POLICIES AND PRACTICE: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF NCLB ON CHARTER SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SERVING MAJORITY-MINORITY STUDENT POPULATIONS IN GEORGIA

by

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(Under the Direction of Sheneka M. Williams)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple-interview study is to illustrate how accountability mandates provided by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) impact the organizational and curricular practices of charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations in a metropolitan area of Georgia. It was found that NCLB has denied these local communities and educators the ability, and right, to develop educational goals and curriculums appropriate for addressing the needs and interest of their students. By doing this, NCLB has eliminated the autonomy and flexibility of these institutions to develop the “whole child,” and has seriously impeded these schools from providing students with the requisite skills and valuable knowledge (as defined by these ethnic and racial communities) that will enable students to positively impact and succeed in our global society.

INDEX WORDS: Policy, NCLB, Race, Flexibility, Autonomy, Charter School
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my Uncle Fred Davis for teaching me *the rules*, to my wife Tamieka for supporting me through this entire process, and to those attempting to provide our students with valuable educational experiences that will last them a lifetime.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

It has been claimed by many that the United States of America is facing a major education crisis (U.S. Department of Education, 2010; CNN, 2011). Even with the implementation of the charter school reform effort, which was intended to increase the academic achievement of all students (Shanker, 1988; Budde, 1989; Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995; Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1997; Lane, 1998; Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004; Finnigan, 2007), the achievement levels of Black and Hispanic students in the U.S., and in Georgia particularly, continue to be far lower than their Asian and White counterparts. Over the last several years, the large academic achievement gaps between racial groups, as measured by state and national tests, as well as graduation rates, have continued to be a visible trend.

Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was developed to aid states close the above mentioned academic achievement gaps. However, an analysis of Georgia’s academic performances reveals that these gaps remain wide and consistent. Reviewing results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Reading, Writing, Science, and Math; results from Georgia’s Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT); and Georgia graduation rate data; there is sound evidence illustrating several academic achievement gaps between Black & Hispanic and White & Asian student groups in Georgia.
Why Study Charters?

Charter schools are considered to be more autonomous from state and local control than traditional public schools (TPS), theoretically giving them the flexibility to address student needs more efficiently than TPS. Moreover, since charters are for the most part only bound by the mandates of NCLB, they are ideal laboratories to study the impacts of NCLB on school environments.

Frequently, charter supporters claim that TPS are constrained by bureaucratic systems, which impede their ability to implement practices advantageous to the academic success of students. Further, charter advocates proclaim that charter schools use their flexibility in order to function in different and more effective ways than TPS. For these reasons, it is believed by many advocates that charter schools, given their autonomous status, are more effective at serving their student bodies than TPS.

Charter schools offer a radical approach to decentralizing management in education that allows individual schools to become self-governing. Proponents argue that autonomous schools – schools unencumbered by state and district rules and regulations – will be better able to design programs to suit the particular needs of their students (Wohlstetter et al., 1995, p.332)

Background

The original concept of charter school reform was introduced in the late 1980s by an education professor named Ray Budde. Soon after sharing his concept, Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, echoed Budde’s call for charters as a way of reforming the nation’s education system. The vision was simple: since educators understood the local context of their school communities better than anyone else, given the freedom from their district and state bureaucracy, teachers should be able to develop innovative educational strategies tailored to their communities, create interesting curriculums, engage students in learning, and
produce high student academic achievement. In short, the vision was to let the educators establish and operate schools (Shanker, 1988; Budde, 1989).

In accord with the Budde and Shanker model, educators would establish a contract with a local district allowing the educators to develop the organizational structure, pedagogical practices, and curriculum of their school; as well as establish the school’s goals and objectives. Moreover, the school would be monitored and evaluated on its stated goals and objectives as established in the contract (or charter). If the educator-led school (called a charter school) adequately met its goals, it would be allowed to stay open. In contrast, if the charter school did not adequately meet its goals, it would be closed (Shanker, 1988; Budde, 1989).

In 1991, Minnesota passed the nation’s first charter legislation allowing schools to operate in a similar fashion as envisaged by Budde and Shanker. 20 years later, 40 states including the District of Columbia have passed charter legislation, and 5,453 charter schools are operational serving 1,729,963 students (The Center for Education Reform, 2010).

Since 1991, the charter school reform model has gained increased attention from federal and state legislatures. The federal government has helped to encourage states to place chartering on their education agendas. In 1995, the federal government established the Public Charter Schools Program (PCSP), which was renamed the Charter Schools Program (CSP) in 2003, and listed as one of its goals encouraging “through the use of funding priorities, the creation of strong charter school laws” (p. 6). Additionally, CSP attempts to encourage states to provide their charter schools with equitable funding and facilities.

However, 20 years after the implementation of the charter school reform model, the American education system continues to be criticized and labeled by many observers as inadequate. In his December 2010 response to the 2009 Program for International Student
Assessment (PISA) results (posted on the US Department of Education’s website), U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “the findings, I’m sorry to report, show that the United States needs to urgently accelerate student learning to remain competitive in the knowledge economy of the 21st century” (p.1). In a video produced by CNN, President Barack Obama also commented on the state of the U.S. education system and detailed challenges ahead for the nation by stating:

Over the next 10 years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education beyond high school; many requiring proficiency in math and science. And yet today we have fallen behind in math, and in science, and in graduation rates. As a result, companies like Intel struggle to hire American workers with the skills that fit their needs. If we want to win the global competition for new jobs and industries, we got to win the global competition to educate our people. (CNN, 2011)

And although many proponents of the charter school reform effort claim that charter schools can accelerate student learning, the impact of charter schools on educational productivity has been mixed (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2007).

**Charter School Performance**

A number of research studies claim that charters have produced increased levels of academic achievement in particular geographical areas including Boston and New York City (Abdulkadiroglu et al, 2009; Hoxby & Murarka, 2009). However, other reports analyzing charter school impacts both nationally and, in a combination of states, have found that charters are performing equal to or less well than TPS (Finnigan et al., 2004; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2007; CREDO, 2009; Gleason et al., 2010). In a case study of five states (Texas, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, and North Carolina), Finnigan et al. (2004) note that charter schools were, “less likely than traditional public schools to meet performance standards even after controlling for several school characteristics” (p.xiv). Using a longitudinal student-level analysis, the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University (2009) found that 46% of
charter schools nationally performed equal to TPS, while 37% of charter schools perform less well than their TPS counterparts. As reported by CREDO:

[T]his study reveals in unmistakable terms that, in the aggregate, charter students are not faring as well as their TPS counterparts. Further, tremendous variation in academic quality among charters is the norm, not the exception. The problem of quality is the most pressing issue that charter schools and their supporters face. (CREDO, 2009, p.6)

In addition, a number of research studies claim that the intent of charter schools to operate as Research & Development laboratories producing innovative classroom practices has not been realized. These studies state that the dearth of innovative educational practices (something new or different) being produced by charters can be attributed to the insufficient levels of autonomy given to charters. Several factors have been cited as reducing the autonomy levels of charter schools including state legislation, authorizers, educational management organizations (EMO), and community partners (Wohlstone, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004; Finnigan, 2007).

**Autonomy, Flexibility, Markets, and school Practices**

The different and more effective organizational and curricular practices of charter schools have often been labeled innovations (new or different, curricular and or organizational, practices in relation to TPS). However, researchers have found little evidence that innovative curricular products (educational strategies, practices, and or programs) are being developed and implemented in the charter school setting (Lubienski, 2003; Lubienski, 2005).

This section presents an analysis of charter school innovativeness in order to illustrate how flexibility and autonomy (from state and local education authorities and regulations) have influenced the curricular and organizational practices of charter schools. In addition, the role of educational markets, and their influence on the organizational and curricular practices of charter schools, will also be presented in this section. And although this study uses past analyses
conducted on charter school innovations in order to explore how some charters (in a market environment) have used flexibility and autonomy, this study does not attempt to determine if charter school practices are innovative. Instead, this section of the study seeks to describe the use of autonomy and flexibility by charter schools to provide a context for the current study.

**Autonomy and Flexibility**

The autonomy of charter school operators can roughly be described as the level of freedom operators have in relation to making decisions regarding their practices, school organization, school administration, and school curriculum. As will be discussed below, the traditional charter school concept provides an exemption from all local and state regulations, as well as allows school operators the flexibility to implement educational and organizational practices as they see fit, in order to increase student achievement. In other words, theoretically, the charter model gives complete decision-making power to those operating charter schools (Shanker, 1988; Budde, 1989; Wohlstetter et al., 1995; Hill, 2002; Finnigan, 2007). As noted by numerous researchers, autonomy is a vital component of the charter concept and is needed in order to increase student achievement. Finnigan (2007) notes that in addition to allowing educators to effectively tailor educational environments to meet students’ needs, autonomy also allows educators to develop better ways of educating students:

> A key assumption of the theory of charter schools is that schools will better serve students if they are both autonomous and publicly accountable (Kolderie, 1990, 1992). An additional assumption is that those closest to schools, including parents and teachers, know how to serve students best (Nathan, 1996; Wohlstetter & Chau, 2004). (Finnigan, 2007, p. 504)

Although it has been presumed that chartering will provide educators with increased levels of autonomy, an analysis of the literature reveals that several factors may be limiting the autonomy of charter operators.
As will be discussed in chapter two, states throughout the U.S. have developed charter legislation for various reasons, which in turn has produced variations in charter laws across the nation. This variance in laws have created a wide range of school types, as well as a range in the levels of autonomy charter schools exhibit across the nation (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002; Wohlstetter et al., 1995). Although the bargain between charter school operators and authorizers is theoretically based on the exchange of increased flexibility for increased accountability, not all states give their schools the same level of flexibility as noted by Finnigan:

Not all charter schools receive blanket waivers from their state education codes and regulations; instead, charter school autonomy varies by state. National surveys with state directors indicated that only 37% of states granted automatic waivers to charter schools in 2001-2002 (automatic waivers do not include health, safety, and due-process provisions). Nine percent did not permit any waivers of state laws, rules, or regulations. The remaining states (54%) allowed some (but not all) regulations to be waived on a case-by-case basis based on negotiations between schools and charter school authorizers or states. (Finnigan, 2007, p. 510)

Focusing on Georgia in particular, authorizing agencies are allowed to provide charter schools with blanket waivers from all state and local regulations. However, some districts, including DeKalb County and Fulton County, require charters to identify individually each regulation they wish to waive.

Although charters are viewed as having extreme levels of flexibility due to being autonomous from state and local education regulations, several factors have been cited in the literature as reducing their autonomy including state legislation, authorizers, educational management organizations (EMO), and community partners (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004; Finnigan, 2007). This reduction of charter school autonomy may limit the types of curricular practices implemented in schools. In their review of the innovative practices of charter schools, Bulkley & Wohlstetter (2004) note that:
On closer inspection, virtually all these activities are already in use in bureaucratically administered districts. While a Montessori approach, block scheduling, or integrated themes may appear innovative in a local context, they have not been developed by the charter school sector but previously existed in district schools. Inasmuch as these practices are innovative, their prior existence in district schools challenges the R&D function for charter schools and undermines the public-choice diagnosis of bureaucratic administration from which it emerges. (Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004, pp.82 – 83)

Viewed another way, charter schools may be experiencing autonomy limitations due to educational market pressures. It seems the creation of education markets, regulated by NCLB accountability mandates, have caused isomorphism to occur in relation to school curricular practices (Lubienski, 2003; Lubienski, 2005). According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983) isomorphism is, “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (p.149). It has been shown that instead of developing innovative educational practices to disseminate throughout the field, some charter schools have limited their variation in pedagogical practices and curricular offerings.

Bulkley & Wohlstetter (2004) explain that school choice and market competition may have produced the unintended consequence of restricting schools to adopting curricular practices that are perceived as successful. According to many researchers, in a market where organizational vitality depends on adequate student test scores, rather than risking failure (by attempting to implement innovative pedagogical methods that may increase student achievement) many charter schools have tended to stick with employing traditional pedagogical methods that are perceived as proven and effective. Lubienski (2003) illustrates how market pressures produce a particular type of isomorphism in the education field:

Perhaps more pertinent here, however, is the concept of mimetic isomorphism, wherein institutions employ a constricted set of responses to uncertainty. Particularly when facing a precarious environment or when operating on ambiguous goals, organizations are more likely to emulate “similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). (Lubienski, 2003, pp.423 – 424)
Thus in relation to pedagogical practices and curriculum, charter schools may be producing more of the same in an effort to stay open. Moreover, it seems an increase in school autonomy from state and local regulations may have little impact on school pedagogical and curricular practices in an education market regulated by the accountability mandates of NCLB. However, it does appear that providing particular types of autonomy for schools participating in the market might be encouraging the development of innovative organizational practices including: marketing strategies, school site placement, admission criteria, cropping services, and “counseling” students with special needs to attend TPS, in an effort to attract better performing students (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002; Lacireno-Paquet, 2004; Lacireno-Paquet, 2006; Lubienski, 2007; Frankenberg et al., 2011).

**Markets and School Practices**

In a number of states, interest groups and politicians have fought to implement education choice options, such as school vouchers and charter schools, as ways of reforming their education systems. Arizona and Michigan’s policymakers, for example, implemented charter schools in order to create competition between education providers. Unlike Arizona and Michigan, Georgia’s original charter law never intended to provide school choice or encourage competition in its education market. Instead, state legislatures implemented the reform to deregulate and decentralize education in an effort to accelerate the development and implementation of innovative educational products (Bulkley, 2005).

In an analysis of market competition in elementary and secondary education, Moe (2008) discusses how school choice should, theoretically, produce more innovative and better performing schools. Moe’s (2008) theory states that competitive education markets create incentives for schools to operate at their maximum capacity. The incentives for schools were
presented as (1) sustained and/or increased funding streams (by attracting customers and receiving per-pupil funds), and (2) the opportunity to maintain operation (staying open). Moe (2008) argues that in the absence of school choice models, there is no incentive for schools to address the needs of parents and students. Under centralized district-run public education models, schools are supplied customers based on district zoning, and thus are guaranteed funding regardless of performance. Unless customers (parents and students) are financially able to relocate near adequately performing schools, or pay for adequately performing private schools, customers will be relegated to their assigned district-run school regardless of performance. The introduction of an education choice model (or educational market), gives parents the ability to leave schools that perform inadequately; thus forcing schools to respond to student and parent needs. Schools that fail to respond appropriately will be faced with losing clients and ultimately closure. Moe (2008) illustrates the benefits of an adequately conceived and implemented education choice plan by stating:

As a result, schools have to compete with one another for parental support, and this competition puts all schools on notice that, if they do not perform, they stand to lose students and resources to other schools that can do a better job. This gives them stronger incentives to educate, to be responsive, to be efficient, and to innovate. Those that respond to these incentives tend to prosper, while those that do not tend to lose their clienteles and be weeded out…(Moe, 2008, pp.565 - 566)

As stated here, competitive education market theory claims that adequate choice plans eventually lead to the closure of inadequate schools, leaving behind only high performing schools.

To support his theory, Moe (2008) presents the research findings of three scholars [Hoxby (2002), Booker (2005), and Chakrabarti (2007)] detailing the ability of competitive education markets, produced by education choice models, to increase the performance of TPS. According to Moe (2008), Hoxby’s market competition work includes two separate studies. The first study examines the effects of a school voucher policy in Milwaukee. The second study
examines the effects of charter school legislation in Arizona and Michigan. According to Moe (2008), the choice plans implemented in Arizona, Michigan, and Milwaukee created competitive education markets that were successful in encouraging the increased performance of TPS.

Booker’s (2005) study [which was also cited by Moe (2008)] is an analysis of education market competition in Texas, which was created through the implementation of charter school legislation. This study used individual student data to assess student gains and the impact charter school competition had on TPS performance. Moe (2008) used this study (which claim that increased charter penetration led to increased TPS performance) to support the need for adequately designed choice models. However, to present Booker’s (2005) analysis the way in which Moe (2008) did is somewhat misleading. Upon closer examination, I found that Booker (2005) did not conclude competitive education markets led to improved educational products in TPS. Booker (2005) only found that increased charter penetration was correlated with increased student test scores in TPS. This is a very important distinction that deserves further discussion; especially given the Texas charter school legislation in place at the time of Booker’s (2005) study and data collection period.

The 1998 Texas charter school legislation permitted authorizers to grant an unlimited number of charters (no cap) to schools serving student bodies composed of 75% or more academically “at-risk” students. Conversely, there were caps placed on the establishment of schools that did not serve a supermajority (75% or more) of at-risk students. Booker’s (2005) study found no evidence that competitive markets led to TPS developing or implementing innovative educational products, or that TPS curriculums or pedagogical practices had improved. Booker (2005) goes on to explain the limitations of his study when he states:

[T]he evidence of a positive and significant effect of charter penetration is quite consistent. We are not able to identify the particular mechanisms which are driving this
observed relationship. As identified in the introduction, possible explanations would include increased efficiency and positive compositional/peer effects. It is also possible that the increased performance occurs because districts allocate more resources to schools that face more charter penetration. A detailed analysis of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but a preliminary look at district per pupil expenditures provides no evidence that districts facing charter penetration have systematically increased their expenditures per pupil faster than those that do not face charter penetration. (Booker, 2005, p.18)

Moe (2008) further attempts to validate competitive education market theory by summarizing the findings of Chakrabarti’s (2007) study on Milwaukee’s changed voucher program when he states:

[C]hanges in program rules which led to big increases in the number of students leaving for vouchers and increases as well in the per-student costs to the district – and thus should have given the district greater incentives to improve its own schools in response – did indeed lead to an improvement in district schools. The change in rules led to stronger incentives, which in turn led to greater improvement. (Moe, 2008, p.557)

In short, Moe (2008) finds that the implementation of an adequate school voucher plan in Milwaukee led to increased performance of TPS. This summary also calls for further review. Chakrabarti (2007) analyzed the first and second phase of Milwaukee’s school voucher program in order to measure their impact on TPS. The study did find an increase in TPS performance after the second phase of the voucher program was implemented. However, like Booker’s (2005) study, Chakrabarti’s (2007) study only illustrates the increase of TPS test scores, and fails to detail to what degree, if at all, TPS developed or implemented innovative school products increasing student achievement. Like Booker (2005), the increase in test scores may have nothing to do with educational products, but instead could be attributed to any number of characteristics including student grouping effects.

As mentioned above, Hoxby (2002) found that competitive education markets led to increased TPS performance in Milwaukee, Arizona, and Michigan. According to Ladd (2003), Hoxby’s (2002) studies displayed the same weakness found in both Booker’s (2005) and
Chakrabarti’s (2007) studies, in so far as increased performance of TPS could be attributed to shifting patterns of students and newly created group dynamics. Ladd (2003) goes further by critiquing Hoxby’s work when she states:

[I]t is hard to rule out alternative explanations for the patterns she observes, particularly in the case of the Milwaukee voucher program. Because that program is part of larger package of policy initiatives designed to affect educational outcomes in the schools serving disadvantaged students, it is inappropriate to attribute all the achievement gains to schools that have large proportions of students from low-income families, and hence eligible for vouchers, to the effects of the voucher program alone. (Ladd, 2003, p.74)

Although Moe (2008) argues competitive markets will create incentives for schools to innovate, other researchers have found reason to disagree with this line of thinking. In his 2005 evaluation of Michigan’s school choice plan, Lubienski cites research by Mintrom (2000) that found charter school and TPS programmatic offerings and classroom practices to be very similar. Lubienski (2005) also states that instead of producing the desired effect of creating innovative and diverse classroom practices, market competition in Michigan mostly impacted the marketing strategies of charter, private, and TPS. Citing numerous cases, Lubienski (2005) goes further by illustrating how the education market system in Michigan encouraged TPS, as well as private and charters, to shift increasing portions of their funding to marketing practices.

The decision to develop and implement innovative educational products may be seen as risky for schools in a competitive market, where as investing in marketing is of lower risk and will ensure the influx of students. As mentioned above, competitive education markets tend to breed a type of isomorphism causing schools to use the same traditional educational practices that are perceived as safe and effective. In an illustration of why attempting to innovate in a competitive market may be unappealing to schools Lubienski states:

In a new climate that fosters uncertainty for schools through shifting enrollments, unstable budgets, and standardized testing, schools now have a disincentive to try new approaches – which are, by definition, at the heart of R&D. According to the logic of
organizational theory, new entrants to a field – those schools that are often expected to be more innovative – are often more likely to adopt a safer strategy to establish stable footing in the local education market (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Consequently, it should be no surprise that many schools, especially newer charter schools, are re-embracing more basic, skills-oriented curricula and traditional pedagogies (Lubienski, 2005, p.479)

In addition to the amount of money schools are putting into marketing, competitive markets may also be encouraging the way schools use marketing. Research has shown that schools are using marketing to attract particular types of students. Instead of developing high academic achievement, charter schools may be trying to recruit high performing students. This reaction to competitive education markets is logical, especially when considering the fact that schools are measured on the ability levels of their students and not on the school’s ability to increase student achievement. In review of the literature, it appears that competitive markets will exacerbate the phenomenon of school segregation (by race and or socioeconomic status) and the inequitable distribution and availability of services to learners. According to Lubienski:

[S]chools might recognize that marketing can “increase” achievement by appealing to families of higher-achieving students, or by focusing on particular groups that would support a specific mission, since research indicated that schools are more effective when they serve a coherent and homogenous community that centers on a defined vision for a school (Chubb and Moe 1990) (Lubienski, 2005, p. 480)

In 2010, research published by Miron et al. supported Lubienski’s theory of competitive markets leading to homogenous school communities by illustrating, in a national study, that EMO affiliated charter schools are highly segregated. Miron et al. (2010) findings are as follows:

Charter schools operated by EMOs tend to be strongly racial segregative for both minority and majority students as compared with the composition of the sending district. Only one-fourth of the charter schools had a composition relatively similar to that of the sending district…For economically challenged students, EMO-operated charter schools more strongly segregate students than do their respective local districts. The student population is pushed out to the extremes. Most charter schools were divided into either very segregative high-income schools or very segregative low-income schools. Between 70% and 73% of the schools were in the extreme categories of the scale, depending on the comparison. (Miron et al., 2010, p.3)
The increased levels of autonomy given to charter schools, which are regulated by NCLB accountability mandates (in so far as NCLB regulations dictate how schools are assessed, federally financially supported, and provided operation status), in conjunction with competitive education markets may be converging to influence the distribution of educational services provided by charters as well.

Estes (2004) found that charter schools were under-serving students with special needs at a disproportional rate. According to this study, charter school operators may have even been declining to serve special needs students due to cost and the difficulty associated with increasing the academic achievement of special needs students. In a more recent study, Miron et al. (2010) found that EMO affiliated charter schools, nationally, disproportionally under-serve students with disabilities compared to their home districts. It was noted by Miron et al. (2010) that many EMO charter schools claim to be unequipped to serve students with special needs, and therefore encourage those students to attend TPS.

Further, in 2011 Frankenberg published findings of a national study that also detailed the discrimination of special needs students. In summarizing the Zollers and Ramanathan (1998) study on charter school practices, Estes (2004) captures a consistent response of charter school operators when faced with the question of how they will offer services to special needs students: Educational Management Organizations (e.g., Sabis, Edison, Advantage), under contract with a charter board, may discriminate against students with disabilities for monetary reasons. Ramanathan and Zollers argued that for-profit charter schools in Massachusetts have “engaged in a pattern of disregard and often blatant hostility toward students with more complicated behavioral and cognitive disabilities” (p.299; see also Bulman & Kirp, 1999). They suggested that (a) some who gained admission by lottery may have been barred once their disabilities were discovered and (b) some may have been rejected after admission because the school claimed it could not adequately serve them (Zollers, 2000). Both R. Rothstein (1998) and Zollers (2000) wrote that it is a common practice for charter school directors to engage in “counseling out” expensive or difficult students by suggesting that they would be better served elsewhere. In this manner, special education obligations may be effectively limited through procedures that formally meet
requirements but discourage enrollment of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs; R. Rothstein, 1998). (Estes, 2004, p. 258)

As noted by the research, a number of unintended occurrences have manifested within particular geographic areas in the charter market, including the propensity of charters to produce extremely segregated school environments (both racially and socioeconomically), and the inequitable distribution of educational services to particular student groups. In addition, studies have shown many charters are using their flexibility to attract better performing students and discouraging the enrollment of undesirable students; most specifically low academic performing students and students with special needs (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002; Lacireno-Paquet, 2004; Lubienski, 2005; Lacireno-Paquet, 2006; Lubienski, 2007; Miron et al., 2010; Frankenberg et al., 2011). And although the results are mixed, it has been shown in a number of studies that Black and Hispanic students are performing less well nationally in charter school settings than their TPS counterparts (CREDO, 2009).

Given the strong push for the proliferation of charter schools, both in the state of Georgia and nationally, it is important that researchers examine how mandates provided by NCLB impact the curricular and organizational practices of charter school administrators, especially since these impacts may influence student academic achievement. Additionally, it is also important to examine schools that serve majority-minority student populations since these populations tend to perform less well academically than their non-minority peers. In addition to exploring how NCLB impacts the practices of charter school administrators (as described by the participating administrators), a further goal of this study is to give school administrators, who serve majority-minority student populations, an opportunity to inform the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 currently titled the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
Research Focus

Given that Black and Hispanic students statistically perform less well academically in Georgia than their White and Asian counterparts (in spite of the proliferation of charter schools), and the fact that accountability mandates of NCLB are regulations all public schools must comply with, policymakers need to better understand how NCLB impacts the practices of charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations. Although this research study will intensely analyze the charter school reform model, the main focus of this study is to closely examine the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on majority-minority charter schools in Georgia.

Deficiencies in Other Related Studies

A myriad of research studies have been conducted on the charter school reform model (Lane, 1998; Manno, Finn, Bierlin, & Vanourek, 1998; Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998; Opfer, 2001; Lubienski, 2003; Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004; Finnigan, 2007; Lubienski, 2008), as well as on the impact of accountability mandates on the organizational, curricular, administrative, and teaching practices of TPS and actors within TPS (DeBray, Parson, & Avila, 2003; Lemons, Luschei, & Siskin; 2003; Rothstein, 2008). However, missing from the literature are an abundance of analyses on the impacts accountability mandates, provided by NCLB, have on charter schools. More specifically, missing from the literature are multiple examinations of the impacts NCLB accountability mandates have on charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations.
Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this multiple-interview study is to illustrate how accountability mandates provided by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) impact the organizational and curricular practices of charter school administrators from the perspective of, and as described by, charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations in a metropolitan area in Georgia.

Initial questions of focus for this study included (1) how does NCLB influence the organizational and curricular practices of Georgia charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations, (2) how does NCLB influence the goals and objectives of these charter school administrators, and (3) How might NCLB support majority-minority charter school administrators in educating their students?

This study is significant for two reasons. First, this study will contribute to the research literature on charter flexibility and autonomy by exploring how polices impact charter school administrators’ practices. Second, this study will contribute to literature analyzing NCLB and its impacts on school environments. This study has the potential to inform policymakers, as well as academics, of the impacts NCLB accountability mandates have on charter schools serving majority-minority student populations.

Even further, Presidential administrations could use this research to inform their reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Only by understanding how policies influence the actions of actors, will policymakers be able to conceptualize appropriate education policies aimed at increasing the capacity of educational environments to increase student achievement.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

What Are Charter Schools and Why Use Charters As a Reform?

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), actors in the field of education have proposed a myriad of school reform models in hopes of increasing the academic achievement of students across the United States. *A Nation at Risk* declared that America’s “preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors” due in part to the failure of the nation’s education system (p.112). The report illustrates this point when it states:

[T]he educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people… If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 112)

The intent of *A Nation at Risk* was to initiate reform efforts that would fundamentally change the American public education system. In response to this report, Ray Budde proposed an education reform model he referred to as Charter Schools. Budde published a book in 1988 titled *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts*, in which he presents his conception of the charter school. In a 1989 article adapted from his book, Budde explains how charter schools could aid in reforming the American education system:
Under a charter system, groups of teachers request funds directly from the school board to carry out specific instructional programs; the two or three layers of “administration” that have evolved between teachers and school boards over the last 150 years are removed… The school board, as granting authority, funds a group of teachers to carry out a particular instructional program for three, four, or five years. The “educational charter,” signed by the teachers, and the board, spells out the goals, objectives, and responsibilities of both parties. Any group of teachers may propose a charter for a specific educational purpose. (Budde, 1989, pp. 518 – 519)

Budde (1989) viewed the charter school reform model as a way of allowing teachers the flexibility to apply their knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, and their students learning styles, to create more effective schools. Budde (1989) also gives examples of creative ways teachers could use a charter to fundamentally change the way schooling is conducted in America when he states:

For example, eight kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers might wish to unify the kindergarten and primary-level curriculum by initiating a whole-language approach to instruction in all three grades… Or 10 high school teachers might wish to replace a chaotic system of electives with a coordinated humanities program for juniors and seniors… (Budde, 1989, p. 519)

Budde (1989) explains that a charter would act as a contract between operators of schools (in his scenario the operators were groups of teachers) and school boards. The charter would specify the curricular methods, organizational structure, and school goals and objectives as developed by the operators. The following description of a charter illustrates this point when Budde states:

Most of the space of the charter form is used to describe the age group to be served, the instructional objectives, and the various resources needed to accomplish the objectives. These are written in such a way that they can be observed, monitored, and evaluated during the life of the charter. (Budde, 1989, p. 519)

Giving teachers authority over all aspects of instructional and organizational decisions, in addition to creating a system of accountability that ensures objectives are met, was at the heart of Budde’s charter reform model. The life cycle of a charter had five stages:
1. Generating ideas
2. Planning the charter
3. Preparing for teaching
4. Teaching under the charter
5. Program monitoring and evaluation

According to Budde (1989), the charter life cycle would provide that, “a continuing cycle of curriculum improvement and renewal is set in motion” (p.520).

In the late 1980s, Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, echoed Budde’s idea of implementing a charter school reform model as a way of raising the adequacy of American educational environments. Shanker added to Budde’s model by suggesting local school boards collaborate with existing schools to create charters; thus emphasizing the conversion model more so than Budde had initially eluded to (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000; Iorio & Morris, 2007; Oluwole, 2008).

Shanker developed his idea of charter schools after a 1987 visit to the Holweide Comprehensive School in Cologne, Germany. In Cologne, Shanker observed education reforms being implemented that were more innovative than those in the United States (Shanker, 1988). According to Shanker (1988), reformers in the United States had failed to introduce fundamental changes to the structure of schooling. He insisted that reform efforts up to this point had been numerous, but merely tinkered with the system instead of introducing real change. Shanker’s idea was to radically change the education system in ways that would enable all students to receive adequate educations fit for a 21st century global society. Shanker details the fundamental aspects of the education system that had been neglected when he states:

We still give a great deal of lip service to the idea that individuals learn in different ways and at different rates, but, in fact, everyone still is expected to learn in the same way and at the same rate in order to be considered “normal.” Children still are expected to learn, for the most part, by listening to the teacher lecture and by reading books (and by reciting
and answering questions), and learning is still supposed to occur at the same rate that the curriculum is supposed to be covered or at the average rate of the group. (Shanker, 1988, p. 89)

At the Holweide Comprehensive School, Shanker witnessed a vastly different model of education than the system in place in the United States. The school in Germany combined grades equivalent to our grades 5 – 11, students stayed with a team of teachers for 6 years, the team of teachers decided how to group their students, and the teachers decided all instructional matters including scheduling (Shanker, 1988). Shanker (1988) also noted the high level of accountability placed on teachers at Holweide in the following narrative:

Since each teaching team has the same students for a full 6 years, there can’t be complaints that last year’s teachers messed the kids up so much that nothing can be done with them. There’s also no possibility of just marking time with problem students until the end of the term when you can pass them on to the next teacher. Difficulties remain and have to be confronted, and teachers live with the consequences of their choices… Holweide’s approach thus turns the usual bureaucratic, assembly-line processing of children (and teacher, too) into an ongoing teaching and learning community, a moral community. (Shanker, 1988, p. 95)

Since the introduction of the charter school reform model, education researchers have written about the theoretical promises charters hold for the United States education system. Proponents of charter schools argue that charters provide choice to educators, students, and parents; provide autonomy and flexibility for teachers and building level administrators; establish increased accountability levels for school administrators and teachers; and encourage innovative organizational, pedagogical, and curricular practices, which taken together will increase the academic achievement of all students and keep the United States a leader in the world economy (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995; Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1997; Lane, 1998; Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004; Finnigan, 2007).

