools (Hanushek et al., 2005). The repercussions for charters can be distressing. Charters with poor academic progress or even a single uninspired teacher can cause long-term doubts for parents about charters as a whole (Hanushek, et al., 2005). Perhaps even more distressing for charters is the fact that some are achieving increased academic success only to see some unfamiliar with their methods drop out and not recommend them to anyone as a viable option. In both scenarios, the resulting parental opinions of the school could fall drastically reducing the effectiveness of the charters primary form of marketing: word of mouth advertising and parental referrals.

With both varying public opinions and fluctuating levels of community support the difficulty level of opening a new charter is high. Despite this there has still been a large increase in charters over the past decade which has prompted more and more research into their operations and academic outcomes. Many of the findings are either contradictory or inconclusive. Research must take into account a large amount of variables present in charters that often makes creating a blanket statement about them as a whole impossible. Charters can have diverse or homogenous student bodies, can be inner city or suburb, and can be primary or secondary schools. These are only a few of the many variables that are present in charters that make it difficult to use a small sampling of information to represent the whole.

One thing researchers seem to agree on is that new charters must overcome obstacles that new traditional schools do not. In 2012, Andrew Kelly and Tom Loveless published their research on newly established charters in *The American Journal of Education*. What they found was both good news and bad news for charters. In their research they found that every new

charter surveyed was outperformed by new local traditional schools. The reasons for this weaker performance were varied, with a lack of defined structure, lack of district support, or the quality of students the charters attracted all playing roles in their low figures (Kelly & Loveless, 2012). With public opinion having a great effect on initial enrolment numbers poor initial test scores which are a key figure in school accountability are another of the many hurdles charters must overcome. While their first year figures showed charters struggling to find their way, numbers beyond the first year were quite promising. Kelly and Loveless (2012) found that charters test scores typically began improving immediately and either met or exceeded those of the traditional school within five years. Their hope is that future charters will learn from the slow start of their predecessors, will begin more successful start-up models, and will receive greater support from local districts allowing them to bypass the slow first year and begin on par with other public schools (Kelly & Loveless, 2012).

With repeated efforts to completely understand the charter movement continuing to produce complicated and confusing results efforts must be made to break down the subject into more manageable pieces. If local charter leaders suggest that charter growth is often dependent on word of mouth advertising then a better understanding must be had of what is being said and why. The Hanushek et al research (2005) suggests that parents are withdrawing students from charter schools for reasons that differ from those of traditional public schools, Kelly and Loveless (2012) concluded that initial test scores in charters are poor, and, perhaps as a result, Galotti and Tinkelenberg (2009) found that the vast majority of parents do not consider charters as a viable option for their young children.

As a whole this information suggests that quality charter schools could find themselves initially struggling to meet enrollment goals for a variety of reasons. This presents the opportunity to further research additional reasons behind this occurrence. Various factors are present in providing information about and influencing the educational choices parents make for their children. The roles of the media, school board, and the charters themselves are three of the more influential factors at work when parents gather information about educational options. Researching these three factors will provide useful information on how charters are portrayed in a specific region and possible reasons why parents are making the choices they are for their children's education within that region. In order to research this topic, I worked to complete the IRB certification and then submitted my proposal and interview questions to the IRB Review Board, and received a letter stating they approved my human participant research that was exempt from regulation.

The following chapters will outline the research that I have conducted on the dissemination of information about local charters to the public. Chapter 3 will discuss the role of the media, Chapter 4 will identify the role of the school district, Chapter 5 will examine the role of the charter schools, and Chapter 6 will look into other ways parents are currently receiving information. Following these chapters I will present my overall conclusions and recommendations for the problems I encountered.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

In a 2009 Forum at the Harvard Graduate School of Education *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert and *Boston Globe* columnist Derrick Jackson sat down with the School of Education's dean, Kathleen McCartney, to discuss the influence of the media on public education. Beginning the conversation was Dean McCartney who stated that "Education is greatly influenced by media, especially columnists" (Anderson, 2008). Herbert goes into further detail explaining that the general public's perception of education is also affected by the media when he states:

A common problem with media is their tendency to lead with stories the public wants to read, rather than what it needs to know. The press focuses too much on personalities and process, rather than what's happening and why it's happening. This likely contributes to the creation and permeation of educational stereotypes in the U.S. The media seems to favor writing about problematic school systems rather than inspirational stories of school and student success. The focus on educational struggles and failures only serves to compound education problems and confirm existing stereotypes. (Anderson, 2008)

Herbert, the winner of numerous awards in journalism over his more than 40 year career, identifies key problems parents are dealt with when using the media as a resource when making educational choices for their future. The first is the problem that media sources, which may include television and print, focus on the general public's wants rather than their needs. Whether

it is to keep reader and viewer numbers high or because a particular media outlet has its own political opinions on a matter, the public does not always receive information that is of true value to them. This leads to the reinforcement of existing stereotypes, another problem that Herbert identified in his statement. In the case of Herbert's statement the stereotypes that are being reinforced are negative because of what he feels is the media's focus on problems with schools rather than their successes. Media outlets focus so much on misguided or problematic schools that parents using these sources for guidance could be left with nothing more than typical stereotypes, a word the Merriam Webster Dictionary defines as "oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment", to work off of when making tremendous educational decisions for their children (Stereotype, 2012).