The 2011 concept of charter schools seems to be similar to the version presented by Budde and Shanker in the late 1980s. A charter school is a public school that can be, in most
states, established by any person or group of people. The operator of a charter school is contractually obligated to meet all goals and objectives set forth in the charter or face closure by the charter authorizer. In addition, the charter operator sets the goals and objectives of the school.

A major difference between the earlier conception of a charter and the modern reality, is that today’s charter schools, as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), are required to participate in their state’s accountability system, which use high-stakes standardized test to measure school adequacy. This means that charter operators are only partially responsible for establishing the goals and objectives of their schools. Accountability mandates, provided by NCLB, outline the criteria that are used to assess the adequacy of all public schools including charters.

Charter school operators are still allowed to include in their charters the goals and objectives that reflect the vision of their institutions, but ultimately the achievement of goals and objectives set forth by NCLB will be used to determine if a school stays open. So at least in part, the federal government establishes charter schools’ goals and objectives, which was not part of the 1980s charter school reform concept. In return for this high level of accountability, charter school operators are given the flexibility to waive local and state education regulations. Theoretically, this ability to waive regulations allows charter school operators to run the school as they see fit. Wohlstetter & Griffin (1998) provide a general definition for the term “charter school” as:

"Publicly funded schools developed by individuals or a group of individuals, including teachers, administrators, other school staff, parents, or other members of the local community in which the charter schools is located. State laws grant developers of charter schools the flexibility to choose their educational objectives and how to organize and manage the school. The charter school concept is intended to free schools from most of the administrative constraints that other public schools face in exchange for accountability for results. (Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998, p.2)"
Proponents of the charter school model claim that chartering will fundamentally change the American education structure because it allows operators to decide the curricular and organizational practices, as well as the goals and objectives, of their schools. In theory, charter schools have more flexibility than regular public schools to shape their educational and work environments. Actors, including parents, teachers, and students, are given the choice to affiliate with, or attend, these schools. If any actor is unsatisfied with the school environment, they have the ability to exit. Proponents of the charter school model further claim that the ability to exit, coupled with the expansion of educational choices, creates an education market where successful schools attract customers and stay open, while failing schools lose customers and close. It has been assumed that this new market will have the ability to reform the education system by eliminating failing schools altogether (Hoxby, 2003; Bulkley 2005). Presenting an illustration of how education markets, in conjunction with charter schools, weed out lower performing schools, Wohlstetter & Griffin state:

The freedom of parents and students – the education consumers – to choose is thought to further buttress the quality of charter schools, as high quality schools will be in demand and flourish, while poorly functioning schools will be rejected by consumers and fail. (Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998, p. 2)

Finnigan (2007) adds to the charter conversation by explaining how the charter authorizer’s role might also fundamentally change the education system when she states, “consequences are a key component of the charter school concept: In theory, if these schools do not meet performance objectives specified in their charters, they will be closed” (Finnigan, 2007, p. 504).

Lastly, charter proponents claim that charter schools provide an additional benefit to the education market. It is claimed that given their flexibility from regulations and their existence in a competitive market, charter schools will naturally operate as research and development
laboratories that will develop innovative practices to attract students. Moreover, it has been assumed that the innovations produced by charters will be disseminated to all schools, fundamentally changing the education system and raising student achievement across the nation (Lane, 1998; Manno, Finn, Bierlin, & Vanourek, 1998; Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998; Opfer, 2001; Lubienski, 2003; Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004; Finnigan, 2007; Lubienski, 2008).

Lubienski (2003) explores the charter reform’s ability, in theory, to produce innovative practices when he states:

> Much of the thinking on school choice proceeds from the premise that state-administered schools are necessarily bound by bureaucratic regulations, inhibiting innovation and enforcing uniformity in the way that children are educated…Based largely on reformers' observations of choice and competition in markets for consumer goods, these dynamics are expected to induce better achievement, more options for parents, and new ways of educating students (Lubienski, 2003, pp. 395 – 396)

**Legal Challenges to Charters Nationally**

The charter reform model has become extremely popular since the concept was first introduced in the late 1980s. In 1991, Minnesota established the nation’s first charter law. By 1994, 10 more states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, and Wisconsin) followed suit and enacted their own charter laws. Today, 40 states and the District of Columbia have passed charter school legislation (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000; Miron & Nelson, 2002; Bulkley, 2005; Shober, Manna, & Witte, 2006). Currently, 5,453 charter schools are operating throughout the United States serving approximately 1,729,963 students (The Center for Education Reform, 2010).

Researching the charter school reform model has exposed the evolutionary nature of charter school legislation (Shober et al., 2006). Although education is constitutionally the responsibility of the states, and charter laws are developed on a state-by-state basis, it appears
that the legislative actions in some states have influenced charter law development in other states. As noted by Shober et al. (2006), over the last 15 years (now 20 years), every state with a charter law has amended its original legislation in an attempt to expand the capacity and use of charter schools. Shober et al. (2006) illustrated this process using Wisconsin as an example:

The state passed its original charter law in 1993. At that time, the law permitted ten school districts to establish two charter schools each...In 1995, legislators allowed all school districts to grant an unlimited number of charters. Because the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) had chartered only one school by 1997, charter school supporters felt that the MPS and the teachers’ unions were blocking new charters. Thus, in 1997, changes to the law expanded charter-granting authority to the city of Milwaukee and several colleges in addition to the Milwaukee school district. In 2001, the legislature clarified the funding formula for Milwaukee charters because the state department of public instruction was providing less than the full per-pupil funding amount to charter schools. (Shober et. al., 2006 pp. 567 – 569)

Much like the changes made in Wisconsin to support the growth of charter activity in its state, California also amended its laws in the 1990s to facilitate chartering options. According to Hill et al. (2002), California’s original 1992 charter law failed to create an autonomous environment for operators. Due to the law’s requirement that operators negotiate with authorizing local districts for flexibilities regarding alternative teaching methods, charter schools operated with either less autonomy than desired or with no autonomy from the local district at all. In 1998, this law was amended and allowed charter operators to appeal petition denials to the state board of education, giving charter school operators three possible authorizing bodies to support their schools (Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2006). California also increased the potential of charter school proliferation by raising its cap limit and providing broad waivers:

The 1992 California law allowed for 100 charters statewide...The 1998 amendments raised the cap to 250 charter schools for the 1998-99 school year and 100 more per year after that. The charter school law also waives most regulations of the California Education Code, except for those related to nondiscriminatory practices in admissions, to basic health and safety standards, and to participation in the state assessment program (Wells, 1998, p.305)
The case of California is an interesting one. Unlike most states that amend legislation in order to make charter law stronger, in 1998 California may have also made the law a bit weaker. In its original 1992 charter law, California allowed the employment of non-certified and non-union teachers in its charter schools. In 1998, the law was amended limiting the hiring autonomy of charter operators. The new amendment required teachers of core subjects to obtain their state teaching certification to work in charter schools. Additionally, participation in the teachers union was made optional (Wells, 1998).

The establishment of charter schools have been legally challenged in a number of states regarding their funding sources, governing boards, and status as public schools. As charter school legislation has been scrutinized in court, it has solidified chartering as a legitimate, at least in regards to its legality, school reform model.

In the case of Michigan, plaintiffs filed a lawsuit claiming that the state had acted unconstitutionally when it allowed charter leaders full autonomy over the operation of their public schools. According to Wall (1998), the state was being accused of divesting, “the Michigan State Board of Education of its right and responsibility to lead and supervise public education” (p.1). The court hearing the case agreed with the plaintiffs and found Michigan’s charter legislation to be unconstitutional. However, on appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court the lower court’s decision was overturned. The Court found that schools could be considered public without being under the exclusive control of the state. Miron et al. (2002) explains the court’s decision when they state:

Having rejected the notion that schools must remain under the state’s exclusive control, the opinion went on to demonstrate three mechanisms by which the state maintains effective partial control. First, the schools’ charters may be revoked by authorizing bodies for failure to live up to their promises. Second, since the authorizers are themselves creatures of the state, this comprises an effective form of partial control.
Finally, the justices noted that the state controls the flow of money to charter schools. (Miron et al., 2002, pp. 13-14)

In addition, the Michigan Supreme Court also found that the use of school governing boards constitutional, since the control over the process of how board members were selected was under the authority of the state and, “the legislature may change that process at any time” (p.14).

Another case that helped establish the legality of charters was the 1996 case Stark v. Independent School District No. 640, which took place in Minnesota. In this case, plaintiffs claimed that the establishment and operation of the Vesta school violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and Article I, Section 16 of the Minnesota Constitution. According to the Wall (1998), Paskewitz, the leader of the Brethren, initiated the charter petition to open the Vesta. Paskewitz offered to supply the school district with a building, free of charge, as long as the school agreed to limit its use of technology. As a part of their religious beliefs the Brethren objected to the use of modern technological devices. In their agreement, the school was given full control over school administration and curricular practices. At the first trial the school was found to be in violation of the law. Upon appeal, it was found that charter schools could accommodate the religious practices of its students. Wall (1998) explains the final verdict when she states:

On appeal, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit reversed the district court and held that the Vesta School violated neither the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution nor Article I, Section 16 of the Minnesota Constitution... the court concluded that “neither the decision to open the Vesta school nor the district’s application of the exemption policies fails the Lemon test. Both actions had a secular purpose and did not have the primary effect of advancing religion or endorsing the Brethren’s religious beliefs.”... In similar manner, the appellate court found no violation of the Establishment Clause of the Minnesota Constitution: “As shown above, no religious instruction takes place at the Vesta school, and there is no expenditure of public funds in support of the teaching or promulgating of religious beliefs.” (Wall, 1998, p. 4-5)
The racial-balancing provisions of a number of states may be the focus of future legal challenges regarding charter schools. According to Oluwole (2008), fourteen states (California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Wisconsin) have enacted charter legislation requiring school operators to design plans, “to limit or eliminate racial isolation and imbalance in charter schools” (p. 11). Oluwole (2008) notes that charter schools across the nation are more segregated than TPS. Moreover, the researcher claims that, with the exception of Arizona and Colorado, Black students are being significantly isolated in predominantly Black charter schools, and that this may be due to the structure of the chartering process. In response to this segregation phenomenon, states have initiated race-balancing provisions in charter legislation.

In an analysis of racial-balancing requirements, Oluwole (2008) found that states using hortatory racial-balancing policies should prevail in any legal challenge. On the other hand, states that implement mandatory racial-balancing policies, which sometimes require specific percentages of student populations, most likely will be found illegal given the ruling in Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No.1. Oluwole explains the concept of a hortatory racial-balance plan when he states:

These provisions urge racial balance, rather than mandate the attainment of a racial balance. The requirement in these provisions lies in identification of means for achieving racial balance, rather than in racial balance itself. These provisions fail to enumerate or require specific means, instead obligating applicants for charter schools to identify means to the end of racial balance. For example, California's statute provides that charter authorizers shall not deny an application unless the authorizers make specific findings that the application fails to contain reasonably comprehensive descriptions of means to achieve racial balance. (Oluwole, 2008, p. 17)

It appears that charter schools are currently held to the same standard as other public schools when it comes to using race as a category, or identifier, when admitting students. Future
research should focus on why charter schools are more segregated than regular public schools, and what type of effect this phenomenon may be having on student achievement.

**States’ Reasons for Enacting Charter Law**

This section provides an analysis on states’ rationales for the initial passing of charter legislation in a number of states. It was found during this analysis that states provided various reasons for enacting their individual charter laws. Analyzing the reasons for enacting charter legislation is important because it influences the type of charter law a state implements; thus impacting the type and number of schools authorized in a state. In this analysis, I found that states implemented charter law for various reasons including:

1. To promote innovative teaching practices
2. To increase professional development opportunities for educators
3. To create competitive markets

However, it seems most states enacted charter legislation for multiple reasons including improving their school systems’ performance.

Expanding learning choices for students was a common purpose noted for enacting charter legislation in the early 1990s. Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Minnesota all listed expanding learning choices in their original legislative language (Wohlstetter et al., 1995). Wohlstetter et al. illustrated how charter legislation could be used to provide choice options for students:

Several states did this by targeting at-risk children in the legislation. In Minnesota, many of the state’s first charter schools were designed to serve students with low achievement levels who were likely to drop out of school or who had already dropped out. Laws in California, Colorado, Kansas, and Wisconsin give preference to such schools. Charter school legislation in Minnesota also evolved from a series of policies designed to expand public choice. (Wohlstetter et al., 1995, pp. 335 – 337)

As noted above, states develop charter legislation for various reasons, which in turn produces variance in charter law across the nation. This variance in law has caused variation in
the types of schools opened, as well as the level of autonomy schools exhibit, across the nation (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002; Wohlstetter et al., 1995). Although the bargain between charter school operator and authorizer is theoretically based on the exchange of increased flexibility for increased accountability, not all states give their schools the same level of flexibility. As noted by Finnigan:

Not all charter schools receive blanket waivers from their state education codes and regulations; instead, charter school autonomy varies by state. National surveys with state directors indicated that only 37% of states granted automatic waivers to charter schools in 2001-2002 (automatic waivers do not include health, safety, and due-process provisions). Nine percent did not permit any waivers of state laws, rules, or regulations. The remaining states (54%) allowed some (but not all) regulations to be waived on a case-by-case basis based on negotiations between schools and charter school authorizers or states. (Finnigan, 2007, p. 510)

In addition, states have established differing charter contract lengths. States can allow charters to operate under a contract for any number of years. When the contract period expires, schools are evaluated for adequacy, and at that time either the school is extended a new contract or it is closed. The original charter law of Michigan (1993) granted 7-year contracts, while Arizona (1994), California (1992), Colorado (1993), Massachusetts (1993), New Mexico (1993), and Wisconsin (1993) set the length of their charter contracts at 5 years. Kansas (1994), Hawaii (1994), Minnesota (1991), and Georgia (1993) all set their charter terms for 3 years (Wohlsteter et al., 1995). Today, Arizona allows two of its state’s authorizers to grant 15-year charters (Shober et al., 2006), Michigan allows authorizers to grant 10-year charters, and Georgia now allows authorizers to grant charters between 5 and 10 years (Oluwole, 2008; Georgia Legislature, 2009)

Although charter laws across the nation are constructed differently, giving schools various levels of autonomy and influencing the number of charters established, all charter schools are subject to federal laws including, “the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
(IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)” (Estes, 2004, p. 257). Moreover, all charter schools are subject to NCLB rules and regulations including its accountability mandates.

As will be illustrated below, states have also expanded their charter laws in response to the federal government's financial support of those states supporting the charter reform model. Therefore, states' reasons for supporting charters is somewhat tied to the federal government's support of the movement as well.

Federal Government Support of Charters

The federal government has encouraged the development of charter schools by providing financial support to states that establish charter schools (Wohlstetter et al., 1995; 105th Congress, 1998; Allen, 1998; Bulkley, 2005; Oluwole, 2008). Federal policymakers endorse the charter school reform model as a way of freeing schools from the bureaucratic red tape associated with local school districts, and allowing educators the autonomy to implement innovative teaching practices that increase student achievement. Federal policies over the past several years has displayed the financial support given to the charter reform model:

The Goals 2000: Education America Act includes the provision that states may use funds designed for overall school reform to promote public charter schools. Likewise, the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, includes a new federal grant program to support the design and implementation of charter schools, which was funded at 6 million dollars for fiscal year 1995. (Wohlstetter et al., 1995, p.333)

In 1995, the federal government established the Public Charter Schools Program (PCSP). PCSP awarded federal grants to states, and in turn states awarded grants to their newly established charter schools for initial operation costs. In addition, the funds supplied by PCSP were used to underwrite national charter school conferences and other programs to support the expansion of the charter school reform. In 2003, PCSP was renamed the Charter Schools
Program (CSP), after adding non-regulatory guidelines to its program, and listed as one of its goals encouraging “through the use of funding priorities, the creation of strong charter school laws” (p. 6).

An additional purpose (embodied in the “Per-Pupil Facilities Aid” portion of the program, which has not yet received funding) is to encourage States to provide support to charter schools for facilities financing in amounts commensurate with the amounts they have typically provided for traditional public schools. (Charter Schools Program Office, 2004, p. 6)

Additionally, CSP attempts to encourage states to provide their charter schools with equitable funding and facilities. In an effort to encourage strong charter laws and practices, CSP allows states to retain up to 15% of their grant funds to support administrative and dissemination activity cost (CSP Office, 2004). Finnigan et al. (2004) detailed the financial support CSP has given the charter movement, and the impact that support has had on the growth of chartering across the nation when they state:

Federal appropriations for the PCSP grew steadily from $6 million in FY 1995 to $190 million in FY 2001 (increasing to $218.7 million in FY 2004). During the same period, the number of charter schools grew from approximately 250 to 2,700. PCSP awards to states have increased in size, from a mean state grant of $512,900 in FY 1995 to nearly $4.5 million in FY 2001. This increase in state grant awards reflects growth in the PCSP annual appropriation coupled with a leveling off of the number of states with charter legislation. (Finnigan et al., 2004, p. xii)

Funding levels of CSP have stayed in the $200 million range since 2001. In 2009, CSP was funded at $216 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Moreover, the 1998 Charter School Expansion Act supplied more federal education funds to states with strong charter laws. According to Allen (1998), this act provided increased funds to states that:

1. Demonstrated progress toward increasing the number of charters
2. Increased charter authorizing bodies
3. Ensured charter schools have high degrees of autonomy over budgets
Lastly, Race to the Top, a federally funded competitive grant program, stipulated the need for states to adopt or expand strong charter laws in order to receive funding through the program. As stated in the application, Race to the Top was designed to, “encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p.2). The program’s application included a section titled General Selection Criteria in which, “ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters and other innovative schools” (p.3) was a category for judging state applications. By implementing strong charter law, a sub-category of the application worth 40 points, Georgia was able to win an awarded of over $400 million dollars from this program to invest in education. As is illustrated by Race to the Top, the federal government continues to encourage the proliferation of charter legislation across the nation.

**Evolution of Georgia’s Charter Law**

As noted above, all charter laws have evolved since their original inception and Georgia is no exception. Since the establishment of the 1993 Georgia charter legislation, the law has been amended several times addressing changes to:

1) Requirements for school conversions  
2) Petitioners allowed  
3) Type of schools allowed  
4) Length of charter contracts  
5) State and local regulation flexibilities  
6) Goals and objective flexibilities  
7) Authorizers  
8) School system eligibility  
9) Funding practices
Unlike Arizona and Michigan, which established charter legislation to grow education markets and increase competition (Bulkley, 2005), Georgia established its charter law to promote innovative teaching and administrative practices. The language of the legislation displays this intent by stating:

It is the intent of the General Assembly to increase student achievement through academic and organizational innovation by encouraging local school systems to utilize the flexibility of a performance based contract called a charter. (Georgia, 1993, § 20-2-2061)

According to Bulkley (2005), Georgia’s main purpose for establishing charter legislation was to decentralize education decision-making authority, and to deregulate educational practices in order to increase student achievement. However, the 1993 charter law was extremely weak and did little to bring autonomy to educators at the school level. In the 1993 version of the legislation, only public school conversions were permitted. Moreover, for a school to convert it needed to receive a two-thirds majority vote from the school’s staff, as well as a two-thirds majority vote from school community parents. Schools converting under the 1993 charter law were not allowed blanket waivers from state or local regulations. Conversions needed to receive permission from their Local Education Agency (LEA) before implementing curricular or organizational changes that violated state or local regulations (Georgia Department of Education, 2004; Kazlauskas, 1998).

Bulkley (2005) claims that Georgia legislatures may have been wary of using the charter reform model to promote school choice given the state’s segregationist history. Bulkley (2005) presents that legislatures focused their rhetoric and policies on improved classroom practices instead of choice options for students in the 1993 push for charters. Introducing choice rhetoric to the school reform conversation in 1993 could have been politically disastrous for the charter movement as illustrated here:
The resistance to parental choice for charter schools reflects a broader distrust of choice in the state, and in much of the South, because of the association between parental choice and efforts to evade desegregation earlier in the twentieth century (Lugg, 1996). (Bulkley, 2005, p. 537)

In 1995 the Georgia charter legislation grew stronger, allowing schools to convert by gaining a simple majority vote from teachers and parents (instead of the two-thirds majority previously needed) as well as increasing the charter period from three to five years (Kazlauskas, 1998; Georgia Department of Education, 2004). The 1998 amendments also allowed charter schools to be created from the ground up (the start-up model), as well as use blanket waivers from state and local education regulations.

Although charter operators could waive state and local regulations under the new legislation, federal regulations could not be waived nor could operators waive regulations pertaining to health, safety, or civil rights. The 1998 version of the Georgia charter law allowed anyone (including private individuals, private organizations, and state or local public entities) the opportunity to operate a charter school (Kazlauskas, 1998). This law also assured the public status of charter schools by specifying charter schools could not charge tuition, must be nonsectarian, nonreligious, nonprofit, and could not be home based (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). Moreover, charter schools in Georgia were required to have a local governing board, in addition to being under the ultimate authority of their authorizer. It is assumed here that Georgia legislatures took note of Michigan’s earlier legal challenges and decided to be proactive in explicitly establishing Georgia charter schools as public schools.

The 1998 amendment was a major step forward in increasing the strength of Georgia’s charter law. As stated in Kazlauskas’ (1998) report, “according to Representative Kathy Ashe, author of HB353, the new Charter Schools Act brings Georgia into the mainstream with many of the other progressive charter school states” (p.3). It is presumed here that federal funds, which
were being funneled to states with strong charter laws via CSP and the 1998 Charter Schools Act, could have influenced Georgia policymakers’ decisions to strengthen Georgia’s charter legislation as well.

In 2000, the Georgia charter school law was again amended, this time requiring all charter schools to participate in Georgia’s new state accountability system (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). The implementation of the state’s accountability system, and the requirement of charter schools to participate in the system, will be explored in the section of the dissertation discussing the emergence of NCLB.

Other amendments established in 2000 theoretically strengthened Georgia’s charter law by increasing the chances of petitioners to receive a charter. Petitioners that had been denied a charter by a Local Education Agency (LEA) could now apply to the State Board of Education (SBE) for a charter (Iorio & Morris, 2007). Two years later, in 2002, the law was amended again requiring LEAs that denied charter petitions to provide a written explanation of why the petition was denied.

In 2007, the Georgia General Assemble passed Act 116 allowing school systems to apply for charter status. Under Act 116, school systems could request charters from the State Board of Education that would establish the system, and all of its schools, as a charter. This amendment strengthened Georgia’s charter law by allowing one petition to initiate the charter process for all schools within a system. The system charter petition provides the system with flexibility in regards to Title 20 of the Official Education Code of Georgia. These flexibilities are in turn granted to all the schools within the system. In exchange for increased flexibility, the system must accomplish the goals set forth in their charter or lose its status as a charter system (Iorio & Morris, 2007).
In essence, the 2007 amendment provides systems with greater local control over their schools, while limiting the influence of parents and community groups since the charter is tailored for the system and not individual schools. This may pose no issue for small systems, like those having one high school and one middle school, since the concerns of the district can mirror those of the parents. However, this may present a different impact for large systems with multiple high and middle schools.

Like all other charter schools in Georgia, charter systems, and their schools, are required to participate in the state accountability system, as well as comply with all federal laws including those pertaining to health, safety, civil rights, and financial reporting and audit requirements. Further, the 2007 amendment required the SBE to establish a Charter Advisory Committee to aid in reviewing system petitions for approval (Iorio & Morris, 2007).

According to Iorio & Morris (2007), the charter system amendment faced constitutional challenges during senate floor debates when it was first proposed. The argument was made, much like in Michigan, that granting system charters would effectively take the constitutional responsibility of education away from elected school board officials and place it in the hands of unelected local school governance boards; this was seen as unconstitutional. Senator Dan Weber explained the constitutionality of the amendment by stating:

The school board would be petitioning voluntarily for charter status and that a local school board should have the authority to relinquish its power to a governing council just as a local school board can give up its authority to a start-up charter school. (Iorio & Morris, 2007, p. 4)

In addition to the Michigan case, Iorio & Morris (2007) presented a court case out of California supporting the argument made by Senator Weber:

A similar constitutional argument was raised in California under the California Charter School Act. There the court held that the Act did not impermissibly delegate legislative powers because there is a difference between the “delegation of certain educational
functions” and “the delegation of the public education system itself.” This same reasoning can be applied to the Georgia Charter School's plan. Even though the main day-to-day activities will be in the hands of the governing council, the control of the school system remains in the local board. Likewise, the school board maintains some input in amending or terminating the charter. (Iorio & Morris, 2007, p. 9)

Other concerns presented during senate floor debates about the charter systems bill were that the bill would give systems the ability to waive teacher certification requirements, waive the protection of fair dismissal under Title 20, create adverse effects on classroom size, and that the bill may also lead to school systems rezoning in order to deny services to particular student populations (Iorio & Morris, 2007). Another important aspect of the charter systems amendment is that it provides a $125,000 grant to systems that have their charter petition approved. Although this increase in funding may be insignificant to larger districts, $125,000 may be substantial for smaller districts.

In 2008, Act 571 was passed by the Georgia legislature establishing the Charter School Commission. The Commission was a state-level charter authorizer that had the ability to approve charter petitions after a LEA had denied the initial request. In addition, unlike schools approved by the SBE, Commission schools were fully funded (Freeman, 2008). Prior to the passage of this Act, petitioners denied by a local district could apply for a charter with the SBE. Schools chartered by the SBE are classified as “state chartered special schools” and can only receive state and federal funding. As Freeman (2008) explains, the establishment of the Commission allowed schools authorized by a state-level authorizer to receive funding equal to those authorized by local districts and regular public schools:

Commission charter schools receive state funds from the Department of Education QBE formula earnings, state grants, and federal grants. They also receive an amount set by the commission that is equal to a proportional share of local revenue from the local school system…This Act was passed to address these approval and funding issues and to ensure that all students are treated the same whether they go to traditional schools or charter schools. (Freeman, 2008, p.9)
In 2009, the constitutionality of the Commission’s school funding practices was called into question in a lawsuit initiated by 7 Georgia school districts (Dodd, 2010). The school districts claimed that the Commission rerouted local tax dollars from district budgets to Commission schools. According to Cochling (2010), the constitutional debate, which sparked the court case, lies in the Commission’s ability to, “allocate a proportional local share of tax dollars without local taxpayer approval” (p. 3). The local districts stated five constitutional challenges against the Commission including:

1) Commission schools are not within the meaning of “special schools”
2) The General Assembly can not create an independent school system
3) The Commission’s ability to grant charters to unelected boards
4) The General Assembly did not prescribe sufficient guidelines for the Commission to follow in creating schools
5) The Commission ability to fund schools with a proportional local share of QBE earnings

Cochling (2010) stated that the courts would not support the five allocations against the Commission and the constitutionality of the Commission would be upheld. Cochling (2010) explains the funding practices of the Commissions and why they were legal:

Taken together, these facts mean that in reallocating QBE funds to include Commission charter schools, the Commission statute is fulfilling one of the purposes of QBE by treating similar public school students equally. And, while it is true that the reallocation of QBE funding impacts local school systems, the reallocation of QBE funds is not, in any sense, the taking of local funding and is certainly not the imposition of a school tax. All local education tax revenues stay in the local system. In fact, as has been discussed, while the Commission funding mechanism may result in a loss of funding to a local district when a student attends a Commission charter school, the loss of funding is roughly equivalent to the amount of federal, state and local money that would have been spent on that child in the local system. So when a student leaves the local system, the money to fund the student's education goes with him or her; yet the local system remains fully funded for the students who remain. (Cochling, 2010, p. 10)
As Cochling (2010) predicted, in May of 2010 a Fulton County Superior Court judge ruled in favor of the Commission, finding its existence and funding practices to be constitutional (Dodd, 2010). However, in May of 2011, the Georgia Supreme Court failed to agree with Cochling’s above stated argument. The Court issued a 4-3 decision declaring the law that allowed the Commission to authorize and finance charter schools, without the consent of local schools boards, unconstitutional. This decision reduced the number of charter school authorizers in the state from three to two (CBSAtlanta.com, 2011).

Reflecting on the evolution of Georgia charter law, it has been shown that Georgia legislatures have increased the ability of operators to establish charter schools, given school operators increased autonomy from districts, increased school flexibility from state and local regulations, as well as increased funding streams for charter schools. As stated above, one issue that needs further exploration is the impact mandatory participation in the state accountability system, and other aspects of NCLB, has on the organizational and curricular practices of charter school operators.

**NCLB Accountability Mandates and the Achievement Gap**

At their most generic level, major federal education policies such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) are designed to motivate states and local school districts to pay greater attention to particular groups of students and to increase the types and levels of services provided them. However, for that goal to be operationalized, institutions from state education agencies (SEAs) down to local school districts and individual classrooms have to change their priorities and organizational behavior. (McDonnell, 2005, p.20)

The current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), titled the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, encompasses two titles influencing the focus of this study: Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, and Title VI – Flexibility and Accountability. Taken together, these titles provide a fundamental understanding
of NCLB’s goal to narrow the achievement gap, and its method of holding states and local education agencies accountable for perpetuating that narrowing.

According to researchers, ESEA has evolved over the last 40 plus years into an education policy that purposefully influences the behaviors of state and local education agencies through the use of conditional financial aid. McDermott & Jensen (2005) note that the use of federal funds to regulate and monitor state and local authorities is common practice and is evident in numerous sectors including; education, transportation, energy conservation, safety, and social welfare (for a more complete analysis on the use of conditional aid by the federal government to influence state and local governmental behavior please see McDermott & Jensen, 2005).

Since this study seeks to explore how NCLB accountability mandates influence the practices of Georgia charter school leaders serving majority-minority student populations, it will be useful to conduct a brief analysis on the educational goals and mandates set forth by NCLB.

**History and Evolution of ESEA**

Title I of ESEA was established in 1965 with the goal of providing educational equity to students across the nation. Federal funds were to be used to provide extra educational support for students identified as educationally disadvantaged, as well as those residing in high poverty areas. The goal of the act was to increase the ultimate academic achievement of these students. According to McDonnell (2005), during the first 15 years of the program there was little oversight or enforcement of how Title I funds were spent. Federal dollars were allocated to schools regardless of need, and monies were being spent on school improvement projects such as football fields and other non-academic related projects. McDonnell (2005) claims that the initial legislative mandate was ambiguous and allowed education agencies to spend the federally supplied dollars as they saw fit:
There was little congressional oversight or pressure on USOE (now the U.S. Department of Education) to enforce targeting procedures that would have ensured the program had a clear categorical purpose. States followed USOE’s lead and did not impose priorities on local districts. (McDonnell, 2005, p.23)

Although funds had been inappropriately spent at a number of institutions, several schools did use Title I funds to support programs and interventions for educationally disadvantaged students. During the 1960s and 1970s, many schools did use Title I funds to provide pullout instruction, and other supplemental services unconnected to their core instructional model, to address the needs of disadvantaged students (McDonnell, 2005).

During the 1980s, consecutive presidential administrations began presenting new ideological perspectives on education policy. Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush both called for the reduction of federal involvement in education, and pushed for an outcomes-based education model instead of an inputs-based one. According to McDonnell (2005) the “national discourse shifted from educational opportunity and equity to educational excellence” (p.25).

As noted by McDonnell (2005), Ronald Regan attempted to lessen the federal role in education with his reauthorization of ESEA titled the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA). Here McDonnell states that:

In ECIA, Title I became Chapter 1, retaining its focus on funding compensatory services for educationally disadvantaged students… Even as the federal government’s financial stake in K-12 education decreased and Chapter 1 continued as a limited, somewhat isolated program for special needs students, the federal government’s rhetorical stance broadened. It now proclaimed its support for an “excellence agenda” focused on higher standards and achievement for all students, and aimed at the instructional core of schools: what students are taught and who teaches them. (McDonnell, 2005, pp.26 - 27)

The Regan administration made other major changes to ESEA in its 1988 reauthorization titled Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988. According to the National Education Association (2006), the 1988 reauthorization significantly shifted how federal dollars were distributed to schools by “conditioning the states’ receipt of the
funds upon some accountability for improved outcomes” (Appendix p.2). According to McDonnell (2005) the 1988 reauthorization, for the first time, required states to “define the levels of academic achievement that Title I eligible students should attain” (p.29). These findings support the well documented shift in federal education policy from supporting an inputs-based, education equity, model to an outputs-based, educational excellence, model.

Since 1988, federal education policies have extended the outputs-based education excellence model to include holding states accountable for producing measurably significant increases in student academic achievement as shown here:

Finally, from 1990 to the present, the education debate has been dominated by the desire of policymakers to see evidence that federal investments in education programs yield tangible, measurable results in terms of student achievement and success. The two main examples of this approach occurred in 1994 and in 2001, with the passage of President Clinton’s Goals 2000 and the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) and President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). (NEA, 2006, p. 2 of Appendix 1)

According to the National Education Association (2006), President Clinton’s Goals 2000 program initiated the standards-based reform movement by requiring states to develop standards related to their reading and math curriculums. In addition, each state was to generate report cards illustrating how well schools taught, and students learned, those standards. The Clinton administration then incorporated this standards reform effort into its 1994 version of ESEA titled the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), by requiring states to also develop and administer “statewide assessments to all low-income students at least once in elementary school, once in middle school, and once in high school and to develop plans to improve their educational outcomes” (Appendix 1 p.2).
According to McDonnell (2005), IASA set the foundation for NCLB by requiring states, school districts, and schools to do the following:

Although Title I eligible students might receive supplemental instruction, schools now had to ensure that these students were part of the core instructional program, and schools had to be accountable for the Title I students’ academic progress in whatever way states held them accountable for all other students’ achievement. To receive Title I grants, states were required to submit plans that provided for challenging content and performance standards, state assessments and yearly reports on meeting standards, and provisions for teacher support and learning aligned with the new curriculum standards and assessments. Each section of the Title I law detailed specific requirements. For example, the assessments and reports had to be aligned with the content standards, test at three separate grade levels, be based on “multiple, up-to-date… measures that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding,” and “provide individual student interpretive and descriptive reports” as well as disaggregated results at the school level by race, gender, English proficiency, migrant status, disability, and economic status (P.L. No. 103-328, § 1111). States were required to hold schools and districts accountable for making adequate progress toward achieving the standards, and they were to identify districts and schools in need of improvement and to take corrective action in cases of persistent academic failure. (McDonnell, 2005, p.30)

Georgia and IASA

As mandated by IASA, Georgia created a state accountability system in 2000 and amended the Georgia charter school law requiring all charter schools to participate in the newly created state accountability system (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). According to Scafidi, Freeman, and DeJarnett (2001), Governor Roy E. Barnes established the Governor’s Education Reform Study Commission (GERSC) in 1999 to aid in the establishment of Georgia’s accountability system. The GERSC was comprised of four committees including the Accountability Committee, which established a think tank of sorts to help develop a comprehensive accountability system for Georgia’s public schools. Scafidi et al. (2001) found that an efficient accountability system attempted to encompass three characteristics: (1) set goals for student leaning at all grade levels, (2) accurately measure student leaning, and (3) reward educators for good student outcomes while supplying interventions for failing schools.
The Accountability Committee heard testimony from numerous actors from the fields of education, business, and policy on the topics of accountability approaches, design, and the use of high-stakes standardized tests as components of an adequate accountability system. From their meetings, the Accountability Committee concluded that a sound educational accountability system would contain the following characteristics:

1) Students in grades 3 and above should take curriculum-based exams at the end of each school year, based on Georgia curriculum standards.

2) There should be threshold scores on these exams that indicate how well each student has mastered the material.

3) Local districts, schools, and educators should be held accountable for how well their students performed on these exams by a system of rewards for good performance and interventions for persistently low levels of student learning.

4) These rewards and interventions should be based on levels of student learning and improvements.

5) There should be a new, agency, independent of the state’s Department of Education, created to monitor performance of the exams and other educational outcomes and to administer rewards and interventions. (Scafidi et al., 2001, p.4)

Scafidi et al. (2001) note that although the Accountability Committee gave no formal recommendations, its ideas of a sound accountability system were made part of House Bill 1187, which established Georgia’s state education accountability system.

House Bill 1187, passed by the Georgia General Assembly in the Spring of 2000 and signed into law by Governor Barnes set up a state accountability system for public education in Georgia that closely followed the thinking of the members of the Accountability Committee (Chapter 20 Section 14 of the Georgia Official Code). For the first time, Georgia had an accountability system based on the end product of education – student learning. (Scafidi et al., 2001, p.4)

Under the new state accountability system, educators could receive cash rewards for student learning outcomes as well as for improvement in student learning outcomes. In addition,
schools that received poor grades for student outcomes, or improvement of student outcomes, for three consecutive years could be penalized in one of five ways:

(A) Removal of school personnel on recommendation of the master or the school improvement team, including the principal and personnel whose performance has continued not to produce student achievement gains over a three-year period as a condition for continued receipt of state funds for administration; (B) Allow for the implementation of a state charter school through the designation by the State Board of Education; (C) Mandate the complete reconstitution of the school, removing all personnel, appointing a new principal, and hiring all new staff. Existing staff may reapply for employment at the newly reconstituted school but shall not be rehired if their performance regarding student achievement has been negative for the past three years; (D) Mandate that the parents have the option to relocate the student to other public schools in the local school system to be chosen by the parents of the student with transportation costs borne by the system; or (E) Mandate a monitor, master, or management team in the school that shall be paid by the district. (Scafidi et al., 2001, p.5)

Although it appears that Georgia attempted to comply with federal education policy in 2000, many states failed to implement the requirements of IASA. By early 1999, only 36 states had complied with the report card requirement, 19 provided support to low-performing schools, 16 had the authority to close low-performing schools; and by 2001 only 17 states would have been able to meet all requirements of IASA, including the requirement stipulating the development and implementation of aligned standards and assessments in Reading and Math in elementary and secondary school settings (McDonnell, 2005; NEA, 2006).

**NCLB Mandates**

When Congress reauthorized the ESEA in 1994 with the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), it conditioned the receipt of ESEA Title I compensatory education funds on the establishment of state standards, standards-based testing, and systems of school accountability based on test results (Jennings, 1998). NCLB builds on IASA by putting even more specific conditions on receipt of Title I funds… Nonetheless, the law attaches newly stringent conditions to elementary and secondary school subides, ratcheting up the level of federal control over policies and programs that previously fell within the purview of state and local educational authorities. (McDermott & Jensen, 2005, p.44)

As stated above, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 goes further than IASA by stipulating full compliance with the policy in order to ensure the receipt of federal funds. NCLB
mandates many measures, however this study especially focuses on the mandates calling for states to do the following:

1. Implement a state accountability plan to the specifications detailed in NCLB
2. Use the definition of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in their accountability systems provided by NCLB [section 1111(b)(2)(B)] for student sub-groups as described by NCLB [1111(b)(2)(C)(v)]
3. Implement uniform assessment tools to measure student learning and AYP
4. Execute intervention strategies specified by NCLB for schools that fail to meet AYP after a number of years.

Title I of NCLB is intended to increase the academic achievement of students and close the academic achievement gaps between, “high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (p.16). Moreover, the policy intends to hold states, local districts, and schools accountable for increasing student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap.

After reviewing the policy, it was found that NCLB fails to explicitly define the achievement gap, or how the gap has been created. However, in reading the act it becomes apparent that the achievement gap refers to the gap in performance on state and national standardized assessments between (1) economically advantaged and disadvantaged students, (2) students from major racial and ethnic groups and those from minority racial and ethnic groups, (3) students with and without disabilities, (4) and students that are proficient in English and those with limited English proficiency. The goal of NCLB seems to be for all students to perform at a proficient level on state and national standardized academic assessments.

Just as in IASA, NCLB requires states to develop a state plan and implement a state accountability system. State systems under NCLB must comply with the specifications of NCLB.
Under NCLB, states are required to implement a single statewide accountability system measuring the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of local districts and schools, as well as include sanctions and rewards for districts and schools based on performance. It is further specified in the policy that all elementary and secondary schools in a given state use the same academic standards, academic assessments, and participate in the same state accountability system for calculating AYP. In a review of NCLB, it was found that states are required to define and calculate AYP in a manner that:

1. Applies the same standards of academic achievement to all public school students.
2. Is statistically valid and reliable.
3. Results in continuous and substantial academic improvement for all students.
4. Measures the progress of public schools, local educational agencies, and the State, based on academic assessments.
5. Includes separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for all public school students and student subgroups (subgroups include race, disability status, English language proficiency, and socioeconomic status).

The Georgia Department of Education details how schools, and school districts, in the state are assessed for AYP when it states:

To make AYP, each school and district must meet the following criteria:

**95% Participation:** Each school, as a whole, and all student groups with at least 40 members must have a participation rate of 95% or above on selected state assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics.

**Annual Measurable Objectives:** Each school, as a whole, and each student group meeting the minimum group size must meet or exceed the State’s Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on State assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics. For AMO, the minimum group size is 40 or 10% of the students enrolled in AYP grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap).

**Second Indicator:** Each school, as a whole and as subgroups, must meet the standard or show progress on a Second Indicator. For Second Indicator, the minimum group size is 40 or 10% of the students enrolled in AYP grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap). In defining AYP, each state sets the minimum levels of improvement, based on student performance on state standardized tests, that school districts and schools must achieve within time frames specified in law in order to meet the 100% proficiency goal.
These levels of improvement are known as Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) to ensure that all student groups, schools, school districts, and the State as a whole reach this goal by 2013-2014. Georgia's plan for AYP allows great flexibility in how schools can demonstrate AMO. There are four ways: (1) direct comparison of student performance to AMO; (2) confidence interval; (3) multiyear averaging; and (4) safe harbor. (Georgia Department of Education, 2010)

As noted by Georgia’s Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook (2010), the state has established criteria defining student proficiency in academic areas assessed by the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). These definitions of proficiency have allowed Georgia to match the percent of students achieving proficiency in each assessed subject area, in each school, in order to calculate each school’s and district’s AYP status:

For grades 1-8, Georgia has defined three levels of achievement on the State’s Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), which measure achievement in reading, language arts, mathematics, and science as follows:
Level 1: Scores below 800 indicate “Does Not Meet Standard,” which represents the Basic student achievement level. Level 2: Scores from 800-849 indicate “Meets Standard,” which represents the Proficient student achievement level. Level 3: Scores from 850-950 indicate “Exceeds Standard,” which represents the Advanced student achievement level. For grade 11, Georgia will use the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT). For the English/Language Arts and Science GHSGT, four performance levels have been defined as follows: Level 1: Scores below 200 indicate “Below Proficiency,” which represents the Basic student achievement level. Level 2: Scores from 200-234 indicate “Basic Proficiency,” which represents the Proficient student achievement level. Level 3: Scores from 235-274 indicate “Advanced Proficiency,” which represents the Advanced student achievement level. Level 4: Scores of 275 and above indicate “Honors,” which represents the Advanced student achievement level. For grade 11, Georgia will use the Enhanced Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) in mathematics. Three performance levels have been defined as follows: Level 1: Scores below 516 indicate the “Basic” student achievement level. Level 2: Scores from 516-524 indicate the “Proficient” student achievement level. Level 3: Scores of 525 and above indicate the “Advanced” student achievement level. (Georgia Department of Education, 2010, p.9)

Below is a graphic representation of Georgia’s Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs). These charts have been retrieved from Georgia’s Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook (2010) (which details Georgia’s federally approved state accountability plan), and
displays Georgia’s mandated AMOs for the CRCT in Reading/ English Language Arts and Math, as well as the AMOs for the GHSGT in English Language Arts and Math. Also, to provide further clarification on how Georgia calculates the achievement level of individual students, subgroups, schools, districts, and the state, I have displayed here the formula Georgia uses to calculate the combined Reading/English Language Arts score.

\[
\text{RELA} = \frac{R_{\text{Met}} + R_{\text{Exceeded}} + \text{ELA}_{\text{Met}} + \text{ELA}_{\text{Exceeded}}}{R_{\text{Tests Taken}} + \text{ELA}_{\text{Tests Taken}}} \times 100
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<th>Reading/Language Arts CRCT Grades 3-8</th>
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<tr>
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As noted above, schools and districts have four ways to make AYP (1) direct comparison of student performance to the AMO targets for a given year in a given subject, which can be found on the chart above; (2) using the confidence interval; (3) using multiyear averaging; and (4) safe harbor. To provide further clarification on the terms Safe Harbor and Confidence Interval, I have provided their definitions as defined by the state of Georgia:

Safe Harbor - the last step in determining AYP status if the confidence interval approach and multi-year averaging do not enable a group of students (referred to hereinafter as “subgroup”) to make AYP. To make Safe Harbor, a subgroup must decrease the percent of students not meeting proficient/advanced levels by 10% from the previous year. The subgroup must also meet the additional academic indicator requirement. (Georgia Department of Education, 2010, p.68)

As stated in workbook element 1.1, for small schools, those identified as having only 10 to 39 Full Academic Year (FAY) students with test scores enrolled in the grades 3-8 or grade 11 configurations, Georgia uses a confidence interval\(^1\) methodology to make AYP determinations. In other words, for schools with a total eligible enrollment of 10 to 39 FAY students with test scores, Georgia will apply a test of statistical significance to determine whether such schools' total group passing rate is significantly below the state AYP annual objective passing rate in each appropriate subject area. This proportion \((z)\) test is the same as cited in *Making Valid and Reliable Decisions in Determining Adequate Yearly Progress* (CCSSO, 2002, pp. 65-68). (Georgia Department of Education, 2010, p. 29)

Georgia’s *Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook* (2010) further details the steps used by the state accountability system to determine whether each public school and district makes AYP when it states:

For public schools that miss AYP based on the performance of relatively small subgroups and to ensure reliability of AYP determinations, Georgia also uses a confidence interval\(^2\) approach along with averaging data across multiple years. See the AYP determination steps listed below and in the accompanying AYP flow chart on the following page.

---

\(^1\) The critical \(z\) is 1.645 for a population proportion, which means the programs are running a one-tail test at the 95% level of significance.

\(^2\) The critical \(z\) is 1.645 for a population proportion, which means the programs are running a one-tail test at the 95% level of significance.
Georgia’s AYP Decision-Making Steps

1. Determine if each subgroup, including the “all student” subgroup meets the minimum number of 40 students or 10% of students enrolled in AYP grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap) – for AMO and second indicator calculations. (Does not apply to graduation rate or attendance but to those elementary and middle schools who use one of the academic content areas from the list of acceptable 2nd indicators).

2. Determine if “all students” and each subgroup at or above the minimum number meet the 95% participation requirement - (n=40 for participation).

3. Determine if AYP is met using State assessment results regarding the percent proficient/advanced as compared to the State’s annual measurable objectives for both Reading/English Language Arts and Math.

3a. If AYP is not met using step 3; determine if AYP is met by using a confidence interval application. (A confidence interval method will be used for schools with 10 to 39 FAY students with test scores in both mathematics and reading/English language arts in the All Students subgroup.)

3b. If AYP is not met using a confidence interval, then apply a *multi-year averaging method.

3c. If AYP is not met using the multi-year averaging method, then determine if AYP is met using the *safe-harbor method – decreasing the percent not meeting proficiency/advanced levels by 10%. Any subgroup using “safe harbor” must meet the second indicator requirement.

3d. Add SWD-M Students to the SWD subgroup at those schools that did not make AYP based solely on proficiency of their SWD subgroup.

To meet AYP, Georgia will require that each elementary and middle school meet State standards on its second indicator, which will include performance above a statewide preset level or improved performance from the prior school year. The *second indicator must be met at the subgroup level where “safe harbor” is used. (Georgia Department of Education, 2010, p.23)

Additionally, I have included the Georgia’s Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook (2010) flow chart, referenced above, to display graphically the steps Georgia takes to assess the AYP status of its schools.
As stated before, states that are not in compliance with NCLB risk losing Title I funding:

If a State fails to meet any of the requirements of this section, other than the requirements described in paragraph (1), then the Secretary may withhold funds for State administration under this part until the Secretary determines that the State has fulfilled those requirements. (107th Congress, 2001, p.33)
In comparing IASA to NCLB, McDonnell (2005) found that NCLB requires more testing, defines AYP more precisely, and more clearly defines levels of proficiency. McDonnell (2005) goes further in illustrating the impacts of NCLB on local schools by stating:

NCLB also specifies the conditions under which schools needing improvement are to be remedied and the sanctions that are to be imposed. NCLB tightens federal regulations, and escalates the rate and level of change expected in individual schools, but it does so within the preexisting Title I policy framework. (McDonnell, 2005, p.33)

Considering the above mentioned requirements stipulated by NCLB, it is important for researchers to consider how this policy may be impacting the organizational and curricular practices of schools in this nation. By mandating charter schools to use high-stakes standardized tests to evaluate their success, Georgia legislatures may have created an environment that influences the organizational and curricular practices of charter school operators in unintended ways. Research exploring school leaders’ perceptions of how participation in the state accountability system impacts their organizational and curricular practices will be explored in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

**Charter School Performance**

Although proponents of the charter school reform movement claim that charters have the ability to accelerate student learning, the reported impact of charter schools on the educational productivity of students has been mixed (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2007). There have been reports claiming that charters are producing increased levels of academic achievement in particular geographical areas such as Boston and New York City (Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2009; Hoxby & Murarka, 2009). However, it has also been reported that charter schools have not produced increased levels of student academic achievement. In fact, several studies have found that charters, on average, perform to the same level or produce lower levels of academic achievement.
than their traditional public school (TPS) counterparts (Finnigan et al., 2004; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2007; CREDO, 2009; Gleason et al., 2010).

In an evaluation of New York City charter schools, Hoxby & Murarka (2009) found that charters were increasing the academic performance of students to a much higher degree than TPS in the same district. Moreover, the study reported that these charter schools were located in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, served students that were poorer on average than TPS students in the same district, and served high percentages of minority students. Illustrating the impact New York City charter schools had on student achievement, Hoxby & Murarka note:

We find that the causal effect on math test scores in the third through eighth grades is a positive 0.09 standard deviations per year of attendance in a New York City charter school. The parallel causal effect on reading test scores is just about half as large: 0.04 standard deviations per year of attendance in a New York City charter school. (Hoxby & Murarka, 2009, p.2)

In a subsequent report, published for policymakers and educators, Hoxby, Murarka, and Kang (2009) noted the success of New York City charter schools by illustrating their impact on a local academic achievement gap when that stated:

On average, a student who attended a charter school for all of grades kindergarten to eight would close about 86 percent of the achievement gap in math and 66 percent of the “Scarsdale-Harlem” achievement gap in English…On average, his lotteried-out counterpart who stayed in the traditional public schools for all of grades kindergarten to eight would stay on grade level but would not close the “Scarsdale-Harlem” achievement gap by much. (Hoxby et al., 2009, p.IV-1)

Abdulkadiroglu et al. (2009) found that the establishment of charter schools in Boston also led to increased student academic achievement when they stated:

For each year of attendance in middle school, we estimate that Charter Schools raise student achievement .09 to .17 standard deviations in English Language Arts and .18 to .54 standard deviations in math relative to those attending traditional schools in the Boston Public Schools. The estimated impact on math achievement for Charter middle schools is extraordinarily large. Increasing performance by .5 standard deviations is the same as moving from the 50th to the 69th percentile in student performance. This is
roughly half the size of the black-white achievement gap. (Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2009, p.9)

In contrast, Finnigan et al. (2004) conducted an analysis of multiple states (Texas, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, and North Carolina) and concluded that charter schools were, “less likely than traditional public schools to meet performance standards even after controlling for several school characteristics” (p. xiv). Moreover, in a national analysis, charters have been found to produce academic achievement levels equal to or lower than their TPS counterparts. In a longitudinal student-level analysis, focusing on academic achievement growth using state standardized tests scores, the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University (2009) found that 17% of charter schools produced higher student gains than TPS, 46% of charters performed equally to TPS, while 37% of charter schools performed less well than their TPS counterparts. As stated by CREDO:

[T]his study reveals in unmistakable terms that, in the aggregate, charter students are not faring as well as their TPS counterparts. Further, tremendous variation in academic quality among charters is the norm, not the exception. The problem of quality is the most pressing issue that charter schools and their supporters face. (CREDO, 2009, p.6)

Although there was the alarming finding that “Black and Hispanic students as a whole, have learning gains that are significantly smaller than those of their TPS twins” (p.45), CREDO did find some positive outcomes for charter school students nationally. Elementary and middle grades charter students (not including multi-level schools such as K-8), English Language Learners (ELL), and students in poverty, all displayed higher academic gains – or larger increases in academic growth – than their TPS counterparts. In addition, charter school lifespan, and time enrolled in charters, played a role in academic gains. As the report explains, student academic gains increased as their years in a charter school environment accumulated. Thus, the worst performing charters were the most recently established charters. Further, CREDO failed to
analyze if market competition, created by the introduction of charter schools, created a competitive effect that increased the productivity of TPS.

Considering the proliferation of newly established charter schools (identified here as schools within their first two years of operation) opened within the data collection period of the CREDO study, and the possibility that charter competition may have increased TPS productivity, the analysis that charter schools are ineffective nationally may not be altogether accurate.

In a second national study, which consisted of 36 charter middle schools across 15 states, Gleason et al. (2010) found that charter schools holding lotteries performed similar to TPS. Gleason et al. (2010) sought the participation of charter middle schools that fit the following criteria (1) had been operational for at least two years, and (2) held a lottery during the year of the study due to receiving more applicants than seats available for their entry grade. This study’s sample differed a great deal from the other studies mentioned above. First, the study only evaluated middle schools. Second, the schools in this study tended to be in operation longer, had fewer students eligible for Free and Reduced Meals, enrolled fewer minorities, and served fewer students with below proficient test scores than the average charter middle school. Gleason et al. (2010) noted that the middle schools sampled served a more affluent student body than the average charter middle school. Illustrating the impact charter middle schools have on student academic performance, Gleason et al. (2010) noted:

On average, charter middle schools that hold lotteries are neither more nor less successful than traditional public schools in improving student achievement, behavior, and school progress...The impact of charter middle schools on student achievement varies significantly across schools...In our exploratory analysis, for example, we found that study charter schools serving more low income or low achieving students had statistically significant positive effects on math test scores, while charter schools serving more advantaged students – those with higher income and prior achievement – had significant negative effects on math test scores. (Gleason et al., 2010, p. xviii)
Black and Hispanic Academic Performance in Georgia

The following twelve graphs were taken from Georgia’s 2009 -2010 Report Card. These graphs have been included to illustrate the level of student performance by race/ethnic categories on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Georgia’s Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), as well as to display graduation rates in the state. An analysis of the graphs reveal the persistent academic achievement gaps in Georgia that Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (currently authorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 - NCLB) was intended to close. As displayed below, Black and Hispanic students in Georgia are performing extremely less well academically than their Asian and White counterparts.

Graph 3.1
Two-Year Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 4th Grade Reading
Graph 3.2
Two-Year Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 4th Grade Mathematics

Graph 3.3
Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 4th Grade Writing
Graph 3.4
Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 4th Grade Science

![Graph 3.4](image)

Graph 3.5
Two-Year Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 8th Grade Reading

![Graph 3.5](image)
Graph 3.6
Two-Year Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 8th Grade Mathematics

Graph 3.7
Two-Year Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 8th Grade Writing
Graph 3.8
Comparison of Georgia and National Achievement Levels on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) for 8th Grade Science

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<th>All National</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Georgia</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific National</th>
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<th>Hispanic Georgia</th>
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Legend:
- Below Basic
- Basic
- Proficient
- Advanced

2005-2006
Graph 3.9
5th Grade – Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) Percentage of Students at Each Performance Level: Comparison By Race/Ethnicity

State: 2009-2010

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Graph 4.1
8th Grade – Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) Percentage of Students at Each Performance Level: Comparison For All Students

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Graph 4.2
Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) Percentage of 1st – Time Test Takers at Each Performance Level: Comparison By Race/Ethnicity

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As shown above, over the past several years Georgia has produced wide academic achievement gaps between particular racial/ethnic segments of its student population. The goal
of this study is to develop an understanding of how federal education policy may be impacting the academic gaps seen in Georgia.

According to the 2008 – 2009 NAEP 4th Grade Reading results, 53% of Black and 48% of Hispanic 4th grade students had Below Basic reading proficiency levels, while only 17% of Asian and 24% of White 4th grade students had Below Basic reading proficiency levels. On the other end of the spectrum, 15% of Asian and 10% of White 4th grade students had Advanced reading proficiency levels, while only 2% of Black and 3% of Hispanic 4th grade students were found to be Advanced in their reading proficiency. An examination of the previous year’s (2006 – 2007) NAEP 4th Grade Reading results display a similar gap between Black and Hispanic 4th grade students compared to Asian and White students.

The 2008 – 2009 NAEP 8th Grade Reading results illustrate a similar achievement gap to the one observed in grade four. For grade eight, 40% of Black and 33% of Hispanic students had Below Basic reading proficiency levels, while only 10% of Asian and 19% of White 8th grade students had Below Basic reading proficiency levels. In relation to students achieving Proficient or Advanced reading levels, only 15% of Black 8th grade students were Proficient 0% were Advanced, 19% of Hispanic students were Proficient 1% were Advanced, 51% of Asian students were Proficient 10% were Advanced, and 32% of White students were Proficient 3% were Advanced. The results presented by the NAEP clearly show that there is an academic achievement gap between racial/ethnic student groups in Georgia.

Using the results of the NAEP in Reading, Writing, Science, and Math, in addition to the results from the Georgia CRCT, there is sound evidence showing that there are several academic achievement gaps between Black & Hispanic and White & Asian student groups in Georgia. These same gaps in academic achievement may also be contributing to the graduation gap
between these racial/ethnic groups. As displayed on the final graph above, Black and Hispanic students are graduating at lower rates than their White and Asian counterparts in the state. In the 2009 – 2010 school year Asians had a 91.9% graduation rate, White students had an 84.4% graduation rate, Hispanics had a 77.6% graduation rate, while Blacks had a 75.8% graduation rate.

According to the 2009 – 2010 Annual Report on Georgia’s Charter Schools, 121 charters were operational in 2010, 80% of those schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), charter high schools produced an 80% graduation rate, 62,303 students attended charter schools, and Georgia charter schools served higher percentages of minority students (Black and Hispanic students) than TPS in Georgia. The racial composition of Georgia’s TPS were 44.96% White, 37.39% Black, 11.30% Hispanic, 3.30% Asian, 2.78% Multi-Racial, and 0.27% American Indian. In contrast, the racial composition of Georgia’s charter schools were 39.89% Black, 35.67% White, 16.75% Hispanic, 4.00% Asian, 3.46% Multi-Racial, and 0.23 American Indian. The propensity of charter schools to server minority populations slightly more than TPS in Georgia is another reason to conduct this particular research in the charter school environment.

Given the following facts that (1) Title I of NCLB was developed and implemented in order to close academic achievement gaps between racial/ethnic groups, (2) there are several large academic achievement gaps between racial/ethnic groups in Georgia, and (3) Georgia charter schools are exempt (to varying degrees) from local and state regulations but are mandated to comply with all regulations provided by NCLB; it is important to explore how charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations (for the purpose of this study minority students will refer to Black and Hispanic students) perceive mandates provided by NCLB impact their organizational and curricular practices.
Additionally, since government officials are currently considering the reauthorization of NCLB, researchers should provide educators with a platform to both present their critiques of NCLB and supply suggestions to policymakers on how to fashion future reauthorizations of the act. Hopefully, by including the perspectives of educators, future versions of the act will aid school administrators in providing adequate educational experiences for Georgia students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Purpose

The purpose of this multiple-interview study is to describe the perceptions of charter school administrators, who serve majority-minority student populations in a metropolitan area in Georgia, on how accountability mandates provided by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) impact their organizational and curricular practices.

Theoretical Framework

A Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework was used to situate my conception of the research problem, formulate research questions, as well as inform my method and methodological approach. CRT studies attempt to gather and present the counter-narratives, or perspectives, of minority groups impacted by the prevalence of race and racism in society. CRT scholars seek to provide a platform for the voices of marginalized people, in order to expose the influence of racism on their lives. The voices, or stories, of people of color are deemed as experiential knowledge and are considered to be powerful and of value when conducting these types of studies. The stories collected during CRT studies are not simply collected in order to produce new scholarship, but instead are used to bring light to issues of injustice and promote social change.

In this study, I wanted to explore how a national American education policy might be impacting the educational environments of minority student groups in Georgia; given the prevalence and special brand of racism that has been developed by the inhabitants of these
United States. Using CRT, it was assumed that the inherent racism present in American society would manifest itself in this education policy and produce unique impacts on school environments serving majority-minority students. Moreover, it was assumed that school administrators serving these students would have the ability to describe the unique impacts of this federal policy on majority-minority educational environments.

By exploring how NCLB impacts majority-minority environments uniquely, it is believed that American citizens will be able to develop a reauthorized version of this policy that will aid all schools adequately educate their students; regardless of racial make-up of their student bodies.

Many scholars have documented essential aspects of CRT, which are central to the framework. In short, CRT encourages researchers to understand that:

1. History and context is of central importance when analyzing any phenomenon
2. Objectivity or the norm are notions that should be rejected
3. Racism is permanent in America
4. A number of theoretical frames that position topics from the perspective of marginalized groups should be employed when examining issues
5. CRT seeks to end racism and bring justice and equality to all groups

(Ladson-Billings, 1998; Bell, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Donnor, 2005)

The current study will collect the stories of school administrators, regardless of race, severing majority-minority student populations. Although detailing the lived experiences of minority group members is usually an essential aspect of CRT, in this study it will also be appropriate to collect the stories of individuals from the dominant group. As noted by other researchers, members of the dominant group can provide valuable information if they have experienced forms of racial oppression as a result to their affiliation with the oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
This framework has helped me to conceptualize the current education problem being studied by noting that Race, Policy, and School Related Practices are important dynamics that should be considered in combination when conducting research on the American education system. More importantly, this framework has revealed the importance of analyzing the intersection of Race, Policy, and School Related Practices from the prospective of marginalized groups and racial minorities in the United States.

Here it is assumed that school race composition will influence how charter school administrators perceive the impacts of NCLB on their practices and their school environments. The marginalized perspective that is being collected and described by this study is of those who serve marginalized student groups. The participants themselves most likely will, but may not, be members of racial minority groups. However, an analysis of how policy impacts environments due to race dynamics, from the perspective of those who represent marginalized groups, is in line with Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholarship.

**Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective**

The net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm, or an interpretive framework, a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p.17). All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.22)

Using this definition of a paradigm (or theoretical perspective/framework) I have found Critical Race Theory (CRT) most helpful in framing the way I perceive the world and the type of work I want to produce. CRT is a framework that views race and racism as characteristics central to American society and culture. According to Sipe & Constable (1996), interpretivists and critical theorists have similar ontological and epistemological perspectives in that they both conceive of reality (ontology) and truth (epistemology) as being subjective and constructed.
However, critical theorists differentiate themselves from interpretivists by viewing issues of power as objectively real and by asserting that there is “one truth which undergirds all the rest, and is not dependent on who is observing it” (p. 158). Epistemologically, truth in the conception of the critical theorists “is the reality of political and economic power” (p.158). And although race classifications and racism are both social constructs, CRT scholars depart from traditional critical theorists by asserting the one truth that undergirds all the rest is the reality of race and racism. Seen here, race and racism impact the allocation of even political and economic power in a society, thus shaping reality and the perceptions of reality. Sipe & Constable (1996) remaining analysis of critical theory is useful and accurate in describing CRT:

The project of critical theory is to discover what is just and to take action; since knowledge is a form of power, it can be used to change the world into a more just and equitable place for all groups of people. Critical theorists view communication in this same active light: communication is for the purpose of deciding what to do to change the world, and how to best accomplish this. (Sipe & Constable, 1996, p.159)

CRT scholars argue that racism is so enmeshed in American society that it has become invisible, normal, and undergirds every conception of reality; including those conceptions that inhabit political, social, cultural, educational, economic, and psychological spaces (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso 2002; Lopez, 2003; Bell, 2004; Donnor, 2005; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Singer, 2005; Yosso, 2005). In this view, race and racism impact every aspect of society and should be considered the most important social construct when analyzing societal problems in America (Singer, 2005).