To better understand if the Central Florida media also used this approach when reporting on local charter schools a search was conducted on the websites of two major print and news outlets in Orlando and Tampa. The print media sources searched were *The Orlando Sentinel* and *The Tampa Bay Times*, the two largest newspapers in Central Florida. The two publications are dispersed from coast to coast in Central Florida and claim more than two million weekly readers combined according to their individual press kits. The two television news sources searched were News Channel 9 in Tampa Bay and News Channel 13 in Orlando. Both of these news stations are offered only to subscribers to a local cable network and owned by the same network, but this network has more than one million subscribers according to an October 2012 *Orlando Sentinel* story on local cable providers. Searches were made on local affiliates of large networks such as NBC, CBS, and ABC, but they resulted in very few relevant results. If they returned any

results on charter schools in the news or even education as a whole they reflected national headlines rather than local news.

The results of the searches varied depending on region and school district and can be seen in Table 1. The news agencies in Orlando and Eastern Central Florida reported more on problematic charter schools than the Tampa and Western Central Florida agencies did. In the Orlando region in the first quarter of 2013, 22 articles published by the *Orlando Sentinel* specifically contained the phrase “charter school” in the title. Of these articles, more than half reported general news about state and national charters in stories that outlined political changes and general legislation about charters. Over 40% of the remaining stories either were titled or contained information that reported negative findings on local charters. For this study an article was viewed as negative if the title contained negative indicators such as failing, closures, fight against, problems, and numbers down. Stories from the *Orlando Sentinel* that fell into this group included “Orange Board plans to close the door on Mavericks Charter” to “Charter bill passes and takes aim at local charter problems.”

The results were similar, if not a bit more concerning for local charters when looking at the same results for television channel News 13 in Orlando. In this case, over 60% of the findings again reported the general state and national news for charters, but every remaining story pertained to problems with local charters. Not a single article spoke of good news or positive outcomes in the local schools. News reports ranged from “Failing Charter Schools Give Parents Pause for Concern” to “Polk and Seminole [counties] Fight New Charter School.”

In the Tampa Bay area the results of the same search produced very different results. The *Tampa Bay Times* had a nearly even split between positive, negative, and neutral articles about charter schools in the 28 articles that returned in the search. Both general articles about national and state charter events and articles that showed local charters in a positive light represented 35% of the group as a whole. Positive articles were identified as articles with titles that contained indicators such as success, growing enrolment, and academic growth. The remaining 30% were represented by articles that reported on problematic charters in the area.

It was the results from the search on Tampa Bays' News Channel 9 that were the most different from Orlando. With both Orlando and Tampa's news agencies being owned by the same cable system one may think that they would express similar views, but this was not the case. In a nearly exact reversal of the Orlando results, over 50% of the reports from News 9 in Tampa told of local charter successes, with over 30% reporting general state and national news and less than 15% of 24 reports spoke of local problems with charters. Report titles ranged from "Charter school students excelling, enrolment up in the Bay area" to "Enrolment boom for Hillsborough charter schools."

Table 1: Results of a Search of First Quarter Articles on Charter Schools by Central Florida Media Outlets

Source	Number of Articles Found	Positive	Negative	Neutral
<i>The Orlando Sentinel</i>	22	5	4	11
<i>News 13 Orlando</i>	24	0	9	15
<i>The Tampa Bay Times</i>	28	10	8	10
<i>News 9 Tampa Bay</i>	24	13	8	3

There are a variety of reasons that the discrepancies between news reports in Tampa Bay and Orlando could exist. For instance, while the news agencies for each region do overlap within the geographical area of Central Florida, they are reporting on unique school districts within each region. This would mean that a failing charter school in the Orlando region would likely not be newsworthy in Tampa Bay nor would a successful school in Tampa Bay be newsworthy in Orlando. This was likely the case when news broke in late 2012 that NorthStar Charter High School, a failed charter that closed in Orlando, made potentially unethical and illegal payouts to members of its former board and administration using public funds. This particular story ended up in repeated follow ups, causing Orlando's number of negative charter stories to increase substantially while Tampa Bay's numbers were unaffected.

Opportunities for reporting on charters differ between the two regions of Central Florida as well. Whether it is chance growth or overwhelming acceptance, the Tampa Bay area is seeing more and more charter openings while Orlando area charters are opening at a slower pace. The Florida Department of Education lists 74 charters in operation in just 3 districts in the Tampa area while only 61 operated in 5 districts in the Orlando area in the 2012-2013 school year (Florida Department of Education, 2013a). In fact, Hillsborough County in which Tampa is located has nearly the same amount of charters at 43 as does 3 districts that include and surround Orlando at 46 despite the fact that these three Orlando districts have over 600,000 more residents than the Tampa district according to 2010 census figures (United States Census Bureau, 2013)

In an effort to better understand how these news stories were acquired, why they were written, and who exactly the target audience was for them the authors and editors of each were contacted. Unfortunately, out of many different attempts, often two to three times, only one columnist responded. A Central Florida school reporter expressed her opinion on local charter schools and the role she feels the media has in influencing the public. When asked about the coverage of both local charters and traditional public schools in Central Florida she replied:

Charter schools have faced scrutiny in the 2 ½ years I've been on this beat because they face fewer accountability provisions (by law) and so have more opportunities for spectacular failures. A regular public school, for example, isn't going to be able to operate for most of a school year without books. There are too many layers of accountability over the principal for that to happen. And when it does happen, it's news. That's where I come in. Same thing with financial mismanagement. I'd

report on it anywhere it was happening, but charter schools have more flexibility, and therefore an unscrupulous person can potentially do more damage before anyone acts. (Field Notes, 2013)

She seems to be corroborating some of the statements made by Herbert at the Harvard discussion. Herbert spoke on media sources focusing on problem situations in education and here she speaks about “spectacular failures” and “unscrupulous” people in charter schools being “news.” It is noteworthy that she was not asked about negative press for charters specifically, only to discuss the coverage of both traditional and charter public schools. She says she does not “have a personal opinion on charter schools as a whole, because they’re really different individually. Some are great, some are terrible.” Unfortunately, for Central Florida charters, it would seem that the great schools she is referring to are part of Herbert’s “inspirational stories of school and student success” that are often not included within the coverage of modern media outlets (Anderson, 2008).