CRT scholars seek to provide a platform for the voices of marginalized groups in order to expose the influence of race and racism in society. CRT scholars argue that the voices, or stories, of people of color should be valued as experiential knowledge, and considered powerful and
insightful. These stories are not simply collected in order to produce new scholarship, but instead are collected and shared to help bring light to issues of injustice and promote social change.

Dixson & Rousseau (2005) presented a list originally created by Mari J. Matsuda detailing the themes associated with CRT. Matsuda’s (1993) list of fundamental themes include three additional aspects of CRT that should be considered in the present study:

1. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy.
2. Critical race theorists...adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
3. Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society. (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p.9)

According to Solorzano & Yosso (2002), five themes, which are similar to the ones mentioned above, should be specifically considered when conducting research in the education field. Once considered, these five following elements should direct the methodological practices of scholars researching education policy or practices:

1. The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination
2. The challenge to dominant ideology
3. The commitment to social justice
4. The centrality of experiential knowledge
5. The transdisciplinary perspective

Solorzano & Yosso (2002) also note that in addition to viewing race and racism at the center of their analysis (intercentricity), CRT scholars should also recognize the intersection of race with other categories of oppression (such as gender, sexual orientation, age, wealth, etc.). CRT scholars give validity to other critical frameworks and incorporate those conceptions of
knowledge and reality into their own work, while keeping race at the center of their studies:

CRT crosses epistemological boundaries, borrowing from several traditions such as liberalism, feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism… and so forth in order to provide a more complete analysis of “raced” people. This element of CRT, according to Tate (1997), forces scholars to question the appropriateness and potential of their theoretical and conceptual frameworks (Singer, 2005, p.468)

It was further found that CRT scholars employ a multidisciplinary analysis, such as considering the sociological, economic, and/or historical aspect of problems when conducting studies. Critical race theorists tend to not study problems in isolation, but instead strive to contextualize problems within a holistic view for analysis. Studies that do not consider a problem within its contemporary and historical context most likely will come under criticism by critical race scholars (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Singer, 2005).

In addition, Solorzano & Yosso (2002) explains that CRT rejects the claims of educational institutions and their dominant ideologies. Educational institutions claim that their policies, curriculums, organization, pedagogies, and other aspects of function, are colorblind and do not perpetuate the privilege of some while contributing to the subjugation of others. CRT puts forth the notion that only by challenging these dominant claims will researchers be able to expose the role race and racism play in the reality of schooling:

A critical race theory challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race scholars argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 25 – 27)

CRT posits that mainstream culture/society disseminates a master-narrative that depicts America as a land of equal opportunity affording all its citizens equal protection under the law. This master-narrative is told from the vantage point of the privileged, and disregards the
experiences and realities of minorities. The master-narrative runs counter to the story of those not protected by White privilege. An important aspect of CRT is giving “voice” to the oppressed in order to evoke action and bring drastic change to society. Therefore, methodologies allowing marginalized groups to provide analyses of these dominant claims enable researchers to expose the role that the education system plays in perpetuating inequality and oppression. Only by illustrating the narratives that run counter to the education system’s dominant story of meritocracy and colorblindness, can the total reality of the system’s impact on people be revealed. CRT scholars maintain that only by seeking counter-narratives of the oppressed will academia be able to challenge racial inequities in America (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

It has been further claimed that allowing oppressed people to share their stories will not only preserve the reality of marginalized groups, which help to distort stereotypic images of the group portrayed in the oppressor's master-narrative, but it will also inform the dominant group of the oppression taking place (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although detailing the lived experiences and knowledge of the oppressed is an essential aspect of CRT, in some cases, it is appropriate to also collect the stories of the dominant culture, especially if individuals belonging to the dominant group have experienced oppression. This collection of minority and majority stories can add depth to the collective narrative. Ladson-Billings (1998) notes, “to the extent that Whites experience forms of racial oppression, they may develop such a standpoint” (p.11). For example, John Brown, a White abolitionist, was a member of the dominant group who most likely experienced aspects of racism by joining Blacks in their fight for freedom. As noted by Dixson & Rousseau (2005), Duncan (2002) added to his ethnographic study of black male students in a high school by including the perspective of others (non-Black males) in the school. Dixson & Rousseau (2005) claim that by adding the voices of others Duncan made it “possible to
juxtapose the dominant discourse represented in the voices of other students and faculty with the counterstory told by the black make students” (p. 13).

Lastly, a key aspect of CRT is conducting research in order to encourage social change. It was noted in several works that CRT has as its main goal to end racism and oppression of all kinds. The work of CRT scholars is not merely to theorize but to change society, end racism, and end all other forms of oppression. This framework has a commitment to social justice and produces transformative works that can help change laws, institutional behaviors, cultural norms, and the perceptions of those who read the work:

CRT is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991). Such a social justice research agenda exposes the ‘interest- convergence’ (Bell, 1987) of civil rights ‘gains’ in education and works toward the elimination of racism, sexism and poverty, as well as the empowerment of People of Color and other subordinated groups (Freire, 1970, 1973; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). (Yosso, 2005, p.74)

Various methodologies can be employed in order to conduct CRT work including critical ethnography, case study, action research, content analysis, and phenomenological qualitative research (Singer, 2005). It was noted by Solorzano & Yosso (2002) that there is no official method to collect data when conducting CRT research, and that researchers have documented the lived experiences of participants by including “such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives” (p.26) [italics included in original text].

For this study I used a type of interview process to collect and analyze the perceptions of school leaders. It is important to emphasis that the methodology used here varies slightly from other CRT scholarship in that this approach allows the researcher to take part in the collection and analysis of participant’s stories, instead of simply collecting the narrations or stories of participants. This methodology further allows members of marginalized groups, and those
closely affiliated with marginalized groups, to provide an analysis of NCLB and its impacts on their practices.

**Methodology and Method**

As stated above, CRT scholars use a myriad of methodological approaches to accomplish their goals. Since my goal was to describe how school leaders perceive NCLB accountability mandates influencing their practices, I designed a multiple interview study using the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpret-View methodology and method to collect and analyze data.

As Roulston (2010) explains, the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpret-View method requires the interviewer and interviewee to engage in a dialogue that allows both parties to reflect on the concepts and interpretations that emerge from their conversation as it takes place. In contrast to other interview methods, which require the uninterrupted stories of participants to be documented and then analyzed by the researcher after the interview has been concluded, this method calls for the continual analysis of data during conversation, and for the researcher to question participants during the interview in an effort to eliminate the researcher’s unnoticed biases (Dinkins, 2005).

As noted by Dinkins (2005) the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpret-View provides a superior method of controlling for, or filtering out, researcher bias and prejudice related to the topic:

A second, perhaps even more important reason exists for the interviewer to bring herself back into the inquiry: The researcher must have an opportunity to identify and check her own assumptions...An inter-view that provides for shared inquiry helps both the researcher and the co-inquirer to reflect on their own assumptions and beliefs...To put our prejudices at risk is to expose them, to let them show. Socrates was quite aware of the danger of prejudices leading an inquiry astray, and he insisted on inquiry through dialogue for this very reason. If we have prejudices or “habits of thought” we have not even noticed ourselves, we need others to notice them for us, to point them out to us or to lead us to a point where we can notice them ourselves. (Dinkins, 2005, p.117)
Filtering out researcher bias, and describing the participants’ experiences to the most accurate degree possible, is a central aspect of CRT scholarship. By bringing the researcher’s bias to the surface during the course of conversation, participants can agree or refute these biases, giving the participant the power to convey their perspective and tell their more fully. This method of collecting and analyzing data fits well with my framework because it allowed me to converse with participants in order to present their description of how NCLB accountability mandates impact their organizational and curricular practices.

The Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpre-view also allowed participants to think more deeply about the topic, their own experiences, and their perceptions, by giving me the opportunity to question their comments during our dialogues. This ability to engage in a dialogue allowed characteristics of the relationship being studied to drive questioning, rather than the researcher creating a predetermined set of questions to do the same. Moreover, this methodology and method provided a type of control mechanism to ensure questions presented were appropriate for the study.

In line with Dinkins (2005), conducting dialogues allowed my participants and myself to turn questions on themselves so that both the participants and myself were able to ensure each question was appropriate for the study. It was suggested by Dinkins (2005) that by using the Interpre-view model, questions could be examined, rejected, and restructured, during the course of our dialogues, in order to present quality questions that conveyed both the researcher’s and participant’s meaning; as well as addressed important dynamics emerging from the conversation:

In a dialogue, in which the inquiry itself guides the researcher, an assumption that leads to a flawed question…will be caught by the dialogue process. The participant as co-inquirer will be in a position to react to the question itself and change the direction of inquiry if necessary or appropriate. (Dinkins, 2005, pp.118 - 119)
Dinkins (2005) provides the following characteristics of the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpretation process. Each characteristic is an element of the process that can be employed to help researchers collect and analyze data appropriately, ultimately helping the researcher to generate a description of the topic of study. The list includes:

1. Say what you believe requirement
2. Anticipating conflicts between beliefs
3. The priority of definition
4. Analogies
5. Examples
6. Pointing out conflicts
7. Rewording a co-inquirer’s statements
8. Asking about ideas
9. The hermeneutic circle of Socrates’ elenchus [ih-leng-kuhs]

Most of the characteristics of this interpretation process are self-explanatory; therefore I will not go into great detail about each one. The first characteristic is extremely important for the Interpretation process to be effective. The co-inquirer (or participant) and the researcher must at all times say what they believe or be honest. This characteristic is introduced in order to allow both the researcher and participants the ability to contradict previous statements while attempting to describe the relationship being studied. As the dialogue takes place, beliefs and assumptions may be presented causing the reevaluation, or contradiction, of earlier statements in the conversation. If participants reject earlier stated beliefs about the relationship between accountability mandates and their practice, it can be assumed that those statements that are not rejected best describe the relationship of study (Dinkins, 2005).

In the second characteristic, the researcher is encouraged to actively present his/her assumptions about the topic of study during the dialogue. The researcher is not required to
remain neutral to the topic, and by presenting his/her beliefs about the topic the participant is able to provide complementary or conflicting responses that will inform the researcher of the impact accountability mandates have on school administrators’ practices. According to Dinkins (2005), this allows the researcher to fully expose their prejudices concerning the topic of study in order to keep those biases from distorting the analysis.

An additional tool to be employed when conducting the Interpre-view is the use of definition. According to Dinkins (2005), asking participants to provide a definition of the phenomenon being studied is a good practice because it starts the conversation on neutral ground. Also, asking for a definition gives researchers a starting point for their questioning. As participants add detail to their definition, researchers have the ability to ask questions related to each detail. A third reason for asking participants to provide a definition of the phenomenon is to provide a point of reference ensuring the descriptions being collected of the phenomenon are actually of the phenomenon in question. Dinkins (2005) provides a forth reason for having participants provide a definition of the phenomenon when she states:

Finally, beginning with a definition is likely to avoid the problem that, as Weston observes, “Sometimes values may appear to vary just because we have different beliefs about the facts” (2002, p.8). For instance, a health professional who is a co-inquirer may express great hesitancy toward getting involved in family disputes over care for the elderly, while a co-inquirer in another inter-view might be much more willing to get involved. The apparent difference between these two co-inquirers, though, could simply be that they have different “beliefs about the facts,” i.e. different definitions of what it means to “get involved” in such cases. (Dinkins, 2005, p. 131)

In the case of the current study, I asked participants to define their organizational practices, curricular practices, and NCLB accountability mandates in order to create a clear understanding of the topic being discussed.

The fourth and fifth characteristics on the list above are implemented for similar purposes. Providing analogies and examples for the participant did aid in clarifying questions I presented.
During the course of the dialogue, questions were at times presented in a confusing manner. As I found myself running into difficulty phrasing questions, I was able to use analogies and examples to clarify my meaning. Participants were also able to use analogies and examples to do the same. Presenting analogies and examples did help clarify the intended meaning of questions and responses.

The sixth characteristic, pointing out conflicts, addresses the conflicting statements participants did provide during the Interpre-view. Using this process was beneficial for me. Pointing out conflicting statements made by participants gave them the opportunity to grapple with their statements and consider how they perceived the topic being discussed. In much the same way, the seventh characteristic, rewording a co-inquirer’s statements, allowed me to clarify statements made by participants in order to better understand the topic being studied. In addition, rewording a co-inquirer’s statements helped me to ensure that my biases were eliminated from the analysis.

Another tool suggested by Dinkins (2005) that I employed during the conversations was to ask participants for their ideal conception of the relationship being discussed. For example, I asked participants to describe how an ideal accountability system would be structured, and then asked them how this system would impact their practices. By asking for a description of an ideal situation, I was able to produce greater dialogue about current accountability mandates, as well as gain a description of an ideal accountability system.

The final characteristic of the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpre-view process is that I was able to employ was the hermeneutic circle of Socrates’ elenchus [ih-leng-kuhs]. This circular method of conceptualizing ideas is similar to Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle, which is described by Laverty (2003) when she states:
This interpretive process is achieved through a hermeneutic circle which moves from the parts of experience, to the whole of experience and back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with and the understanding of texts. Kvale (1996) viewed the end of this spiraling through a hermeneutic circle as occurring when one has reached a place of sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions, for the moment. (Laverty, 2003, pp.24-25)

Dinkins (2005) explains that Socrates would use the process of “circling back to the beginning and reexamining the problem from a different angle” (p.138) when more explanation of the phenomenon seemed necessary. By conceptualizing a phenomenon multiple times, new aspects and beliefs of that phenomenon arose and were presented by participants during our dialogues. This method was used much as Dinkins describes in her work when she states:

As Socrates and his co-inquirers follow the paths of their deeper beliefs, altering the path slightly each time, more of the connections are revealed to them, and their understandings of the connections are strengthened as each new angle is revealed. In this way, they can grow in their understanding of the belief in question. (Dinkins, 2003, p.138)

Lastly, a form of document analysis and observation was incorporated into the current study. Some clarification should be made here. I did not use document analysis or observation to collect analyzable data. Instead, I analyzed school related documents (charter petitions, school websites, promotional materials, school report cards, etc.) in order to gain background knowledge of the schools’ student bodies, performance, and general settings, in an effort to better prepare myself to conduct an Interview with school leaders. As stated before, the framework that I used places emphasis on presenting the stories of participants and detailing how they perceive the relationship being studied. Using this form of interview allowed me to question participants in a way that encouraged participants to deeply probe their beliefs and perceptions of the relationship discussed.
Data Sources

Setting Participant Pool Criteria and Sample Size

In this multiple-interview study, 12 metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia charter school administrators, serving majority-minority student populations, were interviewed in order to describe their perceptions of how accountability mandates established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) impact their organizational and curricular practices.

After considering literature addressing qualitative research participant selection and sample size, I found that using purposeful sampling would best support my study. This type of sample was shown to be most appropriate for the current study by Glesne when she states:

Qualitative researchers neither work (usually) with populations larger enough to make random sampling meaningful, nor is their purpose that of producing generalizations (see Morse 1998). Rather, qualitative researchers tend to select each of their cases purposefully (Patton 2002). “The logic and power of purposeful sampling...leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research...” (Patton 2002, 46). (Glesne, 2006, p. 34)

Therefore, the data collection process was initiated by establishing a set of criteria used to produce a list of potential study participants relevant to the current study. To be eligible for the study, each administrator had to meet the following criteria: (1) They had to be the principal (or leader) of a charter school, (2) the school they led had to have been in operation for three or more consecutive school years including the 2010 – 2011 school year, (3) the school also needed to have a 2008 – 2009 and a 2009 – 2010 Georgia State Report Card on file with the Georgia Department of Education, (4) the school needed to serve a 2/3rds majority Black and or Hispanic student population, (5) the school needed to be operational during the data collection period (the 2011 – 2012 school year), and lastly (6) the school needed to be located in the metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia area. Since this study attempts to explore the intersection among policy, race,
and the administrative practices of charter school operators, only administrators over schools operating under a charter were considered for this study.

In Georgia, charter schools can be one of two types, Start-ups or Conversions. According to the “frequently asked questions about charter schools” section of the Georgia Department of Education’s website (2010), “a start-up charter school is a charter school that did not exist prior to becoming a charter school,” and “a conversion charter school is a charter school that previously existed as a traditional public school.” Start-up charter schools can be established in one of two ways, (1) they can be *locally-approved* by a school district, or (2) they can be approved by the State Board of Education as a *state-chartered special school* after the school’s charter petition has been denied by a local authorizer. In Georgia, only local school districts are allowed to be local authorizers.

In contrast, a Conversion charter school is established when an already existing school petitions its local district to become a charter school. An already existing school may petition to become a charter in order to gain additional flexibility in the way it operates.

Lastly, an entire school system (or local district) has the ability to convert to a charter system, which in turn would make every school in the system a charter school. According to the “frequently asked questions about charter schools” section of the Georgia Department of Education’s website:

A charter system is a local school district that operates under the terms of a charter between the State Board of Education and the local school district. The system receives flexibility from certain state rules and regulations in exchange for greater accountability. There is an emphasis on school-based leadership and decision-making. (Georgia Department of Education, 2010, p.1)

Next, the present study required that each charter school be in at least its fourth year of operation during the data collection period, on the grounds that these schools were likely to be
relatively stable in their organization and operation. It was further believed that by selecting schools that had been in operation for multiple years it would increase the likelihood that participants had multiple years of experience interacting with NCLB, and also would most likely no longer be experiencing difficulties associated with charter school implementation (starting a charter school and all the growing pains associated with beginning a new organization).

Selecting schools that were in at least their fourth year of operation also ensured that I would have access to two consecutive years of demographic and academic performance data. As I will explain below, some schools in Georgia did not have demographic or performance data available for the 2010 – 2011 school year, and therefore each school needed to have performance data dating back to the 2008 – 2009 school year.

Since I used Georgia State Report Cards to determine school eligibility for the study (with regards to their majority-minority status), this forced me to require each school be in at least its fourth year of operation. Due to the state investigation of the Atlanta Public Schools alleged cheating scandal, several schools in the state did not have complete State Report Cards on file for the 2010 – 2011 school year. Therefore, participating schools needed to have report cards on file from the 2008 – 2009 and 2009 – 2010 school years, allowing me to ensure that the majority-minority status of the school was a consistent dynamic of each setting. State Report Cards provided me with the student racial distribution within each school, as well as informed me of how long the school had been in operation.

The State Report Card further provided information on the academic performance of each school through its calculation of a state performance index score. The state performance index score is the percent of students in a school meeting or exceeding performances standards on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), factoring in the results of all subject matter
tests. In addition, State Report Cards contained links to each school’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report. AYP reports provided further insight on each school’s academic performance as measured by the Georgia Single State Accountability System, which is mandated under NCLB.

Thirty-eight schools in Georgia fit the first five criteria set forth by this study (actually 39 schools fit the criteria, but one school closed prior to the start of the 2011 – 2012 school year). Out of the 38 schools that were eligible to participate in this study, 30 were located inside the metropolitan Atlanta area. As defined by the Metro Atlanta Chamber, the metropolitan Atlanta area consists of 28 counties including Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dawson, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Haralson, Heard, Henry, Jasper, Lamar, Meriwether, Newton, Paulding, Pickens, Pike, Rockdale, Spalding, and Walton County (Hall County was also included in the study due to its close proximity to the center of the metro area. Hall borders Forsyth and Gwinnett counties, making it much closer to the center of the metropolis than other counties considered part of the metropolis).

The eight schools located outside of the metro area were eliminated from this study due to their geographic location. These eight schools were spread across three counties several miles away from (as well as several counties apart from) the metro area, making it extraordinarily difficult for me to gain access, visit, and conduct interviews with administrators at these school sites. Additionally, since the majority of charter schools fitting the criteria for this study, and close to the majority of charter schools in Georgia, are located in the metro area, these eight charter schools may not experience a type of *Agglomeration Economy* specific to the education sector that schools located in the metro area most likely do.

Stutz & Warf (2005) describe Agglomeration Economies as, “the benefits gained by firms by clustering near other firms, including reduction of transport costs of inputs and outputs, access
to specialized labor and ancillary services, access to specialized information, and ability to
access a particular type of infrastructure (p.515).” It is assumed here that charter schools located
in the metro area exist in an Education Agglomeration. These schools are most likely supplied
with specialized labor (or at least an abundance of labor options), information, and various types
of infrastructure that are not available to schools located outside of the metro area.

Access to a diverse group of services including Charter Management Organizations
(CMO), Education Management Organizations (EMO), education consultants, as well as being in
close proximity to the Georgia Charter Schools Association (GCSA), the Georgia Department of
Education Charter Schools Division (which are both located in downtown Atlanta), and having
the advantage of being in close proximity to an increasing knowledgebase and network of charter
schools, could produce an environment for metro schools that non-metro schools do not have the
ability to experience. Since the eight non-metro schools most likely did not experience an
education agglomeration like those in the metro area, and due to the fact that their location made
it difficult to include them in the study, these schools were eliminated from the current study.

After producing a list of 30 schools fitting the criteria for the study, the next step was to
define the study’s sample size. Initially, I decided to separate schools into four categories based
on their 2009 – 2010 performance index scores (the state had not produced the 2010 – 2011
school year report cards for some schools at the time of this study), and then define a
representative sample using each school’s performance category and type (elementary, middle,
high). The following table displays this process:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Index Category</th>
<th>Number of schools by school type: Elementary</th>
<th>Number of schools by school type: Middle</th>
<th>Number of schools by school type: High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 69.99%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 – 79.99%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 – 89.99%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 – 100%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using this table, I figured that if I could get 40% of schools in each category to participate, I would have an equally representative sample of each school type. For instance, I could have had one elementary from the 60% category; two elementary and one middle school from the 70% category; three elementary and one middle school from the 80% category; and one elementary, one middle, and two high schools from the 90% category. It seemed that by soliciting 12 schools, in the above noted combination, I would have established a balanced representation of schools for this study.

I also considered the notion of creating a sample using each school’s 2009 – 2010 School Improvement Status. The school improvement status displays each school’s success in achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as measured by the state accountability system. There are five school improvement status categories, which are displayed in the table below:
**Improvement Status Key (Georgia Department of Education 2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished School</td>
<td>The school made adequate yearly progress for three or more consecutive years.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate School</td>
<td>The school made adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, or a school is a new school and has not had a prior AYP determination.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate School Did Not Make AYP</td>
<td>The school did not make adequate yearly progress in current year and will be in &quot;Needs Improvement&quot; if it does not make AYP in next year for the same subject area.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement School and Made AYP</td>
<td>The school was designated in previous year(s) as &quot;Needs Improvement&quot; but made adequate yearly progress in current year.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement School</td>
<td>The school has not made adequate yearly progress for two or more consecutive years in same subject area and must implement consequences in compliance with federal law and State Board Rule.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In much the same way that I contemplated using performance index scores to create a sample, I figured I could also establish a representative sample using improvement status data.

Ultimately, I decided against both methods of creating a sample for this study. I found that using either method created two problems. First, I could not be sure that I would be able to secure the participation of the desired number of schools for any given category. Second, I did not want to turn away potential participants because I fulfilled the quota for any given category prior to that participant’s affirmative reply in regards to participating in the study. In short, I didn’t want to turn anyone away that could inform the study. Instead, I decided to solicit all 30 schools and include the data gathered from any administrator willing to participate.

**Gaining Access to Participants**

Starting in June of 2011, I began the process of soliciting participants for the study. The first step in this process was submitting Research Proposal Applications with the central offices
of eight school districts, and contacting the head administrators of each school via email and
phone. In order to gain access to conversion charters, every district in the study required
researchers to first gain permission from the local authorizer (school district) before seeking
approval from the head school administrator. If the local authorizer did not approve my study I
would be unable to conduct research in their conversion charters.

In contrast, the majority of districts in this study allowed researchers to bypass the local
authorizer to gain access to start-up charters. Researchers needed only to gain the approval of the
head school administrator to conduct research in these schools (I learned this only after
completing and submitting Research Proposal Applications to several districts). Only one school
district required researchers to gain the permission of both the local authorizer and head school
administrator to conduct research in a start-up charter.

After submitting research proposals to each of the eight local authorizers (districts), five
granted me permission to conduct research, two requested revisions to my application before
they would allow me access to their schools, and one denied my request to conduct research in
its district. Out of the two districts that requested revised applications, one granted me access to
their schools while the other failed to rule on my resubmitted application. The district that failed
to rule on my resubmitted application informed me that they did receive my revised application,
and that they would supply me with a response but never did. Without the approval of these two
districts, one denying my request and the other being non-responsive, four schools were
eliminated from my study. That resulted in a sample of 26 schools available to participate in the
current study.

With the list of eligible schools down to 26, I began to contact the head administrator of
each school directly in order to ask if they would participate in my study. I sent emails to the
head administrator of each school, as well as called each administrator by phone, but found that I was having difficulty reaching many of my potential participants. I began to contact administrators during the month of June and continued to solicit participants through the month of October.

During the course of this study, a number of administrators informed me that it was common practice for administrators to delete emails from unfamiliar individuals. Others told me that they received my emails and voicemails and intended to respond, but due to their workloads they often forget to respond. I was also told by a number of my participants that my persistence in sending emails and calling did get their attention and encouraged many of them to participate in the study.

Frequently at the conclusion of my interviews, participants and I held casual conversations about my doctoral program and my dissertation topic. Most of the participants expressed an interest in the topic and mentioned how it most likely would interest any charter school operator. I was assured by a few of my participants that those administrators that ignored my invitation, or declined to participate in the study, most likely did so because of overwhelming duties and responsibilities as an administrator. Furthermore, I was told that many principals are wary of researchers, and are skeptical of how researchers may report the data collected, and portray participating schools and administrators, in their reports.

Out of 26 schools contacted, nine school administrators ignored my request entirely. I attempted to contact these nine administrators (from June 2011 to October 2011) to request that they participate in the study, but never received a response to my request. I had the opportunity to speak with many of their administrative assistants, and was even promised by a number of these assistants that I would receive a return phone call from the principal; but it never happened.
I called and or emailed each administrator approximately once a week. I alternated my methods for contacting the administrators week by week. One week I would call the school, and the next I would send an email to the administrator. The third week I typically would not contact the school at all to ensure that I was not being over bearing. I did contact some of the schools multiple times during the same week, but this only occurred when a school official prompted me to call back at a specific time or to email someone at the school.

Relationships, Participants, and Sites

Out of 26 potential participants, five head administrators declined my offer to participate in the study, nine never responded to my request (never replying to email or voicemail message invitations), and 12 administrators accepted my offer. I had previously cultivated minor relationships with four of the 12 administrators that accepted my offer, and I believe that was the reason, at least in part, why they decided to participate in the study. As I found during the course of this study, it was much easier gaining access to individuals with whom I had a prior relationship. As stated by Glesne:

Access is a process. It refers to your acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research purposes…It helps to know an insider who is familiar with the individuals and the politics involved who can advise you in making access decisions…Whether approaching gatekeepers or a series of individuals, you want them to say, “Yes, your study sounds interesting. You are welcome.” (Glesne, 2006, pp.44-45)

Three of the four administrators, with whom I had minor relationships with, previously met me while I was working in the Georgia Department of Education Charter Schools Division; the fourth administrator was introduced to me via email by a mutual professional colleague working at his school. The remaining eight participants were cold contacts who agreed to participate in the study for various reasons. As part of the data collection process, I had hoped to
interview charter school operators I had met previously, either while working for the Georgia Department of Education Charter Schools Division (GaDOE), or through mutual colleagues working in the field of education. I did not think these particular charter school operators would provide a special perspective on the topic, rather I hoped that having a previous relationship would help me gain access to participants, thus making it easier to collect data.

As a research intern at the GaDOE, I had the opportunity to conduct several site visits to charter schools in the metropolitan Atlanta area. During these site visits I met a number of charter school leaders. During the visits, our GaDOE team informed school leaders that we were there in order to gain a greater perspective on charter school issues, and how the State could improve its practices in relation to supporting the charter movement and enhancing charter policy. Our team did not conduct school evaluations, so I believe school leaders perceived us as the “good guys” coming to support the charter movement. While conducting visits, I took the lead, due to my experience working in public schools, and conducted informal interviews of school leaders as we toured each school. Usually, after touring each school, our team met with the school’s leader and continued asking questions about their charter’s practices, school performance, school future plans, relationships with local districts, and other related charter issues. So in essence, I was able to build minor relationships with some of the potential participants of my study.

When I began soliciting participants for the current study, a goal of mine was to secure as participants administrators I met while working at the GaDOE. I was convinced that my past interactions with these leaders would encourage them to participate in the study, as well as provide a base feeling of trust and comfort during the course of our interviews. Most every school leader I met while working at the GaDOE was informed of my doctoral status, and that I
would be conducting research focusing on charter schools in the near future. During the course of our visits, almost every school leader mentioned that I was welcomed to contact them if I needed to conduct research at a school site, and I felt each invitation was genuine.

In addition to working for the GaDOE, I had also been a classroom teacher in various school settings (public & private, in the city of Atlanta Georgia, and the city of Athens Georgia), and I believe this background helped develop a level of trust and a foundation for a positive relationship between participants and myself. Glesne (2006) noted that when conducting fieldwork there are some things that researchers can control to help build positive relationships with their participants:

Your appearance, speech, and behavior must be acceptable to your research participants. This may be hard to manage at first because you are habituated to acting in certain ways that reflect your personal sense of propriety, dignity, and integrity. (Glesne, 2006, p.111)

Fortunately, I have worked in school settings for several years and understood the norms of dress and behavior for K-12 environments.

Some participants, including the four participants with whom I had previously developed minor relationships said they decided to participate in the study because they were interested in the topic; or they were familiar with the University of Georgia and trusted the university’s researchers; or they sympathized with my plight as a doctoral student and understood I needed participants.

However, many of them provided a combination of the above-mentioned reasons for agreeing to participate in the study. Although I initially intended to use snowballing [a sampling strategy wherein, “participants are selected on the basis of successive referrals from participants recruited initially” (Roulston, 2010, p.82)] to help increase the sample size of the study, none of the participants were able to help me secure other participants for the study.
Profiles of Schools and Administrators

To ensure confidentiality, chapters three, four, and five of this dissertation will refrain from detailing identifiable information of participants, schools, and districts. Pseudonyms will be used in place of the real names of each participant, school, and district mentioned in the study. In addition, I have provided approximations of each participants’ experience in the field of education, their schools’ demographic information, as well as schools’ performance data. Approximations provide readers with a context of the schools’ settings, as well as the general background of each participant, while at the same time allows participants to remain unidentifiable. The following tables list the characteristics of each participating school and its administrator.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Local Authorizer</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Performance Index Score in %</th>
<th>School Improvement Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edwards Charter School</td>
<td>Hayes City Public Schools</td>
<td>PK – 8</td>
<td>700 – 800</td>
<td>90 – 95</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Academy High School</td>
<td>Hayes City Public Schools</td>
<td>9 – 12</td>
<td>200 – 300</td>
<td>80 – 85</td>
<td>Adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurgood Marshall Academy</td>
<td>Hayes City Public Schools</td>
<td>PK – 8</td>
<td>400 – 500</td>
<td>65 – 70</td>
<td>Adequate Did Not Meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakwood Elementary</td>
<td>Quahog City Schools</td>
<td>PK – 5</td>
<td>800 – 900</td>
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<td>6 – 8</td>
<td>1,000 – 1,500</td>
<td>75 – 80</td>
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<td>Approximate % Hispanic</td>
<td>Approximate % Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>Approximate % Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>Approximate % Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
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## Characteristics of Administrators

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<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Administrator Name</th>
<th>Experience in Education</th>
<th>Experience as an Administrator</th>
<th>Head Administrator of Current School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Edwards Charter School</td>
<td>Mr. Griffin</td>
<td>30 – 40 years</td>
<td>15 – 20 years</td>
<td>0 – 5 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering Academy High School</td>
<td>Mr. Chase</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0 – 5 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurgood Marshall Academy</td>
<td>Ms. Campbell</td>
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<td>Oakwood Elementary</td>
<td>Mrs. Allen</td>
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<td>Glendale Academy</td>
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<td>Life Academy</td>
<td>Mr. Kelly</td>
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<td>30 – 35 years</td>
<td>0 – 5 years</td>
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### Edwards Charter School

Edwards Charter School was opened as part of a revitalization effort in the Kennedy Hills community. Edwards Charter is a grades PK – 8 school that has been academically successful making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at least three consecutive years to earn its present school improvement status of distinguished. In addition, Edwards posted a State Performance Index Score of over 90% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. As noted above, state performance index scores are percentages calculated using the number of students in a school meeting or exceeding performances standards on the CRCT; taking into account all subject matter tests (Social Studies, Science, Reading/English Language Arts, and Math).