The columnist was also asked to comment on her feelings about the role of the media when it comes to influencing public opinion, in this case on the topic of public education specifically. Her reply, like the opinions shown in the Harvard discussion, also showed strong ties between the media and their role as educators of the public. She said:

I think the media definitely has a role in informing parents about how charter schools are doing. Schools in Florida can typically be judged by parents on their school grades ... but charter schools are less likely to get grades for a variety of reasons.

So that's one area where the media can come in – filling in some of the holes where parents might not be able to get much information. (Field Notes, 2013)

Overall, little doubt exists that as the columnist points out the media does influence the opinions of those that are exposed to it. It is also notable that the media does indeed fill in the void for parents seeking out the truth about local charters. What type of information will parents receive when they turn to the media for help? Unfortunately, the results of this research are inconclusive and simply indicate that it depends. If charters are succeeding and receiving community support there is a good chance, as indicated, that the media will reflect this and portray local charters in a positive light. The reverse is seemingly also true, with poor performing charters becoming magnified in the media, casting a dark shadow over charters that are performing well in the same area. Overall, the media may leave parents with either a one-sided opinion of local charters or with more questions than answers when it comes to informing them of the local options available to their children.

After finding that research concludes that charters are often overly scrutinized and charter leaders find that word of mouth advertising is their best asset the negative press they receive in the media can be highly detrimental. This raised the need for further inquiry on how information about charters gets to the public. In the next chapter I will explore what the role of the school district is in disseminating charter information. Chapter 5 will look into the role of the charter schools and Chapter 6 will explore other methods parents use to gather information. The final chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings as well as remarks on possible improvement to current methods of disseminating information about local charters to parents.

THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT

The role of the district in regard to Central Florida charter schools can be difficult to understand because of the complicated and unique relationships. One local district director of choice schools seemed to touch on this confusion well when he jokingly stated anonymously in an interview that “the district has no role in the operation of charters within the district, yet is ultimately responsible for reporting the major actions of all charters within the district” (Field Notes, 2013).

The key phrase in this district representative's statement is the district's responsibility for reporting, not participating in, the actions of the local charters. Legislation on charters corroborates this representative's statement in many more words. It lists the responsibilities of the district when it comes to charters within the district. The district's role is almost exclusively that of a monitor or auditor of budgetary spending, and the district is limited in what and how it monitors a charter school. Included in the district's responsibilities are monitoring a charter's adherence to the goals of the original charter, the financial activities of the charter, and the charter's adherence to the “state's accountability system” (Florida Senate, 2000 - 2013).

Much of the remaining language in the legislation is dedicated to the ways in which the district is immune from the actions of local charters. This included waiving the district's liability for civil damages from any employment actions from school personnel, the liability for civil damages due to personal injury, property damage, or death resulting from the omission of an officer of the charter school, and a broad statement that the language of the document does not “waive a district school board's sovereign immunity” (Florida Senate, 2000 - 2013).

For the purpose of this study, the role of the district in monitoring local charters was less important than the role of the district in offering quality information on local charters to the public. To better understand this role, 17 local district choice school directors were contacted for their input on three questions relating to charter school information availability in their district. The actual title of each individual varied by district, with some titles such as “Supervisor, Charter Schools” making it easy to identify the individual overseeing charters in that district, while others such as “Director of Educational Choices” making it a bit more difficult to pinpoint who exactly oversees charters in that district. This relationship could be important as parents try to search out an individual at the district level who may be able to assist them with questions about local charters.

The 17 directors represented 9 local school districts with some districts having as many as four choice school directors and some as few as one. Each director was told that for the purpose of my study, I would be asking questions as a parent of a young child who does not know anything about educational opportunities that are available to my child outside the traditional public school for which he is zoned. All directors were asked the same three questions with the first two questions based on readily available information and the last question based on the opinion of the director. The three questions were as follows: (a) How do I attain information about the other educational options available to my child within the public school system?, (b) How do I find detailed information on local charter schools?, and finally (c) “Can you offer your opinion on the local media and their coverage of both charters and public education as a whole?” At the time of the interviews, the researcher noted that the final question could be difficult for these directors to answer, but there was hope that they could offer honest

insight from their perspective. In most cases, they declined to answer question the last question, all having a response similar to “I’d rather not comment”, but a few were more than happy to offer their input on the local media.

As seen in Table 2 less than half of the district directors replied to my inquiry. Of those that did reply, only slightly more than half offered any thoughts beyond stating that parents should look on the district’s website for information on public schools, school choice, and local charter opportunities. In many cases responses were limited to basic instructions on web navigation for information. Only 4 district supervisors went above and beyond that type of response offering additional sources of information and giving their feedback on the media. These 4 are labeled as having giving meaningful responses in Table 2. While these individuals gave additional input, often their primary answers were still similar to the others that were received. The most common answer to the first question was the following three words: “The district website”, with 4 respondents giving this answer. Some went a bit further into detail citing the specific tabs that could be clicked to find the choice schools section of the website or a “new to the district” tab that offers information for parents that recently moved into the school district. One director stated that they were routinely contacted to answer questions from parents that found their district choice office’s phone number online.