Edwards is located in a historically, and still predominantly, African-American community on the Eastside of Hayes. However, over the past five to ten years the Kennedy Hills
community residential population has begun to shift. Within this time span the number of European-American residents, in addition to a number of residents of various racial and ethnic backgrounds with higher incomes than the original residential population, have increased. Natives of the city have described this population change and revitalization effort as a sign of gentrification, which is defined by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (2011) as “the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.”

Parents of the Kennedy Hills community, along with the Kennedy Hills Neighborhood Foundation, are responsible for opening Edwards Charter School. Therefore, although the school is open to students residing in the city of Hayes, it gives preference to students living in the Kennedy Hills community. A large portion of Edwards’ student body is made up of students residing in Kennedy Hills Apartments (formally a government housing project called Kennedy Hills Housing that has now been converted into a mix-income apartment community). The Kennedy Hills community has a long history of high crime rates and heavy illegal drug activity. And although the Kennedy Hills Neighborhood Foundation was established to revitalize the community, during the course of this study the local metro area news has broadcast several reports of the reemergence of violent crimes in the Kennedy Hills community.

In speaking with Mr. Griffin, the principal of Edwards, the success of the school can be in part credited to the support of its many partners who supply human and financial resources. The school’s partners include three local universities, a local K-12 private school, a health care organization, one of the nation’s largest educational and charter school management firms, two national banks, and a local arts center. In addition, the Kennedy Hills Neighborhood Foundation
raises additional financial support from foundations, corporations, and individuals to support the mission and operation of the school.

Edwards is housed in a pristine building that was newly constructed for the opening of the school. The school building continues to look like a newly constructed building. The school has a well-developed media center that provides the students with multiple computer workstations, a vast book selection, and quiet rooms for student study or for small group faculty meetings. The hallways are spacious, and it appeared that the facility could accommodate high school students even though it operates as a PK-8 facility.

Mr. Griffin is a European-American male who has worked in the education field for almost forty years; spending most of that time in the elementary and middle school settings. Mr. Griffin has over fifteen years experience as a K-12 urban school administrator, and as a longtime administrator Mr. Griffin has had the opportunity to work prior to and during the NCLB era. Mr. Griffin has worked in the Hayes City school district for over twenty years, and has been an administrator in multiple schools in the district including elementary and middle school.

In regards to its student population, Edwards is almost 100% Black, between 5% and 10% percent of its students have special needs, almost none of the students qualify as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and close to 80% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.

**Engineering Academy High School**

Engineering Academy High School is a grades 9 – 12 charter school located in Hayes. The original concept of this school was created by a Georgia based policy foundation in conjunction with a Georgia based technology association. Edwards Charter School and Engineering Academy are roughly 2.5 miles away from one another, but are worlds apart in the
quality of their facilities and access to resources. Engineering has significantly less financial support from its partners than Edwards; this was apparent simply by looking at the facilities. In speaking with Mr. Chase, the principal of Engineering Academy, it became clear how his school was extremely limited when it came to accessing resources and improving the condition of his building. Mr. Chase made it clear that he often had to make tough decisions on how his school would allocate its limited funds during the course of our conversation.

Engineering is housed in an old Hayes City Schools building that has been used for multiple purposes over the years. Hayes City Schools provides its charter schools with the option of using one of its older vacant buildings to conduct school at a low cost. Charters in this district have a number of options in regards to facilities, they can accept the building provided by the district, rent another space, purchase a space, or construct their own space. Even though the use of a district building provides charters with facilities at low costs, charters would in turn need to allocate part of their budgets for renovations. Hayes buildings often suffer from issues commonly associated with buildings that are several decades old, have been vacant, and or have been used as storage facilities. Therefore, renovations may include ensuring air conditioning units are operational, floors and walls are repaired, rooms are converted to accommodate class sizes appropriate for the school, windows are repaired, any electrical issues must be addressed, and so on and so forth. This practice of allowing charters to use old buildings also seems to benefit the district, because Hayes City Schools retains the rights to their buildings. So if a charter school is closed for any reason, Hays City Schools reacquires a much-improved building at the expense of the charter school that occupied the building.

In the case of Engineering, they have used funds from their budget to renovate this particular building in a number of ways. Engineering has converted several rooms, which I
would guess did not serve as classrooms prior to their occupation, into classrooms. They have
had to paint the interior walls of the building, fix broken windows, and generally convert the
building into a functional high school. There had been several construction projects to create a
media center, as well as office space for the administrative staff. The media center was a small
room that appeared to be the size of a middle school or elementary classroom. It was less than a
fourth of the size of Edwards’ media center and housed many fewer computers and books. The
hallways of the school building were extremely narrow, and this became more apparent as
students transitioned from one class to the next. The halls became filled with students during
these transitions and caused me to wonder if this facility had been originally constructed for high
school students.

Even though Engineering Academy is less than three miles away from Edwards, the
process of gentrification taking place in the Kennedy Hills community does not seem to be
extending itself to the Engineering campus. The surrounding community of this school remains
to be predominantly low-income and African-American. No neighborhood foundation has
partnered with the school to couple a community revitalization effort with the enhancement of
the school.

According to the Georgia state accountability system, Engineering has been academically
successful making AYP for at least two consecutive years to earn a school improvement status of
Adequate. In addition, Engineering posted a State Performance Index Score of over 80% in the
common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student
population, Engineering is almost 100% Black, between 5% and 10% percent of its students have
special needs, almost none of the students qualify as students with limited English proficiency
(ESOL or ELL), and close to 85% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.
The principal at Engineering is Mr. Chase. Mr. Chase is an African-American male that has worked at the school for two years. Mr. Chase has also had previous experience as a principal in a different district in the metropolitan area.

**Thurgood Marshall Academy**

Thurgood Marshall Academy is a grades PK – 8 school located on the Westside of Hayes, as opposed to both Edwards and Engineering which are located on the Eastside. This PK-8 school is nestled in a historically African-American community consisting of older single-family homes and apartment complexes. Over the years this neighborhood has remained predominantly African-American with no signs of gentrification taking place. This community once housed several large government housing projects, but over the past five years or so these projects have been demolished. In comparison to Kennedy Hills, a much less visible community revitalization effort has been taking place in the general area of the school.

Thurgood Marshall was formed in partnership with several metro area Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and is open to any student residing in the city of Hayes. Like Engineering, Thurgood Marshall is housed in a building supplied by Hays City Schools, but this building seems to fit the needs of Thurgood much better than the other building fit the needs of Engineering. From the looks of Thurgood Marshall’s building, the space most likely previously served as an elementary school. The layout of the building is common for older elementary schools that operated in this district a few decades ago. As with Engineering, Thurgood Marshall has used portions of its budget to renovate aspects of the building, and continues to use its budget to enhance its facilities. Most of the renovations at this school have also been associated with items such as paint, windows, air conditioning, heating, and electrical issues. There was not a
need to address the size of classrooms or to construct new offices, as the layout was already conducive to elementary.

In speaking with Ms. Campbell, the principal of Thurgood Marshal, I was informed of the troubles Thurgood had with receiving financial support from its partners. In comparison to Edwards, Thurgood Marshall has a limited number of partners, and those partners donate at a much less generous rate than those working with Edwards. Ms. Campbell expressed how much she appreciated the support of her partners, but stated that her school often wants for instructional items and improvements to their facilities but are unable to afford them. She also noted that her partners have been willing to donate human resources, but often fail to supply sufficient financial support.

Ms. Campbell is an African-American female administrator who has spent her entire career in education working in urban schools. She has worked as an educator for close to ten years, and she has worked as an administrator for close to five. Ms. Campbell actually worked at Thurgood in an assistant administrative role prior to becoming the school’s principal. In addition, Ms. Campbell not only worked as an educator in other districts, but also was accepted into a prestigious fellowship program giving her the opportunity to visit charter schools across the nation in an effort to study their keys to success.

According to the Georgia state accountability system, Thurgood has had difficulty with its academic success failing to make AYP for the previous year and earning a school improvement status of Adequate Did Not Meet. Thurgood posted a State Performance Index Score below 70% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, Thurgood Marshal is almost 100% Black, between 5% and 10% percent of its students have special needs, almost none of the students qualify as students with
limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and close to 85% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.

Oakwood Elementary

Oakwood Elementary is a grades PK – 5 charter school in Quahog; a city located in the northeast section of the metro area. Oakwood Elementary was first opened as a regular public elementary school and was later converted to a charter when its district, Quahog City Schools, converted to a charter district. According to Mrs. Allen, principal of Oakwood Elementary, Quahog City decided to convert to a charter district for the flexibility it gave the district to meet state accountability standards.

Although Oakwood serves a Title I student population, with over 90% of its students eligible for free and reduced priced meals, the school itself has an abundance of resources; including a newly constructed building and an abundance of instructional resources to aid teachers deliver the curriculum. Mrs. Allen credits the affluence of the city’s residence, the sound management practices of their central office, and Title I funds for giving her the ability to provide such a well equipped learning environment. According to Mrs. Allen, for this school the district is the major partner they rely on for support. Although the school has some outside partners in the community, this charter relies heavily on the support of its district’s central office staff similar to regular public schools.

Being familiar with the city of Quahog, I found it strange that over 75% of the district’s student population (this includes all grades at all district schools) was eligible for free and reduced priced meals. The city appears to be your typical suburban town with many single-family homes, parks, and other amenities you would expect to find in a suburban area. As I spent time in the city, I observed large numbers of European-American conducting business, shopping
in stores, and generally enjoying the amenities of the city. However, I did not see, and the data on the school district does not show, this particular population (middle-class European-Americans) attending the district’s schools. Upon further investigation, I found that there were several private schools in Quahog. It would seem that the middle-class European-American population to some extent is being absorbed by the private school sector. Through a Google search I found 12 private schools (seven serving K-12, one K-7, three serving 6-12, and one 9-12) in this city of around 35,000 residents. This would explain how the district could collect tax revenue from wealthy residents and serve an average student population with over 75% eligible for free and reduced priced meals. According to Mrs. Allen, many middle-class European-American parents in the community elect to send their children to the local (and in county) private schools.

In a review of the Georgia state accountability system, Oakwood Elementary has been academically successful making AYP for at least three consecutive years to earn a school improvement status of Distinguished. In addition, Oakwood posted a State Performance Index Score of over 75% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, Oakwood Elementary is just below 15% Black, over 70% Hispanic, between 5% and 10% percent of its students have special needs, over 55% of its population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and over 90% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.

The school’s principal, Mrs. Allen, is an education veteran with just over 20 years of experience working in the public school sector. Mrs. Allen is an African-American woman who has worked with various student populations in both rural and urban environments, and also
working in another southern state as a classroom teacher. Mrs. Allen has been an administrator for nearly ten years and has spent all but two of those years as an administrator at Oakwood.

Quahog Middle School

Although the city of Quahog has many public elementary school options for its residents, it only has one public middle school option. Quahog Middle serves the city’s 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. The description of Quahog Middle is similar to that of Oakwood Elementary in that the school relies heavily on its district’s central office for support, and receives a great deal of support; financial or otherwise. Much like the elementary school, Quahog Middle’s student population does not reflect the European-American middle-class population present throughout the city. Using an Internet search to determine the percentage of Quahog’s population that is made up of European-Americans (Whites), I found that roughly 40 percent of the city’s population was European-American. When talking to the principal of Quahog Middle, Mr. Malone, I was informed that many city residents do send their children to local private schools, but that the city still supported the district both financially and with human resources. He added that local business and others in the community also supported the public schools in the district.

Like Oakwood Elementary, Quahog Middle existed previously as a regular public school before converting to a charter when the district became a charter district. This school is housed in a newly constructed building, and has been outfitted with technological innovations to support the curriculum such as smart boards and wireless Internet accessibility throughout the building. The school facilities were just as impressive as the facilities at Edwards Charter School. The physical plant was huge, providing plenty of space in the hallways for class transitions, spacious classrooms, a well-developed media center, and unlike most of the start-up charter schools in this
study this school had athletic facilities (Edwards Charter, Oakwood Elementary, Union Middle School, and Grove Shoals Elementary also had athletic facilities).

Mr. Malone has been the principal of this school for almost five years, and has been working as an administrator for almost ten. Mr. Malone is a European-American male with over 20 years experience in the field of education, and has spent all of his career working in Georgia. Although most of Mr. Malone’s experience has been working in the general geographic area of this district, he admits that the student population in Quahog City has a much higher Hispanic and low-income population than his previous districts. Mr. Malone also stated that one problem he would like to see addressed in his school, and in all Georgia schools with high Hispanic populations, is the lack of Hispanic teachers and administrators in the school. Even though Quahog Middle is a majority Hispanic school, the teaching and administrative staff is mostly European-American. Mr. Malone believes that this is not healthy for his students and thinks they need to see more people of their own ethnicity in positions of power. He also stated that having Hispanic staff members could help to serve as role models for the students.

According to the Georgia state accountability system, Quahog Middle School has had difficulty with its academic success failing to make AYP in previous years. However, the school has showed gains by making AYP in its most recent attempt and earning a school improvement status of Needs Improvement – Made AYP. Quahog Middle School posted a State Performance Index Score above 75% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, Quahog Middle School is just over 20% Black, over 55% Hispanic, between 5% and 10% percent of its students have special needs, over 20% of its population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and close to
80% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals. This school is also one of the larger schools in this study serving almost 1,400 students.

**Glendale Academy**

Glendale Academy is a grades 6 – 9 start-up charter school that originally opened as a commission school (the commission was an authorizer in Georgia that had the ability to approve charter schools anywhere in the state. In addition, the commission, unlike the state, could ensure that its schools were fully funded. However, in 2010 the Georgia State Supreme Court ruled the commission unconstitutional and now the commission no longer exists. For an in-depth explanation of the commission please refer back to chapter 2), changed its status to a state chartered special school, and is now designated as a Shire County Public Schools approved charter.

Although Glendale Academy is now a Shire County Public school, the students attending the institution come from a wide attendance zone that spans several counties. Due to the schools past status as a commission school, and a state chartered special school, Glendale was allowed to serve students living outside of Shire County. The school’s leader, Mrs. Richards, is not sure how the school’s attendance zone will change, or how that change might impact the school in years to come; being that the school has been approved by the local district (Shire County). For now, any student attending the Glendale prior to its designation as a Shire County authorized school has been grandfathered into the school’s attendance zone.

Mrs. Richards founded Glendale Academy and also serves as head administrator of the school. Mrs. Richards began her career as a special education teacher in a traditional public school (TPS), and has also taught adult learners. After completing her career as a classroom teacher, Mrs. Richards went on to participate in a prestigious education fellowship program. This
fellowship was a comprehensive training program in charter school creation, and Mrs. Richards credits the support of the program with allowing her to start Glendale. Mrs. Richards is an African-American woman with 14 years of experience in education, six years as an administrator, and four years experience as the head administrator of Glendale Academy.

Glendale Academy is located in an upper-middle class section of Billings, a city located in Shire County. The county is located in the far northeast section of the metro area, and borders the county that houses the city of Quahog. The majority of students that attend Glendale come from Shire County, Piedmont County, and the city of Hayes. Unlike the majority of schools in this study, the students attending Glendale are not from a common neighborhood or section of town. Moreover, the percentage of students in poverty, or those qualifying for free and reduced priced meals, at Glendale is much lower than the percentages at other schools in this study. The fact that this school is a single gender school, and that it serves grades 6 – 9, also made it unique in comparison to other schools in this study.

Glendale Academy has had great academic success. Over the last several years the school has outperformed the state, and the Shire County Public Schools district, on state mandated standardized test. According to the Georgia state accountability system, Glendale has been academically successful, making AYP for at least two consecutive years to earn a school improvement status of Adequate. In addition, Glendale posted a State Performance Index Score of over 93% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, Glendale Academy is just under 85% Black, close to 5% Hispanic, between 0% and 5% percent of its students have special needs, around 10% of its population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and just over 45% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.
Unlike Hayes City Schools, Shire County has not allowed Glendale to use one of its buildings. In fact, when Glendale presented its original charter petition to Shire County Public Schools the district denied their charter. Now that Shire County has finally approved Glendale’s charter, the district still refuses to support the school in many ways including support with facilities cost. Glendale Academy rents a space in an office complex, and has retro fitted the building to accommodate the needs of a 6 – 9 school. For instance, Glendale has mounted white boards to the walls of its classrooms, converted an open space into a low functioning media center, installed wireless Internet throughout the building, and added lockers in the hallways. Unlike Engineering, Glendale is housed in a relatively new and well-kept building, and did not have the need to allocate part of their budget to address issues relating to electrical problems or replacing the air conditioner and heating unit. However, Glendale does have to pay rent to a landlord, and the cost of rent absorbs a large portion of their budget.

Cedar Pines Academy

Cedar Pines Academy is a grades 5 – 8 start-up charter school that is supported by a Charter Management Organization (CMO). According to the CMO that supports the school, Cedar Pines is affiliated with a national network of charter schools. The national foundation that supports the school does not refer to itself specifically as a CMO. However, the national foundation has been awarded at least one multi-million dollar federal education grant established to support CMOs. In addition, the foundation supports the establishment and management of several Cedar Schools. Examples of popular CMOs, and national organizations that support the establishment and management of charter schools similar to Cedar Pines, include Uncommon Schools, Imagine Schools, Success Charter Network, Propel Schools, YES Prep, Noble Network, Mastery Charter Schools, LEARN Charter School Network, Achievement First, and Aspire
Public Schools. Therefore, I would describe Cedar Pines Academy as part of the Cedar Schools national chain of charter schools. It is one of many Cedar Schools across the nation.

As a Dexter County authorized school, Cedar Pines was supplied a building by the district, much like the start-up charter schools authorized by Hayes City Schools. Cedar Pines’ physical plant is similar to that of Thurgood Marshals’. The building had clearly been used previously as an elementary school, but the building occupied by Cedar Pines looked to be either newer or had been renovated to a greater degree than Thurgood Marshal. The building appeared to be freshly painted, the hallways were clean and the flooring looked to be in good condition, the classrooms seemed to be appropriately sized for their students, and the general function of the building appeared to be in order. As I stated before, this building is an old elementary school building once used by and provided by the district. With that said, the district schools have all received either new buildings or newly renovated buildings over the last ten years. Therefore, this building is out of date and has more wear than other district schools. According to the principal, Mr. Murphy, the school community would like to have a newer building, but the space was sufficient for conducting school.

Dexter County is one of the larger counties in the metro area and has a socioeconomically distinctive north and south end. The communities and residents of north Dexter County are typically more affluent and more European-American than the communities and residents of south Dexter. The residents and communities of south Dexter tend to be more African-American and less affluent. Over the last several years, the residents of north Dexter have petitioned the state of Georgia for a constitutional amendment allowing for the formation of a new county. This would allow north Dexter to separate from south Dexter. North Dexter County residents
complain that a disproportionate share of their tax dollars are being diverted from the north end and sent to the more populous city of Hayes (also in Dexter County) and south Dexter.

Cedar Pines is located in south Dexter County and is a majority Black school. Similar to many metropolitan areas in the United States, the poorer sections of this metropolitan area tend to be more populated with Black people, while the more affluent sections of the metro tend to be populated with White people. Even though Cedar Pines is open to all students residing in Dexter County, only students from south Dexter attend the school. The neighborhood that Cedar Pines is located within is not presently conducting a revitalization effort like other neighborhoods in the study, nor does the school appear to have an abundance of community partners like Edwards Charter Academy. However, Mr. Murphy notes that the school has received a considerable amount of guidance and support from the Cedar Schools national foundation. The national foundation has been instrumental with supplying resources and guidance to the school, as well as providing guidance on how to obtain resources from other entities.

Mr. Murphy is an African-American male who has worked in education for close to 20 years. He spent a number of years as a classroom teacher in urban areas, before becoming a school leader. Mr. Murphy has been in an administrative role for almost 10 years and has been the leader of Cedar Pines for almost five years. According to the Georgia state accountability system, Cedar Pines has been academically successful making AYP for at least three consecutive years to earn a school improvement status of Distinguished. In addition, Cedar Pines posted a State Performance Index Score of over 92% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, Cedar Pines is almost 100% Black, between 0% and 5% percent of its students have special needs, almost none of the
students qualify as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and close to 70% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.

**Union Middle School**

Union Middle School is a grades 7 – 8 charter school located in central Lawrence, and is part of the Lawrence City Schools charter district. The city of Lawrence is located 20 miles northwest of the metropolitan area’s central city downtown district, and is home to one of the state’s first charter districts. Union Middle previously existed as a TPS until its district, Lawrence City Schools, converted from a traditional public district to a charter district. Union is unique to this study in so far as it is the only school that serves two grade levels (7th and 8th). The Lawrence City Schools district has established a number of alternative education options for students enrolled in the sixth grade, but once students reach the seventh grade they must attend Union Middle.

Similar to schools in Quahog, the schools in Lawrence rely heavily on their district’s central office for financial and administrative support. Additionally, Union Middle’s principal, Mr. Brown, noted that Union has a very supportive and successful relationship with its district.

The building seems to fit the needs of the administration, as it was initially constructed as a middle school and has been renovated frequently. According to Mr. Brown, any renovations needed are completed at the district’s expense and have been done in order to accommodate the district’s students. During the course of this study I found that charter schools in charter districts had far less issues in relation to gaining adequate facilities, and Union was no exception. This school, very similar to Quahog Middle, had athletic facilities, an adequate media center, adequate space for classrooms, spacious hallways for students’ transitions, lockers for student use, and for the most part this school had everything one would expect to see in a middle school.
Analyzing each school in this study, I noticed an interesting phenomenon taking place with regard to how accurately these charter schools reflected the demographics of the residential areas they served. For instance, a number of the schools in this study are located in predominantly African-American communities (Edwards Charter, Engineering Academy, Thurgood Marshall, and Cedar Pines), and not surprisingly almost 100% of students attending the school are African-American. However, although Union Middle School’s student body is much more reflective of its residential population than Quahog Middle’s or Oakwood’s are of their city’s residential population, Union Middle is still more Black and less White than the demographics of the city would suggest it should be.

Union Middle’s low population of White students could be the result of White residents enrolling in any one of the many private schools located in Lawrence and Seminal County (the county in which Lawrence is located), much like it is possible that Quahog’s white residents may be exiting their local public schools for private schools. Glendale Academy and Cross Town Academy are both located in predominately European-America cities, but their student bodies are predominantly African-American and Hispanic respectively.

The point here is that each school is situated in a slightly different racial/ethnic socioeconomic neighborhood context, as well as existing in a unique racial/ethnic socioeconomic school community. For Union Middle, its neighborhood community consists of Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, but its school community is disproportionally Black in relation to the neighborhood community it serves.

Union Middle School’s principal, Mr. Brown, is an African-American male that has worked in urban education for his entire 20-year career. For almost 15 years, Mr. Brown has worked as a public school administrator, and he has been principal of Union Middle for over 5
years. According to the Georgia state accountability system, Union Middle School has been academically successful making AYP for at least two consecutive years to earn a school improvement status of Adequate. Union Middle posted a State Performance Index Score above 82% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, Union Middle is just under 50% Black, just under 30% Hispanic, between 5% and 10% percent of its students have special needs, almost 10% of its population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and close to 70% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals. This school is also one of the larger schools serving just over 1,000 students.

**Grove Shoals Elementary**

Grove Shoals Elementary is a PK – 5 charter school in the Lawrence City Schools district. Like Union Middle School, Grove Shoals was a TPS until the district converted into a charter district. This school is located on the eastside of Lawrence, which is home to a large Hispanic community. According to Mr. Harper, the principal of Grove Shoals, Lawrence City Schools is Grove Shoals’ major supporting school partner. Mr. Harper noted that the school district does a great job of ensuring that the school has all the resources, both human and material, that it needs to provide students with an adequate education.

All four schools housed in charter districts in this study noted the support they received from their districts. At some point during the course of our conversations each of these school leaders mentioned how their district did a great job of helping them achieve their goals. In contrast, charters authorized by non-charter districts for the most part described an opposite relationship with their districts. In the case of Grove Shoals, Lawrence City provided a school facility that was renovated regularly at the districts expense, just like Union Middle and the
schools of Quahog. Grove Shoals’ building had a gymnasium for the purpose of sports and other activities; it housed a fully functional media center with computers and a media specialist as well.

Grove Shoals has a great deal of parent and community support. During the course of my visit, there were several parents visiting the school with their students. A number of parents came to the school in order to volunteer, giving support to office staff and teachers who were decorating their classrooms (I conducted my visit while the teachers were preparing for the beginning of the school year). Mr. Harper also informed me during our conversation that his parents were very involved with the school curriculum and as part of their school’s model they allowed parents to make suggestions on academic programs for the students, the after school programs, as well as plan celebrations for student accomplishments. Mr. Harper has an open door policy and allows members of the community, as well as his own staff, whenever they have an issue that needs to be addressed. Although there is no formal neighborhood organization representing the needs of community members or parents, the community members and parents of this school have a great deal of influence in what goes on in the school. Moreover, the community members are very supportive partners in education with Grove Shoals.

Mr. Harper is an African-American male who has worked in education for almost 15 years. His entire education background consists of working in urban, low-income, majority-minority schools. Mr. Harper has focused his practice in the elementary school grades, working each year of his career as either an elementary school teacher or administrator. Mr. Harper has been an elementary administrator for seven years and the principal of Grove Shoals for six years.

Grove Shoals has been academically successful, making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at least three consecutive years to earn its present school improvement status of
Distinguished. In addition, Grove Shoals posted a State Performance Index Score of over 76% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, Grove Shoals is just over 25% Black, close to 65% Hispanic, a little over 10% percent of its students have special needs, over 55% of the population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and almost 90% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.

**Cross Town Academy**

Cross Town Academy is a grades 5 – 8 charter school that has been authorized by the Piedmont County Public Schools district. Piedmont County is not a charter district, and the relationship between Cross Town and Piedmont is the epitome of a poor authorizer / charter school relationship.

According to the school’s founder and current principal, Mrs. Turner, Cross Town Academy has operated without the support of its authorizer since its inception. Mrs. Turner informed me that the district refused to supply Cross Town with a building, has not allocated funds to the school properly, and often miss informs Cross Town staff members on policies pertaining to school operations and charter school entitlements. Even though the school has a poor relationship with the district, Cross Town seems to produce incredible student academic performance.

Having a limited number of partners, Cross Town has had to use its staff to gain financial, material, and human resources. Unlike a number of schools in this study, Cross Town is not able to rely on its parent community, or district community, for support. The students that are served by Cross Town are largely refugees from foreign countries, or children of low-income recent immigrants, and therefore many of the school’s parents are unable to volunteer as
classroom support staff or provide the school with financial and material resources. This inability of parents to support Cross Town, in the same ways as other communities observed in this study, is due in large part to issues regarding language barriers and access to money. Cross Town’s staff has gained a great deal of financial support from applying for and winning competitive grants. The school was also able to develop a relationship with a local college, which led to the college providing Cross Town with a building at a low cost. Mrs. Turner credits the relationship with the college with allowing the school to operate.

Piedmont County Public Schools traditionally serve African-American students; about 70% of the district's student population is classified as Black. However, since Cross Town Academy aims to serve the growing population of immigrant and refugee children in the county, the demographics of this school is very different from neighboring schools. In regards to its student population, Cross Town is just under 30% Black, close to 70% Hispanic, just under 5% of its students have special needs, over 20% of the population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and just over 80% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals. And although the percent of students qualifying as second language learners at Cross Town is far less than some other schools in this study, Cross Town serves a much higher percentage of limited English proficient students at over 20% than its district at around 10%. Cross Town also serves a high percentage of students’ qualifying for free and reduced priced meals at just over 80% as compared to Piedmont County Public Schools at just under 70%.

Academically, Cross Town has been able to outperform district averages, and has been one of the county’s top performing schools, since it opened. According to the Georgia state accountability system, Cross Town has been academically successful making AYP for at least
three consecutive years to earn a school improvement status of Distinguished. Cross Town posted a State Performance Index Score of over 91% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. Moreover, Cross Town has shown academic gains each year it has been opened, and in its last year of reported test data the school gained more than 83% of schools in the state of Georgia.

Leading the academic success of Cross Town is Mrs. Turner with almost 35 years of experience in education. Mrs. Turner has been a classroom teacher, an ESOL instructor, as well as an administrator in low-income high minority schools for most of her career. As a fellow in a prestigious program on educational development, Mrs. Turner has had the opportunity to observe educational environments in other countries, as well as throughout the United States. Mrs. Turner has been an administrator for over 10 years and has been the head of Cross Town for almost 10 years.

**The World Charter Academy**

The World Charter Academy serves grades PK – 5 and is authorized by the Berry County Public Schools district. The World Charter is unique to this study in that it provides its students with a dual language program. In the lower grades (PK – 1), World Charter delivers 70% of its instruction in Spanish and 30% in English. When students reach grades 2 – 5, 50% of instruction is delivered in Spanish and 50% is delivered in English. The World Charter has three goals for its students; achieve fluency and literacy in both Spanish and English, achieve proficiency in all academic subjects, and to be prepared to participate in an international community. The World Charter divides its classes so that equal numbers of native English and native Spanish speakers are grouped together in each class. The school attempts to create an environment where students
learn both languages across the curriculum through immersion; instead of using a pull out model like most schools that provide foreign language classes.

The World Charter seems to have a good working relationship with its authorizer. The configuration of this relationship is far from the supportive school/authorizer relationship that has been established in Quahog and Lawrence, but it is not as tumultuous as the relationship between Cross Town and Piedmont County either. The World Charter’s relationship with its authorizer is more like that of Edwards, Engineering, Thurgood, Cedar Pines, and their authorizers.

The World’s principal, Ms. Gold, noted that Berry County did supply The World with an older building, which the school has renovated using funds from its budget. The building was originally constructed to serve an elementary school population, and therefore the facility seemed appropriate for the school’s use. However, the building is old and was not originally equipped to house the number of students The World now serves. During my visit, the school was undergoing renovations to the floors, and having rooms remodeled and expanded. Further, Ms. Gold was combating issues with the school’s Internet connection, and attempting to find money in the budget to begin to undergo the process of outfitting the facility with wireless Internet. The school did not have space for an elaborate media center like some of the other schools in the study, and like many of the other schools in this study, The World attempted to create a space that was appropriate for a functioning media center.

Although Ms. Gold relies on the Berry County Public Schools district for financial and administrative support, to initiate renovations and other efforts, The World Charter also seeks out support from the community. Since The World was not established by a CMO, a neighborhood or community foundation, or a national charter schools network; the school has partnered with
local business, a bank, and applied for grants to receive additional financial and material recourses. According to Ms. Gold, due to being located in a financially strapped county (located about 13 miles south of the central city in the metro area) it has been difficult for the school to gain the type of financial support it would like from its local businesses.

Ms. Gold is a European-American woman who has worked in the education field for almost 40 years. Many of her years in the field have been spent working with students that qualify as students with limited English proficiency. Ms. Gold was a classroom teacher for almost seven years, has been in administration for over 30 years, and has been the principal of The World Charter Academy for over five years. The World Charter Academy has been academically successful, making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at least three consecutive years to earn its present school improvement status of Distinguished. In addition, The World posted a State Performance Index Score of over 74% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. In regards to its student population, The World Charter is around 45% Black, 50% Hispanic, between 0% and 5% of its students have special needs, over 30% of the population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and just over 80% of its students qualify for free and reduced priced meals.

Life Academy

Life Academy is a K – 8 charter school located on the southeast side of Hayes; and although Life is authorized by the Hayes City Schools system, the school is affiliated with a CMO (Life Schools) who is the school’s most influential partner.