The second question received answers that were not unlike the first. Of those that responded, 5 stated “The district website lists the websites of charter schools where more information can be found on each charter” (Field Notes, 2013). All of the responses to the first two questions involved some sort of internet inquiry that the parent was required to conduct.

Table 2: Number of District School Choice Directors Contacted per District Along With the Number and Meaningfulness of Responses

District	Number of Directors Contacted	Number of Directors Replied	Meaningful Response (Y/N)
District A	1	1	Y
District B	2	0	N
District C	2	1	N
District D	1	1	Y
District E	4	2	Y
District F	1	0	N
District G	2	1	N
District H	3	0	N
District I	1	1	Y
Totals	17	7	4

For many parents, a purely web-based system for information gathering could prove to be problematic. In many working households the amount of time that it would take to sit down and find the districts website, then find the choice or charter school listing, and then click on and research every charter schools website is not available. In addition to the problem of time this solution for information gathering puts the burden of sorting through large amounts of information on the parents as they try to sift through charter websites to identify honest and useful information about each charter. Basing all searches on the internet has yet another and even more significant downfall. While more and more households have internet access, it is still not available in every home. In a 2012 article, *Orlando Sentinel* columnist Walter Pacheco

found that 11 percent of Florida's households with school-aged children still do not have internet access (Pacheco, 2012). The students in these families routinely go to homes of friends or other family members to use the internet, but researching school options for parents with no or limited internet access would prove to be a very difficult task.

The third question revealed just how difficult it is for these directors to offer their opinions as the most common answer was simply "no comment". The four district charter school directors that did choose to offer greater input on their opinion of the media chose to do so anonymously. Just as media support of charter schools seemed to differ by Central Florida region, so did the opinions of district choice program directors. Two of the directors felt that the local media focused too much on "sensationalizing negative news" often painting "a bleak picture" of local charters (Field Notes, 2013). A district director from a different region had a very different opinion, admitting that the role of the media was an important one that varied based on the district, but in that particular district "the media has been very supportive of charters" (Field Notes, 2013).

One school choice director asked to be contacted via the phone to help with this study. Officially this director stated that the district actually had no role in dispersing information on local charter schools. The burden of making the public aware of their presence was on the charter itself, not the district. According to the Florida Department of Education this is true. The FDOE website states charters are responsible for "marketing methods, which may include community meetings, door-to-door contact, brochures and posters, TV/radio/print ads, mailings and news coverage" (Florida Department of Education, 2012). This is in fact a portion of the

actual charter for each school that is approved by the district and state which can be seen in Section 14 of the Model Charter School application made available by the FDOE online (Florida Department of Education, 2013c).

In an informal phone interview this same district director of choice schools went far beyond the original three questions. This representative added that not only is the district not responsible for advertising or advocating charter schools, its true role was more of a “babysitter”. While the FDOE states that the district should monitor local charters, this district representative considered the role as more of a “watchdog” for unsavory actions by local charters, actions that could cost the traditional schools in the district funding. The representative said that they must “watch the backs of their friends in the traditional schools” (Field Notes, 2013). While this opinion would have no bearing on the information available on the district or charters websites, it certainly was surprising coming from a person that acts as the primary liaison between the district and the charter schools within that district.

Overall, the burden of advertising and recruiting seems to be on the charters themselves. While not all the district directors shared the somewhat negative opinions that the final interviewee did, they all pointed to the charter website as the primary location to access on the charter. None of the representatives offered any other advice for parents of young children. It seems at this time the role of the district is nothing more than purveying names and websites and possibly addressing an occasional question from a parent who was able to access the proper phone number to make contact with a district representative.

With research showing charters are often scrutinized, the media admitting it has a role in educating parents, and school districts saying they have little to no role in educating the public about local charters there is one primary source that needed to be explored: the charters themselves. The next chapter will do just that, seeking to determine how charters are advertising themselves, and how effective these measures are. Following that I will identify alternate methods that parents are using to find information about schools and, in the final chapter all the sources will be linked in summary and proposals for future changes will be made.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOLS

The media and local school districts have important roles in disseminating information about school options to parents, but the most important role lies with the schools themselves. Central Florida charter schools were contacted to comment on their role in marketing information about themselves to parents. The 19 charter schools contacted are elementary and middle schools serving kindergarten through ninth grade. The amount of time the schools have been in operation varied and of the 12 that responded to the inquiry the oldest school has been in operation for 14 years and the newest just completed their first school year. Two additional schools responded that they were part of a large charter school companies that had corporate marketing departments. These departments were contacted, but never replied to the inquiry.

Many charter administrators were happy to talk about what they were doing to ensure parents had information about their schools on the record, unlike district choice directors who preferred to remain anonymous. That being said, many of the charter operators also had specific financial concerns they expressed anonymously which will be discussed in greater detail below. In the case of financial and district management issues both the schools and the charters were willing to express their concerns, but would not allow their personal or school information to be attached to their comments. It seems there is a clear divide between many of the schools and their district office managers, a divide that is difficult for both parties to bridge.

Charter administrators who responded to the survey answered questions on how parents should get information about charter schools in general, what methods parents use to get information about their charter school, and what specific marketing methods they use to recruit

new students. After analyzing the data from the answers to these questions the responding charters could be placed into two groups: the established *haves* and the non-established *have-nots*. It is not that either group has more funding or district support. The *haves* have met the majority of the following criteria: they have established themselves with at least three years in operation, they have met their enrolment goals, they are meeting academic goals, and in many cases they have new up-to-date facilities. The *have-nots* in most cases have yet to reach their enrolment goals, have not met their academic goals, are in older facilities, and are in their initial year or two of operation. The information about all of the 12 charter schools that responded can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Information about Charter Schools That Responded to the Survey

School	Grades Served	Years In Operation	Enrolment in 2012	2012 School Grade
Charter A	K-3	1	N/A	N/A
Charter B	K-5	1	108	N/A
Charter C	K-5	2	106	D
Charter D	6-9	2	125	C
Charter E	6-9	2	86	B
Charter F	K-5	3	112	B
Charter G	K-5	4	150	D
Charter H	K-5	7	525	A
Charter I	K-8	10	112	B
Charter J	K-5	11	258	A
Charter K	K-5	14	218	A
Charter L	K-5	14	243	A

Within each group, the responses to the questions were quite similar. The schools that had accomplished goals and established themselves exhibited less of a concern over marketing plans than those that were still trying to gain a foothold in their region. For example, Dr. Daryl Unnasch, the principle of Oakland Avenue Charter School in Oakland, Florida responded that the number one measure they take in their marketing plan is to “do a superb job in the classroom everyday” (Unnasch, 2013). Oakland Avenue Charter represents the *haves* quite well.

According to their website their school has received an “A” grade for seven consecutive years and has a solid enrolment figure of 525 students in kindergarten through fifth grade (Oakland Avenue Charter School, 2013). Beyond the superb job that they are doing in their classrooms Unnasch says that their other primary marketing actions are to “publicize our A rating in school publications [and] talk it up at parent gatherings” (Unnasch, 2013). The same types of responses were seen repeatedly from established charters with anonymous charters administrators reporting that they “don’t have to market themselves” and they “have strong parental support that markets the school for them” (Field Notes, 2013).

Charter schools that are still trying to establish themselves, or the *have-nots*, responded very differently. Their responses were all similar, and concerns over marketing were at the forefront of many of their answers. Charter administrators that agreed to be identified in the study often reported that some type of grass-roots marketing campaign was their main method for recruiting students and increasing parental awareness of the school.

Jody Litchford, a board member of Central Florida Leadership Academy (CFLA) in Orlando Florida, reported that the schools primary dissemination of information about the school comes in flyer distribution to local “community recreational centers and churches with youth programs in areas around the school” as well as the “YMCA and local businesses” (Litchford, 2013). CFLA is a charter middle school serving grades six through eight. They represent the group of establishing or *have-not* charters well with less than three years in operation, a smaller enrolment of 125 in 2011, and a “C” grade in their first two years of service to the community (Florida Department of Education, 2013d). Litchford also stated that CFLA “distribute[s] flyers

to 5th graders in elementary schools in close proximity to CFLA” a marketing strategy that targets students, parents, as well as the support of other local schools (Litchford, 2013).

Anonymous charter administrators agreed with the grass roots approach that Litchford describes at CFLA. “Flyer drives” as one board member called them target the local population at their homes, schools, community centers, and places of worship (Field Notes, 2013).

Anonymous charter administrators in this group often cited a lack of funding as the main reason for their marketing difficulties. Claiming that they are not receiving the same funding as their traditional school contemporaries these administrators have found it difficult to both market themselves and educate parents in their communities about the role of their school and charters as a whole (Field Notes, 2013).

Information given by local charter administrators that indicates they are attempting to market their schools with less funding than traditional public schools receive is not without merit. A 2010 study done by Ball State University on charter school funding found that in the state of Florida charter schools received over 25% less funding per student than their traditional school counterparts (Batdorff, 2010). This figure, which was based on the 2006-2007 school year budget figures, has stayed relatively consistent for the past six years according to a 2012 report in the Sunshine State News (Ward, 2012). While the actual percentage and dollar amount varies from district to district on average charter schools receive between \$2,500 and \$3,000 less per student than traditional schools (Batdorff, 2010). Multiply that by the estimated 180,000 students that are currently enrolled in charter schools in the state of Florida and you will find that

between 450 and 540 million dollars are not making into charter schools annual budgets (Cherry, 2012). This is money that could certainly help charters market their product to local parents.

After seeing discrepant figures such as these the question arises as to where these funds are going and why charter schools are not receiving them. An answer to this question was provided in a 2012 research study performed by Blain Cherry, a research analyst at *Taxwatch*, a company that advertises itself as a “statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit, taxpayer research institute” that provides “the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues [and] expenditures” (Cherry, 2012). In this case the study was requested in November of 2011 by Florida House Representative Will Weatherford, who represents Florida’s District 61. Not surprisingly his district includes Hillsborough County, a Western Central Florida district that is included in this study that has experienced major charter growth and success, results that were reported in the media and then reflected here. The main goal of Weatherford’s request was to attain a clear picture of how charters in the state received their funding and how this compared to traditional schools (Cherry, 2012).