Similar to Edwards Charter School, Life Academy is located in an area of Hayes that is currently undergoing a population shift. Large government housing projects once stood in this section of Hayes (in addition to a number of large apartment complexes catering to low-income
residents). However, over the past 10 years, a revitalization process that many refer to as gentrification has begun to take place. Now this section of Hayes is home to a strange mix of high-income and low-income residents. Mixed in between dilapidated single-family homes, and the few last standing apartment complexes serving low-income families in this section of town, are newly renovated and newly constructed single-family homes and condo developments for high-income residents. With this change in housing patterns, a change in the racial and ethnic makeup of the residents of this community has appeared as well.

Not having conducted a study on the political, economic, and residential history of this section of the city, I will not attempt to discuss how or why this process of residential change has occurred. What is known about this section of Hayes is that it has been, and still is, a predominantly African-American community dating back to the 1960s. However, sometime during the beginning of the new millennium, old housing started to be demolished; new homes began to be constructed; some other older homes were bought, sold, and renovated; and European Americans, Asian Americans, and other ethnic groups with high-incomes began moving into the community. Moreover, affluent African-Americans who had previously not lived in the community also began to move into the community. As this small enclave of affluent residents of all ethnicities grew, so did their demand for a public education option outside of the city schools that their homes were zoned for.

The CMO Life Schools opened a charter school the Hills Park community in order to serve these “new” residents. This is evident in the fact that Life Schools attempted to create a school zone for Life Academy that only encompassed the Hills Park community (which is the neighborhood that is currently experiencing gentrification in southeast Hayes). According to Life Academy’s new principal, Mr. Kelly, their initial school zone encompassing only Hills Park was
too small and did not allow the school to serve enough students to stay financially viable. Therefore, the school expanded its school zone to allow all students living in the city of Hayes to attend. While working in the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) Charter Schools Division, I remember the issue of Life Academy wanting to designate a primary and a secondary attendance zone and that not being permitted by the state. Life wanted to designate the Hills Park community as its primary attendance zone (allowing students from this community to occupy as many seats as possible in the school), as well as designating the remaining city of Hayes as its secondary attendance zone (giving the school the ability to admit students from the city once it had accommodated all resident student population in Hills Park). Life Academy was informed by the GaDOE that they were not allowed to implement a primary and secondary attendance zone as they intended to use it, and that either they establish the Hills Park community as their attendance zone, or designate the city of Hayes as their attendance zone. Life Academy opted to select the city of Hayes as its attendance zone.

An interesting phenomenon of chartering is that charter schools have a need to advertise in order to get students to attend their schools. It seems, from looking at the student body of Life Academy, speaking with the new school principal, and noting the demographics of Life Academy’s surrounding neighborhoods (which are predominantly African-American and low-income); the previous administrative staff may have advertised most heavily to the affluent residents of Hills Park and similarly configured neighborhoods. A number of the original Life Academy teaching and administrative staff are no longer with the school.

In regards to its student population, Life Academy is around 75% Black, 5% Hispanic, between 0% and 5% of its students have special needs, less than 2% of the population qualifies as students with limited English proficiency (ESOL or ELL), and just over 46% of its students
qualify for free and reduced priced meals. According to the Georgia state accountability system, Life Academy failed to make AYP for the previous year earning a school improvement status of Adequate Did Not Meet. However, Life posted a State Performance Index Score of over 82% in the common year used to calculate school performance for this study. Although the school was successful academically, Life failed to make AYP due to its second indicator, which is attendance. The school does not provide transportation for its students, and perhaps this is a reason for its students’ poor attendance rates; however that is purely speculation on my part.

Life is housed in a newly constructed building that was provided by its CMO. The school pays rent for the use of the building to the CMO and this has caused Life a strain on their budget. Even though the physical plant has state of the art equipment, and is well equipped to meet the staff’s and students’ needs, Mr. Kelly says the school is contemplating accepting an old building from Hayes to alleviate the burden of paying an exceptionally high rent. Mr. Kelly, who has worked in the field of education for almost 40 years, believes that the school could divert a large portion of what is paid in rent and use those funds to support student learning. Mr. Kelly has worked in urban education for his entire career in a multitude of states in both the south and the north. He was a classroom teacher for just under 10 years, has served as an administrator for over 30 years, and has been the principal of Life for two years.

Protocol and Procedures of the Interpre-view

I met with participants at their school sites and engaged them in conversations about the impacts NCLB had on their organizational and curricular practices. I found that sitting down with participants and holding conversations was fitting for this study.

As we conducted our conversations, many of the principals were interrupted by staff members and asked to address issues dealing with the school. Many of the issues had nothing to
do with NCLB. Participants often informed me that if they were walking around the school conducting normal business it would be difficult for them to have a conversation with me. In addition, by gaining a block of time on the principal’s schedule I was assured that they would not be pulled into a meeting that I would not be allowed to attend.

On and off campus meetings that principals are involved in include those with parents, staff, students, and district personnel. The participants preferred to simply set aside a block of time to discuss their school practices in relation to NCLB with me.

As I conducted conversations with participants, I implemented a style of interview as proscribed by the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpretive View method. As participants provided their perspective on how NCLB impacted, or did not impact, their practices, I used this method to analyze their response during the course of the conversations. I conducted an analysis by summarizing and restating answers to ensure that I understood the meaning of their statements. I also attempted to challenge the participants on statements they made to ensure that they believed the stance they presented and to ensure I understood that stance.

Additionally, I provided alternative thoughts on issues pertaining to the topics we discussed to display my biases, and then dialogued with participants to see if they agreed, or disagreed, with my statements. This process allowed me to analyze the answers provided by each participant during the course of these conversations. As I conducted each interview I was able to both collect and analyze data generated by our conversations.

**Challenges of Collecting Data**

Upon further reflection, I found it difficult to use the tactic of “challenging participants” during the course of the Interpretive views. As I spoke with participants I remained conscious of the fact that these administrators had taken time out of their busy schedules to participate in my
study. I felt they were being extremely gracious by providing me time and allowing me into their schools. I also did not feel that I had built strong enough relationships with these participants to rashly challenge their comments, or the contradictions that aroused in their statements. With that said, I did point out contradictions made by participants, and I also challenged them on their statements, but I believe that if I had known these participants for a number of years and had developed strong professional relationships with them, I would have been able to challenge their statements in perhaps a more aggressive way. However, I am not sure if this would have yielded different responses during the course of our conversations.

There were times during the course of the interview process when I felt that if I were interviewing a friend, or a coworker, I would have been more easily able to point out contradictory statements without feeling uncomfortable. In order to maintain a level of comfort with the process, I presented participants’ contradictions in a non-judgmental way and simply asked for clarification as I brought the conversations back around to their previous statements. I informed participants that I was attempting to understand how they truly felt about that particular issue and needed clarity on their statements. I often attempted to summarize participants’ statements as well to ensure that I understood their points of view, and then I asked if I had captured their sentiment correctly. This tactic (summarizing) worked well and caused me to feel much more comfortable when pointing out contradictory statements or when challenging participants’ points of view. The most difficult part about using this method came from the power relationship that was established between researcher and participant. Since I was working on their time, I believe I had to be more careful with how I challenged their statements and sensitive to the fact that they had agreed to participate in the study after I begged for their participation.
I did find that my comfort with challenging certain participants was greater than with others. For some reason I was able to more quickly develop relationships, or bonds, with some participants than I was able to with others. This bond allowed me to feel more comfortable with challenging their statements and pointing out contradictions as the conversations progressed. These participants also seemed to be more self-reflective, and enjoyed reflecting on their practices and how NCLB influenced their school’s operations, during our conversations.

Being an outsider, I was worried that school leaders may neglect to share school related issues with me. Prior to beginning data collection, I was concerned that administrators would fear sharing their points of view with me, due to their belief that I may negatively judge their abilities as administrators. It is easily understandable how a researcher could formulate an opinion about the level of competency of a school leader based on responses in a conversation. I imagined that some school leaders might even withhold information, embellish the impacts or lack of impacts NCLB had on their practices, due to my status as an outsider. Additionally, I worried that some school leaders would even downplay the limitations of their staffs, or schools, to adhere to the mandates of NCLB due to my status as an outsider.

I attempted to combat this potential barrier of being an outsider by ensuring school leaders that I was not conducting a study to critique their ability as an administrator, but instead I wanted to understand the impacts NCLB accountability mandates had on their practices. I believed that if I could convince participants that they had been invited to participate in this study because (1) they were the experts on the topic, (2) it would allow them to inform policymakers of the impacts NCLB accountability mandates had on their school practices, and that (3) their input may ultimately influence future State and Federal education policy regarding evaluation of schools and allowable flexibilities; then I was sure this would alleviate their
apprehension and encourage them to be forthcoming in their statements during the Interpre-
views. However, as I conducted conversations with each participant I felt that everyone was
very open and willing to discuss their schools, and their own, strengths and weaknesses; as well
as how the policy impacted their school related practices.

It was noted in Glesne (2006) that when researchers increase the amount of time they
spend with their participants they are better be able to build a rapport. One issue I was concerned
with was the amount of time I was able to spend with each of my participants. School leaders
have very busy workdays as noted above, and therefore my time with them was limited. I was
able to conduct interviews that lasted about an hour on average.

I believe that by implementing the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpre-view method, I was
able to address “limited time” as a barrier to building rapport. I found that the use of a method
that required dialogue helped gain participants’ trust and truthful responses. As we conducted our
conversations, participants had the opportunity to get to know me, my views, and feel more
comfortable with the person that they were speaking with. I was able to tell that this phenomenon
was taking place as participants became more relaxed and open during the course of our
conversations. Moreover, the participants and I continued conversing about the interview and
how they felt during the interview after I had concluded the official interview and the recorders
were turned off.

Each conversation was audio taped so that I would be able to recreate the statements
made by participants and myself verbatim. These statements were then used to illustrate the
findings of this study. Follow-up conversations were not necessary as I was able to analyze and
clarify statements during the original conversations.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Conversations and perceptions: what administrators think about NCLB

The purpose of this multiple-interview study is to describe the perceptions of charter school administrators, who serve majority-minority student populations in a metropolitan area in Georgia, on how accountability mandates provided by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) impact their organizational and curricular practices. This research study attempts to explore how NCLB supports, and or impedes, the efforts of charter school administrators to successfully educate their students.

Initial questions of focus for this study included (1) how does NCLB influence the organizational and curricular practices of Georgia charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations, (2) how does NCLB influence the goals and objectives of these charter school administrators, and (3) How might NCLB support majority-minority charter school administrators in educating their students?

The conversations used to both collect and analyze data revealed a number of somewhat overlapping categories that captured the participants’ critique of NCLB, as well as illustrated how NCLB impacted their practices. Using the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpretive methodology and method, participants drove our conversations in directions that allowed me to better understand how they perceived NCLB and its impacts on their educational practices. In addition, this process also allowed participants to suggest changes to the current policy, which they believe will enhance the policy.
While discussing the impacts of NCLB, five themes emerged in our conversations that better allowed me to understand how NCLB impacted these administrators’ practices and school environments. Although initially it seemed some of these themes might not have been directly related to how NCLB impacted these administrators, these themes allowed for the conversations to reveal just that. The five themes include: (1) the fairness of NCLB, (2) NCLB not supporting school goals, (3) NCLB and funding, (4) NCLB and subgroup student populations, and (5) NCLB impacting organization and curriculum.

It is important to note that the five themes that emerged in this study are not mutually exclusive and tend to overlap. Numerous pieces of data could fit under multiple themes, however, statements will be presented under particular themes that seem most appropriate to the researcher. Ultimately the statements presented below detail how these participants view NCLB impacting their practice.

Although the goal of this study was to better understand how NCLB impacts the organizational and curricular practices of these charter schools, exploring the other four themes enabled me to present appropriate questions during the course of our conversations; address contradictory statements made by participants; and also allowed me to better develop an understanding of how these administrators perceive NCLB impacting their practices and school environments. This chapter will display the comments stated by participants to describe how they perceive NCLB impacting their practices and school environments.

The initial question asked to all participants was, “How do you see mandates of the No Child Left Behind policy impacting your organizational and curricular practices?” After that initial question, all other questions presented in the conversations were driven by the responses of each participant. Therefore, many of the questions presented to participants during the
conversations contain phrases such as, “From what you said earlier,” “So what you are saying is,” “So would you say that,” and so on and so forth. Using the Socratic-Hermeneutic Interpretation methodology and method, the responses of participants were used to drive the creation of subsequent relevant questions and to remain focused on how each participant viewed NCLB impacting their practices. In this study, understanding how participants perceived NCLB impacting their practices and environments was of value and relevant.

Findings – The 5 Categories

(1) NCLB, How Fair is That?

During the course of many conversations I asked participants if NCLB was a fair policy. Comments relating to the theme of fairness helped develop an understanding of how NCLB impacted these school environments, as well as allowed participants to suggest policy changes that also gave insight on how NCLB impacted their school environments. As stated above, examining fairness allowed me to present questions and further explore the impacts of NCLB, which will be presented in other sections of this chapter.

In view of their collective statements, these administrators presented mixed ideas in regards to the fairness of NCLB. Most administrators noted that the policy unfairly assesses the adequacy of schools due to the fact that the current assessment system does not take into account the level of academic growth individual students make during the course of a year. Others stated that the use of a single test to measure school adequacy was ineffective and that multiple measures should be used to assess the adequacy of schools. Moreover, other participants noted that in addition to only using a single test to assess school adequacy, only the subject areas of Math and Reading/English Language Arts are used to assess school adequacy; making for an incomplete assessment of school performance.
However, a few administrators did note that the current assessment system, which is mandated by NCLB, at least in part fairly assess how well schools educate their students. Moreover, it was noted that the current assessment system credits schools for producing school wide academic growth from year to year, making it a fair assessment of school adequacy. This idea that NCLB fairly assesses school adequacy was by far a minority opinion. Administrators stating that the assessment mandates of NCLB are somewhat fair noted that the policy could be fashioned to more fairly assess schools. The remaining of this section details how administrators perceive the fairness of NCLB.

When asked, “So would you say that with the testing aspect of NCLB, which uses standardized test to measure the adequacy of schools, teachers, and also provides an AYP ranking for your school; do you think that’s a fair assessment of schools?” Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School presented a story of his time as an administrator at a TPS to illustrate the unfair aspects of NCLB. And although the scenario he presented took place at a TPS, Mr. Griffin believes that this unfair quality of the policy impacts charter schools and TPS alike.

When I was at Jackson Middle I had boys from Somalia. There was 45 of them walked in, they had been in refugee camps for 7 years, no education. We looked at them, threw them in the 6th, 7th, or 8th grade depending on how tall they were and they had to be tested out. You know, these types of things I think kind of make people say man how do you…and now the whole school is trashed because we took 60 refugees in. Those are the things that I think kind of say well what’s the real story about a school being successful and a school not being successful. And I think that is where the rub comes from some of us educators when you have those type of successions. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter)

Later in the conversation, I circled back to the topic of fairness and NCLB by stating:

Is there anything in the policy, because you said that you would keep the analysis of subgroups, is there anything that you say would unfairly evaluate schools. Or is the way that the policy is currently structured, with using standardized test to measure schools performance, do you think that the way we have it now… (Davis, Researcher)

To which Mr. Griffin answered:
Well if you live and die on how a 7th grader feels on any particular day he comes to school. My gosh, who would want to say my whole career and my worth is evaluated on how some middle school kid walks in to a school on a particular day. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter)

Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary was asked a similar question regarding fairness, “Do you think the test fairly assess student and teacher performance?” Mrs. Allen’s “No,” in addition to the rest of her statement, further supports the last statement made by Mr. Griffin. Her response illustrates how the assessment protocol provided by NCLB (using a standardized test given once per year) unfairly measures the success of schools:

No. I just don’t think that one test can do that. I think you do have to have multiple sources you are looking at. You cannot base it on one test, your promotion retention policies. But your hands are tied and that state law says at certain grade levels… but I just don’t believe that one test should determine. And I think if you look at what is going on now with people being unethical with testing, you know, they put such a, you know, they’re such high stake test you can see why people would do some craziness like that. I wouldn’t, you know, it’s never worth it. You know it’s about taking care of children and what’s best for children or are they learning. (Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary)

Mrs. Allen goes on to illustrate how NCLB assessments mandates are also unfair to students when she states:

Now if a child is a third grader and he is reading on a first grade level, I am going to assume that he is probably not going to pass the third grade test. The more reasonable thing to do is to give him a test on the level that he is performing at to see how he is doing. So I think if you are going to do testing, which I am all for, I think you have to inspect what you expect, and so how do you know if children are learning if you’re never assessing them, I think assessment has to drive your instruction. But at the same time if I know he is not on that level then why put him through that agony why put him through the stress. (Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary)

Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School noted that NCLB unfairly assess schools due to the fact it fails to consider growth individual students make during the course of the year when he states:

Well Malone tells his teachers, “I don’t critique them and judge them on one test on one day.” That’s my biggest complaint about it. Because, like you just said, it doesn’t grade the progress or the growth that that child made. (Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School)
After speaking about other aspects of the policy, Mr. Malone returned to the topic of fairness and stated:

Same thing with the CRCT, it is a snapshot on one day. It doesn’t give us an exact picture it gives us a direction we need to go in. It enables us to target kids, subject areas, standards, so that is my one complaint about the CRCT is that it does not measure growth it just measures where you are at that time. Plus we have another month to go after CRCT, so we’re being judged on standards that have either been rushed through, or not been taught at all in some cases I’m sure. (Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School)

In contrast to the opinions of other participants in the study, Mrs. Richards of Glendale Academy found the assessment mandates of NCLB to be fair. When asked, “Do you think the accountability system we have in Georgia, using the CRCT to measure your students’ and school’s performance, is a fair assessment of your school’s performance?” Mrs. Richards replied, “Yes.”

I think it’s ok. I think I would like to see how we do on national norm test, and we have only been able to do that once or twice. And I think that would be a more accurate representation of the ability of our students and how they compare to their peers nationally. But, I think it’s a fair assessment of what’s been taught and we are teaching state standards, I think is the basement. (Mrs. Richards of Glendale Academy)

Unlike most other participants, Mrs. Richards did not discuss using a growth model to assess student and school success. As seen above, Mrs. Richards believes that the state accountability system illustrates how well students learn state standards within a given subject area for a particular grade level. According to Mrs. Richards, this is a fair way of assessing the success of schools and students.

Mr. Brown of Union Middle School agrees with Mrs. Richards’ assessment of the state’s mandated accountability system to a degree. Mr. Brown proceeds to explain why the current system is a fair way of assessing teachers’, schools’, and students’ performance. However, in this same statement, Mr. Brown does note that there may be other ways, and perhaps more fair ways, to assess performance when he states:
That is a fair way but not the only fair way. The bottom line is what do you do with those kids in the course of an academic year. And there needs to be some type of measure, but there should be a lot of different measures. There shouldn’t just be CRCT results or Georgia High School Graduation results. I mean there are grades, there are progress reports, there are oral test you can give, there are surveys, there are a lot of different things, you can look at pre and post, you can look at a gambit of things, observations, but at the end of the day the one equalizer if you will is the CRCT for us. Here is what you did. Here is your summative assessment. I think that the principals that say it is not fair are not fair. Now I do love the fact that there are several different ways to make AYP beyond the absolute bar. Whether it’s the confidence interval, whether it’s the multiyear averaging, whether it’s safe harbor. The reason why I particularly like safe harbor is because they’re telling me, you know what, you can make it as long as 10% of your kids decrease in the Did Mot Meets category or increases in any other area. I think that’s very fair. I think that’s more than fair. If that were not in place I would probably not agree with No Child Left Behind. But because they’ve showed sensitivity, in Georgia especially, they’ve done some really unique things with students with disabilities by giving flexibility, but the bottom line is no one is saying that you have to hit that absolute bar every year, they’re saying we want to see progress. And I think that’s fair. So for those principals that say they don’t like it, I don’t understand why they don’t like it because all schools have improved in some way, whether they have done it legally or not, they have improved as a result of No Child Left Behind. (Mr. Brown of Union Middle School)

In contrast to the statements made by Mr. Brown and Mrs. Richards, Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines Academy explains how the current state accountability system, mandated by NCLB, is unfair when he states:

Of course it’s not a fair way I would say. I don’t feel it’s fair. I think it is a valid measure, but you need other measures in place to give you a better picture of what a child has done. So maybe they have not reached this absolute measure, but they came from reading at a first grade level and now they’re reading at a third or fourth grade level in a year; I mean that is tremendous. But we do look at that through the ITBS test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, to measure growth with our kids; but that is something we do on our own that is not something that is mandated by the state or the district. (Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines Academy)

Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy found aspects of the No Child Left Behind policy to be unfair as well. When asked, “How do you see the mandates of No Child Left Behind impacting the things you do here in the school?” Mrs. Turner immediately spoke about various
impacts the policy has had on her practices and on the school environment, but then quickly turned the conversation towards the fairness of the policy by stating:

But what I think went wrong is that it went overboard, No Child Left Behind, it thinks that all kids are the same. Every child needs to be served, yes, but every child should not be served the same way. And the accountability part, the part that bothers me most, is that they think that kids who are Special Ed, or kids who are ESOL, or people who have never studied language, or some of my kids have no formal education, like they came in this country and this is the first time they have gone to school, but they count their test score exactly like those who have been born in this country and are gifted, let alone… So they just dump everybody in the same category, no if and or buts, and then they penalize schools whose students are not making the grade. (Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy)

Mrs. Turner further illustrates from her perspective how the policy unfairly assess the performance of schools and students by sharing the story of a student who came to her unable to read, or speak English, and who made incredible gains, but still was unable to perform at grade level on the CRCT:

Like I have one student who first came, she had never been in school, and came to us in the 5th grade, and now she can read. She is in the 7th grade now, she should be in 8th but we had to retain her because she had never been in school. Her parents don’t even speak Spanish they are an indigenous type. So think of this kid who cannot read, write, speak but now she reads. She still reads at second grade, you see what I mean, she is here for two years and we move her up, she reads at 2.2 or 2.5, and she makes a lot of gains but 2.2 will not pass any standardized test when her warm body is in the 7th grade. So to use all these numbers to measure a school’s success I think they penalize us, whoever is running the school or the teacher, and you can see that in doing so they pressure the teachers to do well and they do it at all cost. Look at the scandal and all this. (Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy)

After speaking with Mrs. Turner about the fairness of NCLB, I attempted to summarize her responses on the topic to ensure I understood how she perceived the policy in regards to fairness. I presented the following statement to Mrs. Turner to which she replied, “Yes, yes right.”

So the issue of the state accountability system is not taking into account the growth that schools provide. So they don’t actually measure the impact of the school, they’re more so measuring the students themselves and what they already bringing to the table. Like you’re saying, the magnet students already come in scoring high, so it is not necessarily
the school that pushed them to that high standard, it’s just that they already had those advantages. (Davis, Researcher)

Moreover, Mrs. Turner points out that schools academically achieving outside the subject areas of Math and Reading/English Language Arts are not given credit for their accomplishments during the following exchange:

Mrs. Turner: But we have the best Social Studies department. We make 100% in 7th grade with 86% exceeding in Social Studies.
Davis: But none of that is used to calculate AYP, so you don’t technically get any credit for doing well in that subject.
Mrs. Turner: No. You can keep singing your praise and telling them yeah I made 100% in Social Studies and they will say so what. If I made 100% of my kids passed Social Studies but less than 73% of my kids passed reading, which is very unlikely, I still would not make AYP.

During the course of our conversation, Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School also introduced the topic of fairness and growth models as shown below:

Davis: So you would promote using a growth model instead of using an absolute bar measure.
Mr. Chase: Exactly. I think that’s more realistic. I don’t think there is ever going to be a perfect measurement because you never know what you’re getting from year to year, and you have to be very aware of that. But I think that is more of a fair tool to use.
Davis: So you would say that right now, currently, the way that your school is assessed for AYP is not necessarily a fair assessment.
Mr. Chase: Definitely not. You come into a school that is unhealthy culturally, you come into a situation with low parent involvement, cleanliness at the school, organization, those are things that are not considered when you look at a report card for a school, but those are the things that impact scores at the end of the day. So when those things change no one knows about that except for that community. So you have, for example a high school in Hayes City Public Schools that has had a bad reputation, and you got a principal that comes in cleans the school up, you have a good culture at the school, students are more motivated to learn because they feel safe and they feel protected, and they feel like the teachers are teaching, and they are in a good environment to learn. You don’t capture that, you don’t get those things, it’s just the numbers for the test. And though there may be some incremental increases sometimes it’s not enough to meet the standard of the AYP. So you get the report card and the public looks at it and says that is a bad school they did not make AYP. But did you disaggregate that data to see why they did not make AYP. And it is such a complicated report card that the average person does not understand it; that I did not make it because three students in Special Ed did not make the bar for Math, or that one of my other subgroups didn’t make it because they couldn’t
read at this particular level. So the subgroups could make or break a school from making AYP and that’s not something the public sees.

Ms. Gold of The World Charter Academy made the case that placing such a great amount of emphasis on standardized testing, by using one test to determine the adequacy of schools, adequacy of teachers, and to determine the promotion or retention of students, causes undue pressure to be placed on educators as well as students in the following statement:

Mrs. Gold: And that much pressure on a six-year-old child, it doesn’t belong there. We’ve gotten to the point where its 88% next year of the kids that need to score in level two and three in reading. Well if you’ve got a class of 50, a class of 60, how many children is that?
Davis: Most of them.
Ms. Gold: You know yeah. One child may make a percentage difference; that’s huge. So, you are saying that this teacher who has 79% of her children right where they need to be is failing because she didn’t have that one or that two, she wasn’t able to get that one or that two where they needed to be.

Not all participants commented on the fairness of the policy during the course of our conversations. As stated before, issues of importance to participants in relation to how the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has impacted their organizational and curricular practices drove the questions presented in the conversations. And although many participants commented on the unrealistic expectations of NCLB, it did not seem appropriate to the researcher to display these comments under this theme. Comments pertaining to the unrealistic expectations of NCLB will be discussed in chapter 5.

It was found here that many of the participants believe that Georgia’s current single statewide accountability system (which is mandated by NCLB) is to some degree unfair. Many of the participants believe that multiple measures should be considered when calculating a school’s performance, as well as the use of a growth model that calculates the value schools add to the performance of their students. Exploring the theme of fairness allowed participants to reflect on NCLB and present knowledge that led to the emergence of the following themes.
(2) NCLB Not Supporting School Goals

Most participants believed that although they took issue with many of the mandates provided by NCLB, they were still able to provide an adequate education for their students. However, a few administrators did note that they perceived some aspects of NCLB as failing to support their schools’ goals. During the course of our conversations, a few participants commented on how NCLB directly kept them from educating children in a manner they felt was appropriate.

When asked why Life Academy administers the Stanford 10 assessment (which is a norm-referenced standardized test), Mr. Kelly explains that he believes this assessment is more appropriate for informing his staff on how to support student learning than the NCLB mandated state assessment (the CRCT) when he states:

Because we want to see growth. We want to see how the youngsters are growing, if they’re growing, and if they’re not growing, then what do we do to assist them in that growth process. Now, even when we look at the performance base of the CRCT, I mean it gives you data but then the data is skewed to the point that…you know like I said on any given day…and this is just my personal belief, the performance base is not a true measure of what a kid knows. It just isn’t, because you know on any given day it could be good or it could be bad. Well if you’re looking at a norm-referenced test, over a period of time, you know you’ve got a starting point in the fall and you’ve got a culminating point in the spring, then you can see exactly where the youngster is academically. If there is growth, then he did well, if there is not growth, then there is something we need to do better and or differently. (Mr. Kelly of Life Academy)

In addition, Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School also commented on the shortcomings of the single statewide accountability system. Mr. Griffin noted that although he did not feel the system impeded his ability to accomplish the goals of his school, he did see how it failed to support the goals of his school when he stated:

See it [the CRCT] doesn’t give you any information to really tell you… it doesn’t change behaviors. And this is the whole thing when we talk about teaching. What actually changes your behavior as a teacher? The test scores do not define anything. There is not enough breakdown to tell you what that means. It tells you some got it or not.
He goes on to say:

So, I think when we think of 21st century schools how you are going to test up to that is going to be the more critical piece, then just knowledge. Ok some professor poured some knowledge into me, now I pour it into a kid, and then he regurgitates it onto a piece of paper, that’s not going to get us anywhere in the work world. It’s how you take what you know and apply it to some real world issue. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School)

Mr. Kelly of Life Academy also noted that NCLB fails to support schools with providing incentives for students, so that students will put forth their maximum effort in achieving academically. Mr. Kelly also notes that NCLB fails to support schools with providing incentives for students to attend school during testing periods. Mr. Kelly shared a story of how Life Academy used money from its budget to supply incentives (a day of free bowling, pizza, and games) for students with perfect attendance during the several days CRCT testing. In addition, Life Academy supplied any student that exceeded on the CRCT (which means making a score of 850 or more in any subject area) with an all day free ice cream Sunday party that allowed students to, in Mr. Kelly’s words, “eat ice cream until they became an ice cream.” Mr. Kelly explains how NCLB fails to supply funds for incentive programs like these, and therefore is not providing the support he needs to motivate his students to excel academically during the following exchange:

**Mr. Kelly:** Title I doesn’t pay for that and No Child Left Behind money can’t be used on that either. So those types of things that you need to motivate kids, same thing, you can’t be spending it that way. Those things that you need to motivate teachers, you can’t use the money for that either. So what I am saying is, is that there are things that can be done to motivate kids, to motivate teachers, that No Child Left Behind does not address or Title I can’t address.

**Davis:** So even though No Child Left Behind puts this…pushes the academic focus and maybe supports instruction, it does to some degree maybe constrain what you can do as far as student engagement and getting the students into learning and supporting on that other end of what helps students do well.

**Mr. Kelly:** Right.
Mr. Kelly goes further in his critique of NCLB by stating that the policy constrains him from developing the “whole child,” because the policy fails to financially support programs that are outside the scope of Reading/English Language Arts and Math instruction during our dialogue:

Mr. Kelly: And even if you look at charter schools they don’t have the extracurricular activities as like most public schools. So you can’t use any money from No Child Left Behind or Title I to impact your basketball team, or your volleyball team, or your chess club, or your golf team, but see kids have to have some type of outlet extracurricularly other than just reading and math, you know, that you want to supplement. You’ve got to be able to work with the whole child.

Davis: So to some degree Title I could keep the school from developing the whole child.

Mr. Kelly: Oh yeah, sure.

When further questioned about his desire to develop the “whole child” and how NCLB played a role in Life Academy accomplishing this goal, Mr. Kelly agreed that the policy simply fails to support the development of the whole child as illustrated by the following dialogue:

Davis: As far as since there are constraints on spending, and even NCLB mandates saying we need to focus on these subject matters, it could constrain you from developing the whole student?

Mr. Kelly: Yes. Right. What ever happened to the old saying, “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy?” You know, you’ve got to be able to do something else for them. And it behooves us as administrators to be able to orchestrate that. Even though we are getting money, the No Child Left Behind money, the Title I money, we still…it’s just not enough… we still need to be able to do some extra things for kids that is going to help them become a well rounded well educated kid that’s able to do more than just reading and math.