Cherry’s findings corroborated the information first published in the Ball State (Batdorff 2010) reports. The Ball State Report found that charter schools in Florida were receiving only 75% of the funding per student that their traditional school counterparts were. The *Taxwatch* report agreed that Florida’s charter schools are indeed receiving 25 to 30% less per student than traditional schools. The *Taxwatch* report found a number of factors that contributed to the per pupil funding discrepancy, the majority of which pointed to the districts themselves as the main cause. Educational districts within the state can withhold up to 5% of state funding bound for

charters to cover the cost of “monitoring” charter schools. While on average few districts withhold the full 5% and this withholding is limited to certain number of students depending on the schools population (either 250 or 500) it still adds up.

For local funding districts must meet a minimum funding criteria set by the state when funding local charter schools, but once that number has been met any additional funds in the districts educational budget can be dispersed exclusively to traditional schools again shortchanging the budgets of many local charters. While the report did not include statistics for every district in the state, it did include both Orange and Hillsborough Counties. In this thesis these two districts have played important roles, with Hillsborough routinely demonstrating greater support of its charter schools. The *Taxwatch* report furthered this fact when it concluded that Hillsborough County is one of the most equitable distributors of local and state funds to its traditional and charter schools whereas Orange County is one of the least equitable distributors (Cherry, 2012).

Ultimately the *Taxwatch* report shows that all charter schools do not receive the same funding that their traditional school counterparts do. Charter schools are in many ways trying to overachieve and out perform their traditional counterparts academically, meaning that their budgets are often dedicated to this cause, not marketing. As charter schools reported they are left with marketing budgets that only allow grass roots types of advertising such as open houses and distributing flyers to the local community. While these efforts may produce results for some charters they have not always been enough to meet the enrolment goals they initially set for themselves.

While a charter schools initial charter states that it is their role to recruit students for their school it seems that some of their ability to do so has been limited by the districts role as purveyor of funding to the charter again leaving parents with limited opportunities to access quality information about charter school options. At this point it has been determined that research finds that charters are often overly scrutinized, the media knows its role in disseminating information on local charters, the districts are offering little support, and local charters are being left holding the bill, a bill they often cannot afford. The next chapter will look into alternate methods in which parents are receiving information about charters. Following this, in the final chapter, I will summarize all the methods researched for disseminating information on local charters and offer propositions for improving the process in the future.

INFORMATION GATHERING METHODS

With parents either exposed to too many influences or practically none at all the decision on where to send their young children to school can be very difficult. As previously noted parents can rely on the media, which may give them mixed messages, or they can rely on the district which may not give them any personal opinions at all. Previous research suggests that parents, regardless of their own education, are looking for convenience and charter leaders say that parents rely heavily on references or word of mouth advertising. This means that how or where parents receive referrals can play a major part in their decision for their child's education.

To better understand exactly where parents were receiving their data and the importance they placed on the information they received a survey of parents of three and four year old students was interpreted for this study. The survey was given to nearly two-hundred parents and guardians of students at a Central Florida Early Childhood Three Year Old (EC3) and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) school. The school hosts children from a very wide demographic slice of Central Florida, both ethnically and socioeconomically. It's acceptance of government aid ensures that families from lower socioeconomic conditions can afford quality schooling while its location in a predominantly wealthy section of Central Florida ensures that children from higher socioeconomic conditions also attend. The schools director commented that the educational background of the parents and guardians that sent their children there ranged "from those without a high school diploma to M.D.'s and Ph.D.'s" (Field Notes, 2013). The survey itself was designed by the school for their own marketing purposes and as such they requested that while

the information from the survey could be interpreted and incorporated into this research the names of the parents, children, and the school and its employees should not be used.

The survey only asked two questions of parents: how did they hear about that particular school and, more pertinent to this research, what source of information is most valuable when selecting a school? This second question was the only one which was interpreted for this study. The parents were asked to rank in order from one to five the most valuable sources of information available to them about local schools which included publications/websites, word of mouth/referral, pediatrician/dentist, community organization/church, and an other/write in response. Nearly 100 out of 152 surveys were returned and the results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 4: Results of an EC3/VPK Survey on Information Available to Parents about School Choices

Source of Information	Word of Mouth/Referral	Publication/Website	Pediatrician/Dentist	Community Organization/Church	Write In/Other
Number of First Choice Votes	45	42	3	4	3
Number of Second Choice Votes	40	38	10	6	3
Number of Third Choice Votes	7	12	38	31	9
Number of Fourth Choice Votes	5	4	42	41	5
Number of Fifth Choice Votes	0	1	4	15	77
Rank of Importance	1	2	3	4	5

Reading the raw numbers of the parent survey chart required some interpretation. After removing all personal information including parent and student names the school gave me the opportunity to sit down with the surveys themselves and interpret the raw data. This was done on site at the school. While doing so I located multiple errors in the methods in which the parents categorized their preferences. Often the parent only listed four choice options leaving the other/write-in field completely blank. In these cases this was recorded as the fifth option for the parents' consideration. In 14 other instances parents wrote in that their first choice was information they saw on the news or information gathered from relatives. In these cases the write in vote was moved to the appropriate category (publication/website and word of mouth/referral respectively) and the other/write-in option was again recorded as the fifth option for those parents.

The results of this survey seem to correspond well with the views of local charter leaders who feel that word of mouth is the biggest form of advertising that affects their charters. It aligns with the research of Galotti and Tinkelenberg which reported similar findings. It also confirms that various publications and websites are valuable tools for parents, but they still are not the preferred method of information gathering for decisions about attending charter schools. These two methods of gathering information were the overwhelming favorites of the survey, representing nearly 90% of all first and second preferences. Not only was the inclusion of the pediatrician/dentist option in the survey unusual, but the fact that it outranked community organizations/churches was surprising. The write in option was not utilized often and when it was it was often incorrect. As previously mentioned, parents often used this option to describe an information gathering method that better fit into another category. They also wrote in that

they will send their children to schools that their other children attend which provides little insight into how they chose those schools to begin with.

Overall, this survey confirms that there is no clear cut favorite method when it comes to parents gathering information about schools. Parents looking for referrals on local charters may find this difficult because of the large number of new charters that are opening across Central Florida. In some cases, these schools are part of a larger group of charters or are managed by a corporate management company and references on those entities can be found, but for most local charters little word of mouth information would be available in during the charter's initial years of operation. Word of mouth and referral preferences placing first in this survey also present a major obstacle for the districts method of promoting charters. Every district director that replied to contact reported that the primary way for parents to gather information according to the district was the district website. More than half of the parents that responded indicated that a website would not be their primary option for information gathering and nearly 20% felt that it would be their third option at best.

While the survey indicates how parents are getting their information, it does not indicate how their sources are doing so. With exception of the publication/website option the survey cannot answer how those that referred parents to a school received their information about the school. How did the pediatrician or church member form their opinion? Do they have a relative or child that attends a local school or are they merely relying on publications and websites themselves? Of course the survey cannot answer these questions, but asking them proves that while word of mouth may rank highly in surveys such as this other factors may indeed influence

the word of mouth advise that is given. This puts a premium on quality information given to parents rather than the quantity of information available.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The decision that parents make about their child's education could have far reaching outcomes on their child's future. This makes the availability of quality information about all the educational options present in a region extremely important. Not only must the information be available, but parents must know how and where to access it. Currently this stipulation is not being met. In an era of change in public schools that has resulted in tremendous charter school growth information on these charters is not always making its way to the parents that are the most in need. While charter schools could easily be blamed for not adequately distributing materials and information to parents the district in which the charter resides can also shoulder much of the blame for not granting the charter enough financial support to do so. The media has proven to be an adequate distributor of information; unfortunately this information often focuses on problems in a select number of schools and does not address the large number of success stories that exist in the charter community.

There are a number of possible solutions to the problem of parents not having easy access to quality information on local charter schools. The tendency of many parents to rely on the media as a major source of information can only be changed by making other higher quality sources more readily available to them. What these resources should be, how they should be distributed, and who should carry the burden of doing so are the real questions that need to be answered.

At the district level there are many improvements that could be made to increase parental awareness of the opportunities available to their children. These would begin with the personnel

in charge of choice programs at the district office. These offices should have as much responsibility for assisting charter schools as they do monitoring them. There should not be a large disparity of support from one district to another. Not only is this extremely unfair for start-up charters in a district in which the director of choice programs offers them little support, but this can also make it difficult and confusing for established charters that want to expand their school into another district.

A similar situation exists when it comes to the dissemination of funding to charter schools. Again there are too many variables in play from district to district. While it is understandable that operating costs including buildings, maintenance, and salaries will vary from one region to another a districts ability to withhold various amounts of funding from its charter schools needs to change. In order to prepare and accomplish marketing goals charters must have accurate long range forecasts on per-student funding and allowing districts to make their own decisions on withholding percentages does not expedite this need.

Equitable distribution of funds between traditional and charter schools is not a new concept. It has been argued in the Florida Legislature for quite some time and the argument continues today. In 2013 charter schools achieved a victory in funding when the Florida Legislature agreed to pay out 91 million dollars to charter schools to cover construction and maintenance needs, but this one-time payment still does not solve the problem of long term funding goals (McGregory & Sickler, 2013). The payment will help offset some of the losses incurred by charters when they do not receive the additional local funding that their traditional counterparts receive, but it likely will do little for their marketing budgets. State Representative

Janet Adkins introduced a bill that would guarantee a \$200 million payment to Florida's charter schools annually, "but it failed to gain traction" (McGregory & Sickler, 2013). A bill such as this would be extremely helpful in allowing charters to create achievable long term marketing goals that would increase parents' awareness of their existence and goals as a school.

Perhaps an even more controversial and radical change that would create more equitable funding for charters would be to let them govern themselves as their own unique learning district in the state of Florida. This is not altogether unheard of in the state. There are currently 67 counties in Florida that correspond with 67 unique school districts. There are, however, 74 school districts in the state. These seven additional districts represent educational options with unique needs and goals and as such were made into their own unique district. They are represented by long standing schools such as the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, but also include newer educational developments such as Florida Virtual School (Florida Department of Education, 2013b). Being governed by their own separate district policies would allow charters to no longer rely on local districts for funding, thus enabling them to secure equitable funding regardless of the charters location. This status change would also create a singular supporting cast for charter's that could assist in marketing and dispersal of information across the state, something that is currently unavailable to local charter schools.

Charter schools themselves also have room for improvement when it comes to marketing themselves to the local population. Grass-roots and word of mouth advertising are not always going to be enough to fill local classrooms. As previously stated charters are required to provide details on how they will recruit students to meet their enrolment goals when they initially apply

for their charter. Whether it is through a review by the charter's attorneys, the district, or the state, the marketing plan must be proven to be sound, effective, and achievable. It seems that currently some local charters are opening their doors and then finding out that they are not meeting their enrolment goals and do not have the money and or the wherewithal to take any effective actions to correct the situation. If these charters were properly established there should have been some provision as to how to market themselves in this exact situation. In some cases this falls back on the district not offering adequate support to its charters, but the charter operators must be well versed in marketing before they move forward with their operations. Too many charters seem to be founded on solid educational goals, yet have little to no solid business planning to help these goals become reality.