Ms. Campbell of Thurgood Marshall Academy also perceived NCLB to some degree as not supporting the goals of her school. During our conversation, Ms. Campbell stated that the policy altered the focus of schools away from educating students and shifted that focus toward producing adequate test scores:

What I think, I think we’re being held accountable for a test score. What we should be held accountable for is the actual education of the students. And I don’t think that the measures that are in place are sufficient to tell us, ok this child has been taught and I know this child has been taught because of these things. We’ve got to work on the state
assessments. It is really bad, I’ll use our state as an example we’ve got one of the lowest levels of assessments and our students aren’t passing it, that speaks not to the test it speaks to what we are teaching them. Why are we not preparing them for this measure? So what we’re held accountable for…you want numbers, you want me to get numbers, but what you should hold me accountable for is to make sure that my teachers are teaching. (Ms. Campbell of Thurgood Marshall Academy)

Like Mr. Kelly of Life Academy, Ms. Campbell of Thurgood Marshall also stated that NCLB constrains, or limits, her ability to develop the whole child in some way. As Ms. Campbell explains, her school is limited in its ability to develop the whole child because NCLB places a narrow focus on increasing test scores in the areas of Reading/English Language Arts and Math, and fails to financially support the Arts, extracurricular activities, and other non-Math non-Reading related school programs, which limits the program offerings of many charter schools:

Davis: Do you think the policy in any way, like you were saying since those tests dictate what you focus on, does that change the curriculum offerings you guys have here? Would you like to offer more extensive programs in the Arts or some other realm but…
Ms. Campbell: I really wish we could do more…you know we…we now we offer music and art and we have French but that is like stretching it to make that happen. But I think that is really important. But I wish we could do more as far as improving our Science lab….if we could broaden our offerings that would definitely be a benefit to not just our students but to the community, because it would help with the revitalization.
Davis: So you think the policy, and I want to be clear, so you think aspects of that policy does keep you guys from broadening your offerings?
Ms. Campbell: Yes, because sometimes it is just really restrictive. I have this much stuff on the table, and I have this deficit in this place and I just need to, but it’s like no this just simply has to go for staples in the gym [laughter].
Davis: And that is the Title I funds? They must be spent on what they have been specifically earmarked for?
Ms. Campbell: Yes.

When asked how NCLB might impact her school’s environment and her practices as an administrator, Ms. Gold of The World Charter Academy began to detail how NCLB fails to support her school model. The World Charter Academy is a duel language school (with a focus on English and Spanish) that attempts to hire Spanish-speaking teachers (preferable speakers of
Spanish as their first language) to teach core content courses (such as Math) in Spanish. Ms. Gold stated that the Highly Qualified Teacher mandate provided by NCLB (found in Title II of the policy) does not take into consideration the needs of various school settings, and that a highly qualified teacher in one setting may not be highly qualified in another. Ms. Gold illustrates how NCLB has kept her from hiring the best-qualified teachers for her school model in our following exchange:

Ms. Gold: We have good teachers who, we have had very good teachers who taught 11, 12, 13 years in their countries come here, they are required to take a test in English. And part of that test is writing in English, and that’s something they are not required to do in the job, but because of No Child Left Behind they can’t be highly qualified and work here if they don’t take and past that test in English. So we wind up often times with teachers who are less qualified to do this job because they have passed a test rather than having the true qualifications that we need in order for our charter to work correctly.

Davis: So you would say, one major issue is that the school doesn’t get to decide who is highly qualified and that can hamper you.

Ms. Gold: Or that the criteria for highly qualified is so stringent that it doesn’t look at a school that is different in some way. Just today, I have, and it’s a $20,000 a year job, Pre-K teacher they just reduced the salaries. I have a person who has worked for nine years with younger kids and she has worked for two years with our Pre-K program. She has a college degree in high school, she has an ESOL degree, and they have deemed her not qualified for this $20,000 a year job because her degree is not in early childhood. So, they have deemed her not highly qualified to work in this pre-K program. Now she has nine years experience in working with Pre-K aged kids, she is a native Spanish speaker, the job is $20,000 dollars a year, she has a college degree, and she is not highly qualified because her degree is at a high school level. At a high school level in her country, but even in her country she never worked in high school.

To provide clarification on the “highly qualified” mandates of Title II, I located a document produced by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission titled, “Title II – A Handbook: A Guide for Advancing Teacher Quality in Georgia Schools.” This document defined the term “highly qualified,” as it pertains to teachers in the state of Georgia by noting the following:

The No Child Left Behind Act, 2001 requires that all teachers of core academic subjects be “highly qualified.” This document states who may be considered “highly qualified.” Please note: A teacher who is “highly qualified” may not necessarily be fully certified.
To be fully certified and “highly qualified” a teacher must meet all of the state’s certification requirements and be assigned appropriately for the field in which he or she is teaching. (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2010, p.7)

The guide further provided the criteria for being a highly qualified teacher in a Georgia charter school by stating:

4.04 Teachers in Charter Schools
To be considered “highly qualified” to teach in a public charter school in the State of Georgia, teachers of core academic subjects must meet all requirements except those pertaining to licensure or certification provided that the terms of the state-approved charter allow the school to exempt licensure or certification. When the school’s state-approved charter does not provide for exemption, teachers must meet ALL requirements of “highly qualified” teachers as stated in this document, including certification by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

4.04.1 “Highly Qualified” Requirements For CHARTER SCHOOLS that Require Certification

_Teachers must:_

1. Hold a bachelor’s degree from a GaPSC accepted, accredited institution of higher education*;
2. Hold a valid Georgia teaching certificate;
3. Have evidence of subject matter competence in the subjects they teach by:
   a. an academic major OR the equivalent (minimum of 15 semester hours for middle grades; minimum of 21 semester hours for secondary) – Exception: An academic major or the equivalent is not applicable to elementary teachers;
   b. OR a passing score on the State approved, required content assessment for the area/subjects they teach (see ** below as the test must be passed within three years)
   c. OR meet the requirement of a “high objective uniform state standard of evaluation” (HOUSSE), as adopted by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, which is applicable to Veteran teachers who are 1) multi-subject special education teachers who are the teacher of record for multi-subjects, 2) retired teachers returning to service, or 3) life certificated teachers.
   d. Have a teaching assignment that is appropriate for the field(s) listed on the Georgia teaching certificate.

* The bachelor degree or higher must be from a GaPSC accepted, accredited institution of higher education. For degrees earned outside the United States, the institution from which the educator holds the degree must be credentialled by a GaPSC accepted credential agency as outlined in Rule 505-2-21.

**Any teacher hired by a charter school that requires teachers to be certified who holds a valid, non-renewable teaching certificate with either the major or concentration or passing score on the required content assessment in the core academic area/subject he/she teaches or HOUSSE is considered “highly qualified,” but must complete and receive the
appropriate Georgia clear, renewable professional certificate within three years from the date of initial certificate validity to remain “highly qualified.” Any teacher having a teaching assignment for a non-core academic area/subject(s) is not required to meet “highly qualified” requirements and must complete and receive the appropriate Georgia clear, renewable professional certificate by the end of the validity period of his/her certificate.

4.04.2 “Highly Qualified” Requirements for CHARTER SCHOOLS that DO NOT Require Teacher Certification

Teachers must:

1. Hold a bachelor’s degree from a GAPSC accepted, accredited institution of higher education*;

2. Have evidence of subject matter competence in the subjects they teach by:
   a. an academic major OR the equivalent (minimum of 21 semester hours for middle grades; minimum of 21 semester hours for secondary) – Exception: An academic major or the equivalent is not applicable to elementary teachers;
   b. OR a passing score on the State-approved, required content assessment for the area/subjects they teach**;
   c. OR meet the requirement of a “high objective uniform state standard of evaluation” (HOUSSE), as adopted by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, which is applicable to Veteran teachers who are 1) multi-subject special education teachers who are the teacher of record for multi-subjects, 2) retired teachers returning to service, or 3) life certificated teachers.

3. Have a teaching assignment that is appropriate for the core academic area/subject(s) in which the teacher serves as the teacher of record AND in which the teacher validates their “highly qualified” status with an appropriate major, or the equivalent of the major, or a passing score on the State approved, required content assessment for the area/subjects they teach, or HOUSSE requirements, which is applicable to Veteran teachers who are 1) multi-subject special education teachers who are the teacher of record for multi-subjects, 2) retired teachers returning to service, or 3) life certificated teachers.

*The bachelor degree or higher must be from a GaPSC accepted, accredited institution of higher education. For charter school teachers who hold degrees earned outside the United States and are employed after November 1, 2010, the institution from which the educator holds a degree must be credentialed by a GaPSC accepted credential agency listed at www.gapsc.com.

** Effective March 6, 2007, the only assessment accepted by the GaPSC are the Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators (GACE) for fields in which there is a GACE. The GaPSC will not accept Praxis tests taken after March 5, 2007. Educators who passed either the Teacher Certification Tests (TCT) or the Praxis content tests in the appropriate field when these were the required assessment tests also fulfill the content assessment requirement. (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2010, pp. 10-12)

Ms. Gold also explains how NCLB keeps her from effectively supplying World Charter Academy teachers with extra support, in the form of paraprofessionals, when she states:
Ms. Gold: And they make things like, well if you’re in a needs improvement school you cannot spend your money on paraprofessionals. You know, if you can hire a qualified paraprofessional to work with a teacher in the classroom and provide those students in that classroom with more face-to-face instructional time…that doesn’t make sense.

Davis: Well talk about that, because that’s new to me also. If you are a NI [Needs Improvement] school…

Ms. Gold: Berry County is a NI district. So unless it was grandfathered in, unless someone had a paraprofessional through Title I, a Title I paraprofessional paid for by Title I, before the district went into NI status we can’t have them. We cannot use our Title I funds to pay for a para [paraprofessional].

Davis: Financially would you have enough money then to…

Ms. Gold: No, we wouldn’t. Because when you’re buying a teacher through Title I you pay that teacher’s actual salary. So you’re paying, let’s say the teacher had 10 years experience and they were making $42,000 or $43,000 and then you add 30% on top of that for all the extras, the benefits, the social security, and all that stuff. Then that’s a huge chunk of change. You get up to 70, $75,000 pretty easily. Well if you’ve got $100,000 form Title I that’s…

Davis: It just took most of that

Ms. Gold: It takes most of that yeah. And often times you don’t have that much. I’ve had years when I’ve had, well last year umm, little school $13,000 worth of Title I. You couldn’t buy anything.

In the conversation presented above, Ms. Gold illustrates how she sees NCLB limiting her ability to support her school’s model and goals. As stated by Ms. Gold, due to NCLB mandates, which do not allow schools authorized by districts in Needs Improvement (NI) status to hire paraprofessionals with Title I funds, she is unable to increase her school’s capacity using affordable paraprofessionals. As stated by Ms. Gold, NCLB only allows her to hire highly qualified teachers as instructional support due to the district’s NI status. Unfortunately, the cost of a highly qualified teacher tends to be more than the amount of Title I funds available to The World Charter Academy for hiring instructional staff members, which leaves the school understaffed.

Like Mr. Kelly, Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy also found that NCLB failed to support her school’s mission of adequately educating the whole child. Mrs. Turner claims that Georgia has responded to the NCLB accountability era, which has initiated the use of
standardized criterion-referenced testing to measure the adequacy of schools, administrators, and teachers in Georgia, by dumbing down the state’s curriculum in order to ensure schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Here, Mrs. Turner explains why she believes NCLB has perpetuated a lowering of academic standards and student expectations when she states:

So the schools, or state, in order to make AYP as a whole state, they dumb down the standards, they dumb down the passing score. Have you ever looked at the passing score of each subject on the CRCT? You can see that to pass or to meet standards according to Georgia standards, you only need to make an 18. This is in 5th grade. You can make 18 correct out of 40 in reading. So if you look at it you don’t even pass, you don’t even make 50% but you are passing. And then all other subjects are the same. The highest subject is like 57% in mathematics, if you make 57% you pass but in reality when a teacher makes a test you need to get a 70% in order to pass. So you will see that all the states dumb it down. Now they are realizing that many states like Texas or North Carolina, which were the worse ones in this study that showed that in fact their kids are not learning more as they glorify that I have this many percentage of students pass, because most of the kids still not read and write but they pass because the standards are so low. (Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy)

When asked how NCLB has specifically impeded Cross Town Academy from accomplishing its goals, Mrs. Turner responded:

Mrs. Turner: I would spend more money to do exploratory learning. I would love for the kids to be able to see the world in the different colors, to put it that way. But because of the limited funds I had to use this first, because this is what they need so the school make AYP. But like many teachers had to, I use to be in Shire County Public Schools and when they put in [the county’s current K-12 curriculum], we forfeit a lot of things that we know it will make the student a whole child, because of the funding limited. But I still doing that, we send most of our kids on a weeklong field trip like Washington DC, New York, and so, but I have to write grants and beg for money because my kids can’t pay. But we are still doing that stuff.

Davis: So with No Child Left Behind you think that it has restricted your use of funding for the things that you would like to do to educate students?

Mrs. Turner: Yes exactly.

Mrs. Turner goes on to talk about how NCLB forces school curriculums to have a narrow focus on Math and Reading, and therefore neglects to emphasis other important aspects of developing students. This narrow emphasis makes it much harder for Mrs. Turner to develop learners that possess critical thinking and problem solving skills. Moreover, Mrs. Turner
illustrates how NCLB is having this negative impact on all schools, including charter schools, when she states:

We kept saying we want a world-class education but I do not think we emphasize on being a human being, a whole and good human being. We just pick this and then we go read on this, and then in order to show that we do it we give them a test. You know that isn’t the only way to show it, and we give them a test, but the test is all multiple-choice. So the kid can memorize it and pass it but they still cannot think. We have graduated a bunch of people that cannot think for the past several years. (Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy)

As we spoke, I attempted to summarize how Mrs. Turner sees NCLB impacting her school’s learning environment by stating:

So ultimately we’re forced to make sure that we pass the test, or we make the numbers, or play the game, but not necessarily educate students, just make sure we meet the criteria that are based on test scores, and subgroup numbers, and things of that nature, instead of teaching students and making sure they are progressing.

To which Mrs. Turner replies, “Yes, yes, yes.”

Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School also expressed that, in some ways, NCLB did impede his ability to accomplish the goals of his school. Mr. Malone shared how NCLB, at times, forces him to make choices that neglect the needs of particular segments of students when he states:

Sometimes it is written that you can’t buy textbooks, you can buy supplemental and resources, but the actually hands on books that the kid can carry home, because like I said earlier a lot of our kids do not have resources at home, and I think roughly 55% of my kids have internet access but for 1,400 kids you are leaving out 600 kids that don’t have resources. Well if you don’t have textbooks for everybody then that’s an area of concern. (Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School)

This section attempted to note how these administrators perceive NCLB as failing to support their school’s progress and goals. It was found that the use of the current single statewide accountability system (which uses a single multiple-choice criterion-referenced test to measure the adequacy of students and schools) may be causing Georgia educators to “dumb” down the
curriculum in order to make AYP; encouraging educators to narrow the curriculum to focus more tightly on Math and Reading/English Language Arts; limiting the ability of schools to develop the “whole child”; impeding the ability of schools to develop critical thinkers and problem solvers; and creating a culture of test score achievement over student knowledge attainment. It was also expressed that the current statewide accountability system fails to provide administrators and teachers with useful and adequate data used to inform their practices when attempting to increase student academic performance. Moreover, NCLB’s highly qualified teacher mandates were found to be by one participant unsupportive of alternative school models; due to its creation of a one size fits all criteria for Highly Qualified Teachers.

In addition to failing to support the hiring of paraprofessionals, and funding the implementation of school incentive programs, participants also noted how NCLB’s Title I funding restrictions have impacted their administrative practices in other ways. The following section illustrates in greater detail how Title I mandates specifically have impacted the organizations and curriculums administered by participants.

(3) NCLB and Funding

During the course of our conversations, several participants spoke of how mandates associated with funds provided by Title I impacted their practices. This section attempts to illustrate how these charter school administrators perceive NCLB’s Title I mandates impact their practices, curriculums, and schools.

While discussing the issue of funding, it was found that some administrators perceived NCLB as failing to protect charter schools from being inequitably and inadequately funded by their local authorizer. In contrast, other administrators perceived their districts’ funding practices as equitable and adequate. The two distinctly different perceptions regarding funding seemed to
have been contingent upon the type of school administrators operated, Start-up vs. Conversion. Those participants operating locally approved start-up charters tended to discuss the inequitable funding practices of their authorizers, while conversion school administrators expressed great satisfaction with the funding allocation practices of their authorizers (for clarification on Start-up and Conversion charter schools please refer back to chapter 3 under the Data Sources: Setting Participant Pool Criteria section). Although administrators in both school settings welcomed the infusion of funds provided by Title I, there seemed to be a different experience with those funds depending on the type of school administrators operated.

It is important to note that all conversion schools participating in this study (Oakwood Elementary, Quahog Middle School, Union Middle School, Grove Shoals Elementary) were located in a charter districts. This means that every school in that district is a charter school. Drawing from my previous knowledge on charter districts, in conjunction with the information gathered during the course of our conversations, I found that the charter districts in this study funded all the schools under their authority the same; much the way traditional districts fund TPS. The experience of conversion charter school administrators operating schools located in a charter district seems to be much different than that of start-up charter school administrators operating in a traditional district. The contrasting experiences, most specifically in relation to funding, are illustrated in this section.

Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School (which is authorized by a traditional district) informed me that Hayes City Public Schools funds his school at a lower level than it does the other schools in its district. Mr. Griffin claims that the issue of inequitable funding has little to do with NCLB and is strictly a local issue when he states:

**Mr. Griffin:** I won’t even begin to tell you how charter schools get screwed in funding. And a lot has to do with federal funding and the way… and I know where the funding is.
The chairman of our board was the CFO of Hayes City Public Schools, so it’s not like we don’t know where the buckets of money are. But I would just tell you off the top we think we probably get dinged about 10 to 12% less then what it cost, what Hayes City Public Schools gives its average school. And I can be very specific on that. A lot has to do with IDEA money, a lot has to do with special Ed money, a lot has to do with Title I money, just funding. We get pretty… Hayes City Public Schools does a better than most charter… let me just say this, we do a heck of a lot better than… Dexter County really screws its schools in my opinion; Hayes City Public Schools is probably the fairest of all the school districts out there that do it. But still it’s not one to one.

Davis: Well is that an issue with NCLB or is that a separate issue with the district

Mr. Griffin: That is a separate issue of how districts allocate funds. It is not an NCLB issue.

However, while commenting on the issue of inequitable funding, Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School (which is authorized by Hayes City Public Schools) noted the importance of those enforcing the accountability mandates of NCLB also understanding, or taking note of, the phenomenon of start-up charters being inequitably funded when he states:

I think one of the things NCLB needs to take into consideration is that most charter schools are shorted at the district level with the money. In most instances the money will go directly through the district, at least in Georgia, it goes through the district and then it comes to the schools. The district takes their piece and then sends the charter school the rest. In other states the money goes directly to the school, and in those instances I think that is better. But the charter school should be funded at the same rate as the regular school. Most charters are not, and so that takes resources away from us. So we have to do even more than what a regular public school does with less. And then when we write our charters there is an expectation that we will perform better than the regular school. And once again we have to perform when we get less. (Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School)

Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy (which is authorized by Piedmont County Public Schools) and Ms. Campbell of Thurgood Marshall Academy (which is authorized by Hayes City Public Schools) are two other start-up administrators operating in traditional districts who also noted how the inequitable funding practices of their districts impact their practices. The following statements illustrate these impacts:

Mrs. Turner: I don’t even count Piedmont County Public Schools as a partner. We do it to make them look bad. Every dollar the regular school gets we get 70 cents, and I am one of the best middle schools behind the magnet schools.
Davis: So you can’t hire other staff outside of the teachers because you don’t have the funds to hire a full time Title I person, a full time... whatever?

Mrs. Turner: But my assistant principals, one of them is teaching two classes and the other one is teaching one class. My dean of students is teaching two classes, and my CFO is teaching a math class. That is how I save money. Instead of hiring each person for a certain job, and then you have to pay benefits and all of that, you hire one that can do two and three jobs, and pay them well, above and beyond what they would usually get; and we save on the benefits. And that is how we save money.

Ms. Campbell: Our district has done a better job... last year they did a better job of supporting us, but because of financial restraints that they face we’re kind of the last man, or lowest man, on the totem pole.

Moreover, start-up charter administrators tended to express the importance of Title I funds to the operation of their schools more so than conversion charter school operators. It is an assumption that this might have been caused by the inequitable funding practices of the districts in which these start-up charter schools were located. In any case, as illustrated by the following comments, it seems that start-up charter schools serving high percentages of students from low-socioeconomic households need the extra funds provided by Title I in order to maintain their operations. Here, Ms. Gold of The World Charter Academy (which is authorized by Berry County Schools a traditional district) illustrates the need for Title I funds in her school when she states:

And I understand, and I very much support the idea that Title I is not to supplant what the county should be doing, it’s to add on to it. But umm, it certainly is nice to have those funds, without those funds, I talked to you about the technology, without those funds we would not be able to have the technology that we have. It’s not something that the county provides. But we feel like that it’s...it is for our children, something that is absolutely necessary if they’re going to be in today’s world, or tomorrow’s world, that they be exposed to it and they’re not going to have it in their homes they’re not going to have it in any of their homes at this point. So we feel like it’s essential. And so Title I funds have allowed us to do those kinds of things. (Ms. Gold of The World Charter Academy)

When asked about Title I funds, his decision on how to use them, and how they impact his school, Mr. Chase made a comment similar to Ms. Gold’s when he stated:
Oh yeah the data again, going back to the data, what students are the weakest in these areas. So we use a lot of our Title I money for Saturday school and for absolute enrichment. If we couldn’t pay it out of our regular budget Title I now offers that opportunity for us to do that…. So Title I definitely helps in that regard. (Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School)

Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines Academy (which is authorized by Dexter County Public Schools a traditional district) reinforced the importance of receiving Title I funds for start-up charters when he commented:

There are some restrictions, however I think there’re enough options, for me in particular, there are enough options to where I feel very comfortable with where the funds are going in terms of, I mentioned, supplying the teachers with supplemental salaries so they can stay longer, there is a category for professional development so we can pay for subs, or we can bring in independent contractors and then they provide us with a parent liaison as well as the resources for our parents. So there are some restrictions however I am fine with what they offer us to spend the funds on. (Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines Academy)

When Glendale Academy went from being a Commission authorized charter school to a Shire County Public Schools (a traditional district) authorized charter school, Glendale lost its Title I designation (for clarification on Commission charter schools please refer back to chapter 2 under Policy Context: The Evolution of Charter Law – subsection - Evolution of Georgia’s Charter Law). Like a number of other start-up charter administrators in this study, Mrs. Richards believes her school, Glendale Academy, is now being inequitably and inadequately funded by her local authorizer Shire County Public Schools. Her following statement provides an illustration of how important Title I funds are to schools, especially those that perceive themselves as being underfunded by their district authorizer, when she states:

However they did not give us the funding we need. Because how can we now hold the Saturday academy and ask teachers to come for free, which they do. We’re also a Title I school, which took three years to earn that designation, and some schools wouldn’t be proud to say we’re Title I, but for us we knew it would provide us with the resources that the most deserving and students who need it the most would receive. And so as a Shire County school the threshold of students in poverty has to be much higher. So we were right around 50% of our students who qualified for free and reduced priced lunch. As a Shire County school that number and their thresholds is closer to 70%. So Shire County
Public Schools as a system has a certain number that a school will have to reach in order to be considered Title I. As a school, that is a part of that system, that number is not high enough for us. It is what we have been told, who knows if that is the truth, I don’t know, all I know is that we lose our Title I designation. So now that we don’t have that, we don’t have the additional federal resources to offer those supplemental services like Saturday academy. So now the only way that we can provide those interventions and remediation activities and services is to try to fund it out of our operational budget. (Mrs. Richards of Glendale Academy)

In contrast to the statements made above by start-up charter administrators, participants operating conversion charters perceived funds, both provided by and not provided by Title I, as equitably and adequately allocated from their local authorizer. Further, conversion administrators seemed to view Title I funds as extra sources of funding as opposed to necessary streams of funding. In comparison to start-up charter administrators, conversion charter administrators did not express as great a need for Title I funds to support basic functions of their schools. Even with that assessment, some conversion charter administrators were still able to provided accounts of how Title I funds impact their practices and organization.

Conversing with Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary (which is authorized by Quahog City Schools a charter district), she explained that her district did an excellent job of providing all its schools with adequate resources, and further explained why she viewed Title I funds as extra support when she stated:

Mrs. Allen: The Title I monies that come in are an addition, and that is based on the system that we work in. Ask me the same question if I am a teacher in South Georgia where the resources may not be as plentiful then my answer would probably be different, but Quahog City Schools has always been a district where you pretty much have what you need even before they became a Title I district.

Davis: So the policy really does not constrain your practice, or really have any bearing because the district does a good enough job providing any resources or services you need.

Mrs. Allen: Right
Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary (which is authorized by Lawrence City Schools a charter district) also explained how Title I funds supplied an extra source of funds to his school that could be used to support many facets of its operation when he states:

It is very clear-cut if you have an understanding of the requirements under Title I. We have a really significant amount of money that we receive to support student achievement through the Title I program. But at the end of the day there are limitless opportunities to focus those funds and those resources beginning with actual personnel decisions, to the actual supplies and resources that kids will have access to. (Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary)

However, while discussing his view on two streams of federal education funding (money provided by the presidential stimulus package of 2009 and Title I funds) Mr. Brown of Union Middle School (which is authorized by Lawrence City Schools) noted that these funds could have been more effectively used if restrictions on the funds were eliminated. And although this segment of our conversation was centered on discussing the equitable distribution of funds, Mr. Brown drove the conversation toward the topic of restrictions on Title I spending and the impact it has had on his school environment and practices when he states:

The biggest flaw in the stimulus funds was that it was connected to Title I funds. It was given out the same way. You know, math, reading, you can get personnel, you can get a program. If you had given principals, districts, the ability to get truly what they needed and not meet it with the criteria of Title I, you probably would have seen a complete change and complete overhaul. So I think the biggest issue is not really the amount of funding but how funding can be spent. Had you given me stimulus money two years ago and said you can do what you want with it, then I would have created the unique ability to meet some of the unmet needs of our students. For instance, with Title I money you can’t hire any kind of behavior support. If you call them an RTI interventionist it has to be academic. I created six job titles because I believe in getting personnel, and only one of those job titles were approved. If I had had a behavior support specialist through those funds to go in and be proactive with regards to some of the things that were going on, creating the right kind of program for mediations, then a lot of the negative behaviors that we experienced last year would have been nipped in the bud, we would not have lost some many kids to suspension, and we would have done better on the CRCT. Well I didn’t have funds to hire somebody to do that so my poor administrators ended up doing the bulk and I don’t think that administrators should be a behavior support folks. (Mr. Brown of Union Middle School)
During the course of our conversation, Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines Academy claimed that Title I funds, and the mandates associated with those funds, helped to support his school’s curriculum and academic programs. Mr. Murphy further claimed that mandates associated with Title I in no way dictated the type of curriculum his school implemented, nor limited program offerings his school strives to provide. As we explored the role of Title I on his school’s organization and curriculum, Mr. Murphy began to contradict his initial statements and found that his administrative practices, and school’s curriculum, had been influenced by restrictions placed on Title I funds as illustrated in the dialogue below:

Davis: Does that in anyway impact maybe like resource allocation, because at the end of the day you only have so much funding, and when you’re trying to figure out which departments are getting what funding, do you ever find yourself subsidizing Math and Reading more with resources more so than other subjects?
Mr. Murphy: No. I don’t find myself doing that. It kind of goes back to what the priorities of what my school are. So we generally, we’ve set long-term priorities short-term priorities. So like this year we’re focusing in on literacy and specifically writing and honing in on that. So with that being the priority the majority of the resources are going to funnel in through that. If our priority happens to be…if we become more of a STEM school, you know the Science Technology, then a lot of the funding would go toward the Science classrooms and the Math classrooms.

After discussing the topic further, Mr. Murphy begins to realize how in fact his programs are to some degree influenced by the spending mandates of Title I when he states:

Mr. Murphy: We are able to offer what I would like to offer however it is on a very tight budget. So I would put more resources into those programs. So we have theater, we have dance, we have art, and we have band. So I would put more money into those programs to make them more robust and excellent programs.
Davis: Can you use your Title I funds to fund those programs?
Mr. Murphy: Let me think. I don’t what to miss speak. I want to say no. I am thinking about my budget and my line items on the Title I. I think not. I don’t think so.
Davis: Are the Title I funds restricted from the arts?
Mr. Murphy: I think they are; don’t quote me on that I am not sure. But we have always used them more towards academics mainly. And see this is this underline message because now that I am remembering my conversations with my Title I folks, “make sure it’s Reading and Math you can do Science.” I remember this ringing in my head like in terms of buying instructional supplies and materials. That is what I have been told, to
make sure that the monies are going first to Reading and Math, then Science, and try to stay away from Social Studies.

**Davis:** Do they try to get you to funnel money to Math and Reading first or is the money restricted to Math and Reading?

**Mr. Murphy:** It has to be, if you’re spending money, it has to be Math and Reading. Like even with the teachers doing the extended day, you do Math and Reading teachers first.

**Davis:** They get funding first?

**Mr. Murphy:** Yes, if you are going to use your funding in that manner. Like I could not come to the table and have a Social Studies teaching. It has to be Math and Reading first and then Science.

So although Mr. Murphy comes to the realization that Title I funds do to some degree dictate which programs are made more robust in his school, he later notes that the larger foundation that supports his school does help him find funds to support those programs neglected by Title I. However, Mr. Murphy still admits that the programs neglected by Title I are not as developed, financially supported, or robust as he would like them to be.

Conversing with Mr. Kelly of Life Academy further illustrated how Title I spending mandates influence the practices of administrators, and the programs offered in their schools. Mr. Kelly found that Title I mandates restricted his spending to the core subjects of Math and Reading/English Language Arts. Mr. Kelly provides a number of contradictory statements, in regards to the areas he is allowed to spend Title I funds, during our conversation, but ultimately states that these funds are used primarily for the enhancement of Math and Reading skills. The impact Title I spending restrictions have on Mr. Kelly’s practices are illustrated in the following conversation:

**Mr. Kelly:** There are always constraints, always constraints on it. We are taking federal monies; you do what they tell you to do and how they tell you do to it if you want to spend the money.

**Davis:** Do those federal dollars… do they, I guess force you to spend on like particular subject matters? Do you have to spend your money specifically on Reading or on Math?

**Mr. Kelly:** You have to spend that money on Reading and Math. You can also spend that money on social services such as counseling. You can use money as far as a parent resource assistant, you know, that’s going to be working with the school for attendance purposes and all that type stuff. So those are all the big pieces that you can spend money
on. You can spend money on supplies, you can spend money on equipment if you so desire.

Davis: Does it have to pertain still to Math and Reading?

Mr. Kelly: No, for example we purchased the Study Island Program, and Study Island is a Reading and Math program that will help youngsters from grades 1 – 8. When you go on to Study Island they evaluate you, and find out what your weakness are, and every time you log on it’s going to give you information to work on as far as strengthening your skills. You can log on to Study Island from home as well as from school.

Davis: But it still focuses on those subjects…

Mr. Kelly: Reading, Math.

Davis: And if you wanted to, you could not buy other software that is, I don’t know, focuses on Science. Or you couldn’t take that money and buy band equipment?

Mr. Kelly: No you can’t buy instruments for band. It’s got to be academic, Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies. You can’t use Title I money for band equipment, physical education equipment, Art equipment, because it’s not in the area that is deemed where you need the help at and that’s Reading and Math to make AYP.

While conversing with Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy, she explained how being a targeted assistance Title I school impacts her practices. According to Mrs. Turner, even though she operates a charter school, being a targeted assistance Title I school limits her curricular autonomy by dictating which students are allowed to use materials purchased with Title I funds. And although Mrs. Turner would rather not use the targeted assistance model, she explained why here school had been forced to use this model for the past several years in order to receive Title I funding.

The U.S. Department of Education provides clarification on the two Title I program models (Targeted Assistance and Schoolwide) by first defining the term “targeted assistance,” and then by detailing the differences between a targeted assistance Title I program model and a schoolwide Title I program model in the statement below:

The term "targeted assistance" signifies that the services are provided to a select group of children—those identified as failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the State's challenging content and student performance standards—rather than for overall school improvement, as in schoolwide programs. Like schoolwide program schools, the goal of a targeted assistance school is to improve teaching and learning to enable Part A participants to meet the challenging State performance standards that all children are expected to master. (U.S. Department of Education, 1996)
One of the primary differences between schoolwide program schools and targeted assistance schools is the requirement that the latter may use Title I, Part A funds only for programs that provide services to eligible children identified as having the greatest need for special assistance. Targeted assistance schools, therefore, may not provide services to all children in the school or in particular grades. (U.S. Department of Education, 1996)

The following dialogue between Mrs. Turner and myself illustrates, from her perspective, the impact being a targeted assistance Title I school has had on her organization and curricular practices.