Many charters responding to this study did indicate that they post information online, host community events, and advertise themselves through the district office when given the opportunity to do so. While these actions are a good step in getting parents the information on the school, parents still need to know that the charters are participating in these events to attain the information they need. Charters need to budget for some type of direct mailings to parents in their district to inform them of their existence, their goals, and upcoming events such as an open house. In addition to direct mailings charters should target preparatory schools in the district with flyers and information that can be dispersed to the parents of students at that school. Some charters interviewed for this research indicated that they already are doing this, but others did not. The EC3/VPK program director that cooperated with the study by allowing the use of the schools marketing survey was asked how many charters had disseminated information to her school. Her response was surprising: none (Field Notes, 2013). The fact that a school in a

middle to upper class neighborhood that serves a very diverse population of students has never been approached to provide information about local charter schools demonstrates how much groundwork there is left to be done for those schools.

Limitations of the Study

After completing this study certain limitations became apparent. When interviewing subjects for the study, despite making every effort not to produce leading questions, I still received comments that the questions were indeed leading. In the future assistance can be sought from experts in the field of creating survey questions. They may also suggest that additional questions be included in the surveys making them greater than three simple questions. This may help garner more interest from the participants and make them less likely to consistently answer “no comment”.

A second limitation that was discovered was the limited scope of time that was included in the study of the media articles. By only researching the first quarter of 2013 the results could have been skewed by a single negative event that occurred within a local charter school. A longer amount of time, such as a five year inquiry may have produced more reliable results that would not have been greatly affected by a single event.

Future Research

This research found that there is certainly a need for more research on the subject of the dissemination of information to charter schools. The role of the media will likely remain unchanged, and continually changing legislation may also make researching districts and the laws that control them difficult. There is still room, however, to look into detailed information of how districts are spending their budgets and what makes some districts friendlier toward their local charter schools than others. This would include long term reviews of the district's budget, policies, and leaders in an attempt to link these figures to the success of local charters.

An area of research that I feel is very important is the role of the charter schools themselves. This study should look into the public records of a large group of charter schools to locate their original charter agreement with the state of Florida. This would allow for detailed information about what each charter is stating they will do to recruit students. This information could then be compared to the actual actions of the schools. This would identify whether or not charter schools are acting on their original promises and could lead to stricter guidelines on what a charter must plan for from the beginning.

Concluding Remarks

Through state, district, and school level changes parents can begin to receive quality information about charter options in their area. Changes in all three of these areas will ultimately assist the parent in their role as the guardian of their child's educational future. Possibilities include creating a separate district for charters, increasing the standards that a charter must uphold when creating a marketing plan, and recruiting more supportive personnel at the district level. Changes like these along with more equitable distribution of funds at the district level will better allow charters to reach their intended audience: local parents.

According to a 2011 Florida Department of Education Report on the states' school choice programs only "parents understand the personality, the needs and strengths of their children, and what type of education will help them excel." The report concludes that "as new choices are implemented and current choices expand, it is imperative that parents be well-informed of their options in order to make the best decision for their children" (Florida Department of Education, 2011). This awareness along with continued research and implementation of change will ensure that parents can continue their roles as managers of their children's educations with readily available quality information from schools, districts, and the state of Florida.

APPENDIX: INFORMATION ON FIELD NOTES USED IN THIS STUDY

For this study a number of local sources were interviewed via email and the phone for their input on the dissemination of information about charter schools to local families. These included interviews with the local media, district directors of charter schools, charter school administrators, and a director of a pre-school program. This appendix will identify the number of interviews that occurred, the approximate location of the person being interviewed, and the date range in which the interviews occurred. The researchers Field Notes are more complete and contain additional indicators on each interviewee. This additional information will not be published in this study, however, to better protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

Table 5 indicates the available information on each interview. For the purpose of identifying the region that the interviewee represented three separate regions were defined. East Central Florida contains Volusia and Brevard counties, Central Florida contains Seminole, Orange, Lake, and Osceola counties, and West Central Florida contains Polk, Pascoe, Hillsborough, and Pinellas counties.

Table 5: Field Note Interview Information

Interviewee	Interviewee Position	Region	Date of Interview
Pre-School A	Pre-School Director	Central	05/17/13
Media A	Columnist	Central	05/23/13
District A	District Director	Central	06/05/13
District B	District Director	West Central	06/05/13
District C	District Director	East Central	06/10/13
District D	District Director	Central	06/10/13
District E	District Director	West Central	06/15/13
District F	District Director	Central	06/17/13
District G	District Director	West Central	06/25/13
Charter A	Charter Administrator	East Central	06/27/13
Charter B	Charter Administrator	Central	06/27/13
Charter C	Charter Administrator	Central	06/28/13
Charter D	Charter Administrator	West Central	06/28/13
Charter E	Charter Administrator	West Central	07/08/13
Charter F	Charter Administrator	East Central	07/08/13
Charter G	Charter Administrator	West Central	07/08/13
Charter H	Charter Administrator	Central	07/09/13
Charter I	Charter Administrator	Central	07/09/13
Charter J	Charter Administrator	Central	07/09/13
Charter K	Charter Administrator	East Central	07/10/13
Charter L	Charter Administrator	Central	07/10/13

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