Mrs. Turner: Because the Title I you can’t use...even the books we...we are target Title I, the absurdity of that. We target Title I. Target Title I can only use the books for students that are Title I. So I bought the books and had to mark them Title I use only. And the absurdity, last time I bought books for reading, and I bought reading in Social Studies and reading in Science because I think kids need to read in all subjects. They [officials with the Piedmont County Public Schools] struck it down and said I will not pay you $1,500 because you used the money to buy reading in mathematics. I said reading is reading. They said no it has to be like fiction.

Davis: So even with the Title I funds, you are being restricted to what you can spend it on, and that is constricting what you want to do in school?

Mrs. Turner: Yes because it is only reading and Math. So I have to go find other money, grant money, or whatever. Because if I use the school money to buy all other...I can’t use Title I money to supplant, you cannot use it to supplant.

Mrs. Turner further explains how being a targeted assisted Title I school impacts her autonomy and the autonomy of her staff when she states:

Mrs. Turner: Because Title I is federal funding and they only designated it to Reading and Math, and because we are targeted Title I this book can only be used with the targeted Title I kids. You can only use it with the staff that teaches Title I. So they have to check it out, and I have them count every book, and I have to post and put it...but if we go schoolwide everybody can use it. But now we come to the second...the most absurd situation. Because we have this money left, and we want to spend it, we decided to get a Promethean board. But the teacher who teaches Math in that room only has Title I once. She also is certified in gifted, so she teaches a gifted class. So when she teaches Title I kids she can use the Promethean board, but when she teaches gifted kids she has to turn to the white board, because we are targeted Title I. It is against the law.

Finally, Mrs. Turner details why Cross Town Academy has used the targeted assistance model instead of the (Mrs. Turner preferred) schoolwide model, during the following portion of our conversation:
Davis: Can you choose to be a schoolwide Title I school?
Mrs. Turner: Yes but they will take...you know why I did not choose to be a schoolwide Title I school, because in order to be a schoolwide Title I you have to send 10 teachers to a meeting monthly, and in a school of [very small numbers] if you send 10 teachers who is left to teach. So this year they heard it, so they said they are going to cut down to five. So we are going to go to schoolwide Title I. So for the past 8 years we couldn’t.
Davis: And you have to send those teachers to the meeting during the day?
Mrs. Turner: Yes including me. For a whole day, once a month, 8 – 4.
Davis: And this is a Piedmont County Public Schools policy?
Mrs. Turner: I don’t know if this is a Piedmont County Public Schools policy or a state policy.

This segment of the study illustrated how funding mandates provided by NCLB has impacted these charter school administrators’ practices and organizations. Here it was revealed that start-up charters in this metropolitan area of Georgia are being inequitably funded (as reported by the administrators participating in the study). It was also found that the inequitable funding practices of these districts might be creating impediments to start-up charter schools providing an adequate educational experience for their students. Given this perspective, future research studies should be conducted to explore how NCLB encourages, and or allows, district authorizers to inequitably fund start-up charter schools. Moreover, that research could also address if equitable funding practices could be mandated, regulated, and protected by a reauthorized version (or the current version) of NCLB.

Although it was found that these administrators do view Title I funds as needed and helpful in supporting the implementation of many Math and Reading/English Language Arts programs in their schools, from their perspective, mandates associated with NCLB have also limited their autonomy and made it more difficult to provide (and in some cases has kept them from providing) the level of robust educational programs necessary for developing the whole child. According to these administrators, especially those of start-up charter schools, Title I spending restrictions (including those on supporting the implementation of programs such as
Field Trips, Band, Orchestra, Art, Theater, Social Studies, Foreign Language, etc.) might be limiting administrators curricular and organizational autonomy, as well as impacting how well they are able to educate their students.

(4) NCLB and Subgroup Student Populations

While discussing how NCLB might uniquely impact schools with particular student populations (most specifically schools serving high percentages of ESOL, minority, and or students from low-income households), it was found that some administrators did perceive NCLB in some ways as impacting their school community uniquely due to the demographics of their schools’ student body. Georgia’s use of disaggregated student performance data, which is used to assess the performance of schools, was scrutinized during the course of many conversations (for clarification on disaggregated subgroup student performance data, and how it is used to assess school performance and calculate AYP in Georgia, please refer back to chapter 2 under the section titled NCLB Accountability Mandates and the Achievement Gap section – subsection NCLB Mandates). The participants’ perceptions of how NCLB’s focus on subgroup performance, and the impact this focus had on their schools, varied and is displayed by the conversations presented below.

Mr. Griffin’s critique of NCLB suggested that Georgia’s single statewide accountability system is correct in taking into account the performance of racial and socioeconomic subgroups when assessing the performance of schools and districts. Mr. Griffin believes that there are no excuses for why students of low-wealth, or those belonging to racial or ethnic minority groups, are performing less well academically than their middle- to high- wealth, or White, peers when he states:

Well what I wouldn’t take away is poverty. Now I am going to give you a good example of…this school right now is 83% poverty. Our scores, and I don’t know if you looked
them up, are pretty respectable. Ok so, you know this is of low wealth. So when you say you got a subgroup of low wealth, that to me… they have been in America this long, and they’ve been in your system, Hayes City Public Schools, they come from West Side Elementary to Apple Middle or whatever, that should not be any excuse and they should hold everybody accountable, just because you come from low wealth neighborhoods that to me is not a reason to change policy. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School)

Mr. Griffin goes on to state how the deliberate action of NCLB, in regards to holding schools with high minority and or high poverty populations to the same standard as schools with lesser percentages of these student populations, positively focuses schools on finding ways to increase the academic performance of underperforming subgroups when he states:

Well it doesn’t take it into account, and also it’s saying I’m not going to take it into account, it’s very intentional about that. Because at the end of the day I’m going to use this as a lever for you to figure it out, and you’ve got to make these kids successful come heck or high water. And I don’t think that is an unfair thing, because at the end of the day we give you about 12 years in this county, 13 counting kindergarten, to get through that last door of non-paid, and you’ve got to get through it. And so you know, how we do it, it’s up to us as educators to figure that out. But I think it is something as educators we have omitted or we’re not paying attention to around this whole language acquisition. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School)

In sum, Mr. Griffin believes student performance data should be disaggregated by race and wealth, and used to assess the performance of schools. He further believes that schools should be held accountable for producing adequate academic achievement among its racial and wealth subgroups. Moreover, Mr. Griffin does not view NCLB, and its emphasis on racial and wealth subgroup performance, as creating a negative pressure influencing his practices or organization. Mr. Griffin explains how the plight of his student body, not the accountability mandates of NCLB, present a type of pressure on him to ensure that his students are academically successful:

Do I feel No Child Left Behind has umm… is pressure to cause someone to be unethical as I am reading in the paper? Abso-dog-gone-lutely not. The pressure of an administrator is, as an administrator that I take upon myself, is I look at our children and I go oh well… and I say this is life and death to them. My children, those three girls, get do-overs in life if they screw up, because I have the resources to give them a do-over. My children are
coming from Kennedy Hills Apartments, and we serve the largest last standing public housing in Hayes, they don’t get do-overs. They get one shot at this. Cause they’re…you know they just don’t… society is not going to give them a do-over, and so any pressure to be successful is internal not external. It has nothing to do with No Child Left Behind it’s, I’m old and I’ve been doing this for a long time, how do I position our kids to have those post secondary opportunities? My response being a K-8 school is to put you on the trajectory of success, irregardless of No Child Left Behind. So, No Child Left Behind either affirms what I am doing, or it affirms that I need to be doing something different. It’s almost that simple.

However, as we continued to discuss the topic, Mr. Griffin did note that students from low-wealth households tend to present unique educational challenges for educators, but insisted that educators find ways to combat these challenges when he states:

And I’ll tell you statistically speaking, there have been studies ad nauseam about this, a kid of low wealth walking in at 5-years of age is 30 million words behind. They have heard 30 million words less. So how do we cover that gap? So now you’re on this trajectory. Middle class is on this trajectory. We can play that out five years from now and it’s huge. So I think that’s where the challenge is. We get the same resources and we expect you to be here at a certain time. You know, middle class starts here and kids of low wealth start here and now we got to catch-up, it’s a catch-up game. And I don’t think public schools have that good…thought process of how do I catch you up, when do I catch you up, process. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School)

Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary also notes the unique challenges that students of low-wealth tend to present educators. However, Mr. Harper goes further by making the case that NCLB fails to account for the unique challenges schools serving high percentages of students from low-wealth households, and or high percentages of students participating in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, face when assessing their performance. Mr. Harper illustrates these points with his following two comments:

There is a lot of credit that needs to be given to parents on that level. And I think when No Child Left Behind was formulated the assumption was, well sure parents care about their kids, of course they want them to do well, of course they’re providing them with all these other opportunities, and that’s not current reality. And it’s not to ding the parents, but it is something that has to come to the forefront of the conversation. (Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary)
Mr. Harper continues by describing how his school is attempting to use Title I funds to address the challenges of serving a high percentage of English Language Learners (ELL) when he states:

We really do believe that parents are the first teachers. And in order for students to be truly successful, that parent engagement piece is critical. And it shouldn’t be typical, but it is, that most of your high needs students come from environments where education is not the priority. So you have the school busting its hump on one end with its resources that are supposed to be state of the art and highly effective, and after 3:30 it stops it ends. So talking about the flexibility again, we are trying an innovation this year with our Title funds that came out of a conversation at the board level that wanted our school specifically to look at year around schooling… I think it was more or less, if there’s a school that we think will benefit from it, it may be Grove Shoals Elementary because they have a high minority population of second language learners that this maybe something that will benefit the kids. (Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary)

Like Mr. Harper and Mr. Griffin, Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School also detailed how schools serving large populations of students from low-wealth households face special challenges. However, Mr. Chase presents a much different argument than Mr. Griffin and discusses how his school, which serves a large percentage of students from low-wealth households, should be assessed differently than schools that serve low percentages of students from low-wealth households. During our conversation, Mr. Chase detailed how NCLB places a unique pressure on his school due to its student population when she states:

Mr. Chase: I think we need to be looking at different tools for the types of progression for different school districts because my school and its demographic are very different from Lawrence City Schools. So 100% may be a realistic thing for Lawrence City Schools by 2014. 100% may be more realistic for me 2018 or never, we just may need to have a different measurement to see are you meeting that need and is there progress.

Davis: So you think different schools face different challenges depending on the student bodies they have so they should be assessed differently.

Mr. Chase: I do. And that’s because of the demographic makeup of each of the schools and or the districts. So once again you have Lawrence City Schools, that is not a Title I area I don’t think, and then you have Piedmont County which is right down the street and they are probably a Title I district. So should you… is it apples for apples; I don’t think so.

Davis: And do you think that is a unique experience for a person that serves a majority-minority population, or people that serve a lot of students that are low income? Do you think there is a particular pressure or particular experience with NCLB for someone that
works in this environment vs. someone who is in Lawrence City Schools or another district where they have more affluent students and White students?

Mr. Chase: Yeah I do. Yeah, and the bottom line is parental involvement. NCLB I think puts the pressure on performance on the school, and the teacher, and the leader... the principal. But at the end of the day the teachers are the ones doing the work. They’re in the classrooms pushing the students, we’ve [principals] got to be there to ensure that they have the right resources and that they are motivated to get it done, but what about the parent. When you get to an upper middle class community, you know, I’m going to be responsible for my child. And if kids don’t have that kind of a framework where their parents are pushing them and supporting them, and they got to raise themselves, and raise their brothers and sisters, that’s a whole other dynamic that you have to deal with. So, in so many ways it’s not fair. Because there’s only so much the school can control. So at a Lawrence City Schools, and it’s not a knock on Lawrence City Schools, it’s just that’s a school that has an upper middle class to wealthy community. Whether all the parents come to the parent meetings or not, I would bet 80 to 85% of those parents are very involved with their students. That doesn’t mean they have to show up at the school, but their involved. They are buying them the resources, they’re asking questions about homework, whether it’s at the table for dinner or whether it’s going through the drive-through at McDonalds. They’ve set up a lifestyle where they’re holding their kids accountable because everybody is going to college. Here in this dynamic, as much as we push that, here that’s part of our culture everyone’s going to college, well for some of our kids, most of them, they’re the first ones. And to go to college that’s a big leap. It’s a whole other deal for some of our kids. So it is a very tough deal when you don’t have your parents at a level where they can raise their kids. We are raising our kids at these schools many times. That’s not a sole responsibility in many of our upper middle class schools. They have the same pressure academically but there’s a chance they’re going to make it a lot easier because they can lean on those parents when... in our demographic a lot of the cases that’s not happening.

Even though Mr. Chase does not give specific examples of how NCLB impacts his organizational or curricular practices in this dialogue, this portion of our conversation does illuminate his perspective on the impact NCLB has on school organizations serving particular student populations. Mr. Chase explains that NCLB unfairly assesses schools serving large percentages of low-wealth students through its requirement that all subgroups, schools, and districts perform to a standard level, which is prescribed by state mandated AMOs and the federally mandated 2014 deadline of 100% student proficiency. From Mr. Chase’s perspective, NCLB does not sufficiently consider the challenges schools serving high percentages of students from low-wealth households face, and therefore is not accurately assessing schools.
Ms. Campbell of Thurgood Marshall Academy made a similar argument as Mr. Chase when I asked her, “Does the state accountability system, which is mandated by NCLB, fairly assess your school?” And although Ms. Campbell’s argument centered on the inequitable funding of schools and the assessment of academic achievement, I included her following response in this section because Ms. Campbell presents a perceived correlation between the inequitable funding of schools, student population wealth dynamics, and the assessment of schools when she states:

The way schools are measured? I think I have a different perspective now with the whole CRCT investigation. And before I don’t think I would have said that it was unfair but now I do; I think it is really unfair. And it’s not that… I don’t need you to give me five grace points because of where my school is, but I really need you to be realistic about how much money my school has. Like, you have to equalize it if you are going to judge us on… if we are going to have the same test at the end of the year then you’ve got to equalize it throughout the school year. Or acknowledge the fact, like I said, don’t give me extra points, but you’ve got to acknowledge the fact that ok this is a school that has this SES, it is working with this budget, and these are the gains that were made. So it is like we are on different levels. Like I can’t compete with a school that has a PTA raising $100,000. Because that says a lot about the culture of that school immediately, because if they can pull in these kinds of resources, just the parents… they’ve got the business community, they’re going to have different partners…So it’s like you have to equalize everything, and if it is not going to be equal then don’t parade these schools out like, you know, you don’t know where this whole thing came from, or like where the feeling of this would come from. There is no equality. (Ms. Campbell of Thurgood Marshall Academy)

I followed up Ms. Campbell’s statement with the following summation and question:

So you think the students’ economic standing also compounds the problem of the school not having the same amount of funding, because the student community themselves, the parents, can’t bring in as much human resource or as much money, just even with their PTA like you were saying, they can’t bring in as much money or have that same support. (Davis, Researcher)

In response to my question, Ms. Campbell spoke about how NCLB, and the state accountability system, needs to more fully consider the challenges schools serving low-wealth communities face. Ms. Campbell argues that the accountability system fails to consider the growth in student
academic performance her school produces, while simultaneously failing to consider the dearth of resources her school community has access to in order to produce growth, when assessing the performance of Thurgood Marshall. In her response, Ms. Campbell explains why expecting all schools to perform to the same level, without regard to their unique challenges, is unfair when she states:

**Ms. Campbell:** Exactly. So our parents can make noise and they will call Hayes City Public Schools but they will get brushed off. Whereas certain parents in certain areas they just make a phone call and things happen. Our building is an example. And my thing is I love it [the building], because I feel like ok let’s just keep it going because that is all we can do. But be realistic. When you give me my AYP determination, I need you to really understand; like this is what they [Thurgood Marshall] did, but this is what they had to work with, and this is what we [Hayes City Public Schools] did to help them, however much or little that was, when you put us against another school.

**Davis:** So the schools are not on equal playing fields to begin with?

**Ms. Campbell:** They are not, right.

**Davis:** And you think that is because of student populations? Wealthier students have more advantage?

**Ms. Campbell:** Right, yes, yes.

Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy supported Ms. Campbell’s comments by noting how the current funding structure does not adequately fund a school like Cross Town Academy, which serves a high percentage of students in ESOL and come from low-wealth households, when she states:

And they will argue that yes all these poor schools have Title I money, but it is not really enough. Especially the rich schools, a lot of funding money comes from the parents, come from the tax base. And the school in the poor area... there is almost no money, no tax base, no money from the community. (Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy)

Although Mr. Griffin stated earlier that Georgia’s use of racial and socioeconomic subgroup performance data to assess the adequacy of his school failed to present him or his organization with any unique pressure (given that Edwards serves a large percentage of low-wealth Black students), he did perceive Georgia’s use of subgroup performance data as it pertains to students participating in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and
Special Education programs as presenting a unique pressure for schools serving high percentages of ESOL and Special Education students. Mr. Griffin found issue with NCLB and the state accountability system’s expectations of students served by ESOL, as well as those being served in Special Education programs, to perform to the same degree on the CRCT and the GHSGT as their peers who are not served by these programs. During our conversation, Mr. Griffin expressed how schools serving high percentages of students in ESOL and Special Education programs are unfairly assessed and are under a unique pressure when he states:

Mr. Griffin: Well I think, ok because I have subgroups here, so therefore, I mean we are a big subgroup, but let’s just take special Ed. See when Bush started you had to be at the 50 percentile. But now you got to be at like the 84 percentile. There is a point where, just well how high am I going to expect an 8th grade Special Needs kid to get. I mean when you get these large subgroups you go… you know there’s a reason you’re in Special Ed. Let’s take Barker Middle School who has this huge infusion of…when I was the principal there I had 60% ESOL, you know you get a one year pass and after that I expect you to be at grade level. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School)

Mr. Griffin goes on to detail the unique pressure of educating students served by the ESOL program when he states:

Now should student where English is a second language be successful? Absolutely. First of all, the bar is not that high; meets. But does it take more than one year to get them there? You only get a one-year pass if English isn’t your first language. You walk in here with a disruptive education, you’re 12-years-old, you come from Guatemala, who knows what challenges you’ve had in your life, you get thrown into our middle schools. And now, you know, you’ve had one year of English, and now they are in your 7th grade Social Studies class and you’ve got to get them up to standard. And that’s some of the challenge, and I’m not saying we, you know, step back from that challenge, but I think it’s wrong…how are you going to label schools successful or failure. I think they should rethink that… in my opinion. I think the only things you should get a pass on is maybe ESOL that’s only been here one year, and maybe it should be two or three I don’t know what that number should be as far as you really expect them to reach standards. I know if you threw me into say France, and you gave me one year and now I got to know French history like everybody else. I don’t know if I could… you know. You see what I’m saying. How quickly could I learn French? I don’t know. I don’t think I could do it in a year. And I am just thinking of myself. (Mr. Griffin of Edwards Charter School)
Like Mr. Chase, Mr. Griffin does not specifically explain how NCLB and Georgia’s single state accountability system, which uses the performance scores on the CRCT of these subgroups (here specifically Special Education and ESOL) to assess the adequacy of his school, directly impact his organizational or curricular practices. However, this portion of our conversation does illustrate the unique pressures NCLB presents for school administrators that serve student bodies with significant subgroup populations in both charters and TPS. Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School further illustrates the unique challenges schools with large percentages of ESOL and English Language Learners (ELL) face when he replies to the question, “so what are some issues you think specifically you deal with, with your student population that makes it more difficult to get them to a passing mark?” To which he answered:

Resources at home is one of the things we face. One of the things we do face is a language, cultural, with our Hispanic population. That’s the one area we did not make it in last year is our ELL population, Math and Reading. So for that, we’ve tried to create more before and after school programs for language. Also hiring staff that is bilingual, hiring Latinos or whatever culture we can add to our, to let them see the success opportunities of others. I think it is important that we provide those things for our kids. The one thing that I have seen over the last few years is the lack of Latino candidates. I mean if there was one thing that I could change is bringing more of that population into my school, because those kids need it. You know, I could not imagine not seeing someone similar to me in a role that I could model myself after. (Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School)

Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy also commented on how serving a high percentage of ESOL and Title I students (while operating under the mandates of NCLB) have informed her organizational and curricular practices. When asked, “so how do you think that [NCLB mandates associated with subgroup performance] impacts what you guys do here? Like you said, you have a high percentage of ESOL students, you have a lot of students who come in probably behind…” Mrs. Turner jumps in before I could complete my sentence and replies that she incorporates a number of practices in her school, not in response to NCLB mandates, but because they are best
for teaching and learning. However, as she continues to speak, it becomes evident how the accountability mandates of NCLB do uniquely impact her school’s environment due to student demographics when she states:

So my school is different in the way that I do whatever it takes to get them up to standards, regardless of No Child Left Behind. I really don’t…I told my teachers, teach them higher than the required standards. Then what we implemented into our school is that we have longer school days. The first impact is financial. But we do it anyway without No Child Left Behind because the kids are so far behind. So you have longer school day, longer class time, and then you have after school program, then you have the Saturday school program...when you have the money, and then you have the summer school. So we implement all of this, and then one of the greatest things we have in the school is that the class size is so small. The class size range from 8 to the biggest one is about 20, we don’t go more than 20 but the smallest one is 8. But Special Education students depend on their IEP, we follow their IEP, and there might only be 2 students in a class, but the impact first of all is financial because it cost more. The second thing is that it gives the teachers somewhat anxiety, including me, the anxiety is high because I know what I am doing is right it’s good but my students are so far behind so it is more difficult than regular kids. Especially in 5th grade this year we have half of them are Title I students or ESOL and many have never been in school. So of course it causes you these angst, you always feel... will I make AYP will I make AYP. (Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy)

Even further, Mrs. Turner explains why she believes the accountability system, including the test used to assess student performance and the state curriculum, is culturally biased. Mrs. Turner’s perception of how NCLB uniquely impacts minority students, and schools serving minority students, is detailed in the following dialogue:

Davis: So do you think that the policy may be unfairly, and maybe unintentionally, but unfairly assessing schools that have high minority high poverty populations because they don’t consider growth?

Mrs. Turner: Yes that is exactly what I said, and the other thing, no matter what they tell me, whoever do this NCLB, I don’t think they are educators. They are a bunch of legislatures who think...they view education cut and dry because they themselves so cut and dry. Partly they’re not very smart, I don’t know, that is how I feel, and that they’re not rounded themselves. They are not aware of cultural differences. That is what I emphasize in the school. I want them to know that we are not alone. We here with other different colors, and accents, and all this, but I don’t think those people who started No Child Left Behind...they probably think as a bunch of White men, I don’t know. Because you look at the history of education in this country, it’s always based on the knowledge of the White man and then you measure up to this knowledge. And some of us bring with
us a rich culture that has never been counted because you are not known or in the mainstream and No Child Left Behind reflects that.

Mr. Kelly of Life Academy notes how serving a diverse student population has created a unique experience for his school, and himself as an administrator, under the mandates of NCLB.

In this portion of our conversation, Mr. Kelly explains the issue with expecting his school to reach the 2014 federal deadline of 100% student proficiency in Reading/English Language Arts and Math when he states:

Well I can’t speak for them I’m speaking for Life Academy. Because I know my students, and I know the divers populations and families that they’re coming from, and we have some challenges. We have some kids coming here that should be able to read by time they come here in kindergarten; they can’t read. We have some kids here that has a problem with social skills, that does not enable them to be able to adjust when they come here in kindergarten. So a lot of that…kids are playing catch up. And whenever you have a kid playing catch up rather than staying up, that’s a problem. Now if we came from an ideal setting, where all the kids coming to us, from A to Z in kindergarten, are reading on a kindergarten and first grade level, then ok that could be possible. But see we are a public school. We don’t screen the youngsters that come into Life Academy. You have some charter schools that have a screening test that says ok you can come you can’t come. We don’t do that here. You know, we are open just like a public school we have to take everybody that comes. And that’s the indicator that No Child Left Behind does not consider. Now if you have a mechanism in place where you can screen kids and you’ll only take the top percentage kids coming through, all right you might be able to make 100%. But when you’ve got… Hayes City Schools says we have to take every kid that comes through the door, alright, regardless of what baggage he’s coming to you with, I think it’s an impossibility for me to have 100% of my population making AYP. That’s just being realistic. (Mr. Kelly of Life Academy)

During the course of this study, about half the participants mentioned how the racial, socioeconomic, special needs, or English proficiency status of their students caused a unique pressure under NCLB. Other participants in the study alluded to these same pressures when speaking about the fairness or funding aspects of NCLB, however I felt it was important for this section of the chapter to highlight comments specifically illustrating the intersection between student population demographics and mandates provided by NCLB. Considering the comments made in this section, it would appear that several administrators perceive NCLB as providing a
unique, unfair, and perhaps negative pressure to produce particular levels of academic achievement without considering the challenges these student populations present to educators; or without considering the gains these schools produce among the students they serve.

The next section of this chapter illustrates how these administrators perceive NCLB impacting their organizational and curricular practices. While conducting conversations, these administrators were able to present specific examples of how NCLB impacted, or influenced, their practices. And although the previous four sections (1) NCLB, How Fair is That?, (2) NCLB Not Supporting School Goals, (3) NCLB and Funding, and (4) NCLB and Subgroup Student Populations, helped to create an understanding of how NCLB impacts the practices of these administrators, the following section details specific practices that are being implemented in response to, and or that are being made possible by, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

(5) NCLB Impacting Organization and Curriculum

In conducting these interviews I found that NCLB tends to impact, or influence, the organizational and curricular practices of these administrators in a number of ways. In order to more easily detail the specific ways in which this policy impacts these administrators organizational and curricular practices, I separated the described impacts into the four categories: (1) Teaching and Administrative Practices, (2) Narrowing the Focus to Test Preparation, Math, and Reading/ELA, (3) Programs Provided by NCLB, and (4) Hiring Practices and High Quality Teachers.

During the course of our conversations, many of the study participants were able to detail how they perceive NCLB impacting their administrative practices on a day-to-day basis. Although previous sections of this chapter have highlighted how NCLB has negatively impacted (from the perspective of the participating administrators) these schools and their administrators,
this section details a number of ways in which NCLB supports and positively (as described by participants) impacts these administrators’ educational environments. Although some administrators did provide positive impacts of NCLB, a number of administrators did continue to provide specific examples of how NCLB negatively impacted their organizations and practices. These perceptions, both negative and positive, will be detailed in this section.

Teaching and Administrative Practices

When asked how NCLB has influenced his practices, Mr. Malone explains that the policy has compelled him and his staff to monitor the academic progress of students more vigilantly than they had in previous years. Mr. Malone details the new process his school uses to ensure that students stay on track to meet adequate yearly performance measures when he states:

We monitor our kids. Last year I had a board in my conference room, I called it my war room, and it had every student with disability listed up there with every benchmark score, 150 something in my school, so it made us aware of that one subgroup. We had another wall with our ELL, as far as that goes, so we monitor every child more specifically because I didn’t want it to come down to .6 of one child. So from an awareness standpoint that was one practice we changed. And we went back and made sure that those kids were enrolled with us for the full academic year. And the teachers set back and we looked at those kids that did not pass the CRCT and what practices could we have changed. The individual teachers looked at that. But it is frustrating to know that out of all of our categories, 22 categories, that we made it in 21 of those, we missed by .6 of one child, but the newspaper prints Quahog Middle School does not make AYP. That is pretty disheartening to my staff. (Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle School)

Mr. Malone perceives the pressure, provided by NCLB, to more vigilantly monitor student achievement throughout the year as a positive influence on his administrative practices. However, Mr. Malone also details how the strong focus on subgroup performance, and the use of standardized tests to determine the adequacy of schools, can be unhealthy and unfair to school environments. In general, most participants in this study shared Mr. Malone’s sentiment as illustrated in previous sections of this chapter.
Mrs. Allen also explains how NCLB encourages a focus on subgroup performance, but presents a slightly different perspective than Mr. Malone. Mrs. Allen perceives this focus as positive and encouraging healthy changes in the way teachers and schools assess their, and their students’, performances when she states:

I think it has, so far as, we’re so use to doing school improvement plans, but what the No Child Left Behind policy did was really force us to take a closer look at what we’re putting into our school improvement plans. And as we’re looking at our school improvement plans, or Title I plans, or just the overall plan, we’re a lot more focused on subgroups. So no more is it, I’m a teacher with 20 kids and I’m not concerned as long as I get 80% passing in my class. I need to know, I need to be a lot more focused on, well here is this child, and if he’s a part of this group, you know then how am I reaching them; even so far as down to boys vs. girls. How are children learning, because ultimately that’s what we’re about. (Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary)

Mrs. Turner supports the perspective presented by Mrs. Allen when she explains how having a federal policy that encourages the monitoring of particular subgroups has supported student learning in her school. Mrs. Turner notes the positive impact NCLB has had on the practices of her staff when she states:

It is, it is positive because it makes everybody work together as a team. My teachers have to sit together, because you cannot just pass one subject, you cannot just get this one group of gifted to pass, you have to get all of the Title I, Title III, and ESOL kids to pass as well. What I like about it is that it covers ever kid. And it is the first time that… I worked with ESOL kids for years before I started this school, for over 20 years, and normally the kids were not counted. So their improvement was not counted as a part of the school’s success so normally they were exempt from taking any test, standardized test. But this is the first time that they actually included these kids, so now the schools really need to work on how to get these kids up to standards. So there is more money or ways that they try to improve to get these kids to pass in certain ways. (Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy)

While conversing with Mr. Harper, he explained how the mandates of NCLB have positively impacted his administrative practices as well. Like Mr. Malone, Mr. Harper and his staff have implemented the use of student achievement data from the CRCT, and the current year’s Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO), to inform their schoolwide improvement plans,
and to progress monitor student academic achievement throughout the year. Mr. Harper detailed how NCLB influences these practices by stating:

The action plan where all of our goals sit take up 7 pages, so you are talking about a good number of full pages of goals that go across every grade level, and they hit the core content of Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Attendance and Science, and within each grade level’s goals we are also looking at subgroup performance. And from year to year you’re setting what we like to think are smart goals starting with the student and the teacher, based on what the school wide absolute measure is. But the push during the school year is really not just meeting, it is exceeding. So at a minimum it is a week-to-week process of knowing where kids are and where we need them to be. And so we progress monitor, that’s really our school wide focus. From second to the fifth grade we progress monitor every single student week to week. And every year we are finding ways to tweak it and refine it so that we have no surprises come AYP time. (Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary)

Similarly, Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines Academy also notes that his school has implemented a progress monitoring effort in order to ensure student mastery of the skills and content prescribed by the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). Our exchange below illustrates how the accountability mandates of NCLB are promoting a common practice among these administrators:

Davis: You say you use test scores, in addition to student performance in class, in order to identify students for after school programs. Do you use benchmarks and other test scores to organize your curriculum from year to year?

Mr. Murphy: Actually we do, we do benchmark test. You mentioned benchmark test. So what happens in the summer time, when our kids first come to us, they take a diagnostic, which is basically all the skills in our head we think you should know by the end of fifth grade. And then along the way they take a benchmark one, which will be a test that has... that’s assessing all of the first quarter objectives. And then benchmark two, benchmark three, benchmark four, and then eventually they’ll take the one at the end of the year to see the growth over the course of the year.

Davis: And do those skills line up with what is on the CRCT?

Mr. Murphy: They pretty much line up with that and they are a little more rigorous than the CRCT and we are continually... and it is something that we have done along with our sister schools, and we have developed on our own so we are continuously tweaking it to make them more rigorous and to give us a better gage of where our children will fall on the CRCT so there won’t be any surprises or anything like that.
When asked what practices her school incorporates to ensure they meet the student performance mandates of NCLB each year, Mrs. Richards of Glendale Academy detailed a progress monitoring practice similar to that of the administrators from Quahog, Cedar Pines, and Grove Shoals. In the following statement, Mrs. Richards illustrates how her school assesses students, and then uses those assessments to provide supports for students to ensure adequate performs on the CRCT when she states:

We frequently have interim assessments where we’re benchmarking our students to see how well they are meeting and mastering standards as determined by the scope and sequences the teachers have created over the summer. When we get results, especially from benchmark exams, we have a data room where every student in the school is listed on a wall and we show their performance, percent objective, how many have met, exceeded, or did not meet based on either the benchmark assessments or the previous year’s CRCT. We also take those students, and we code it by a color, so those students between 750 and 800 are in the yellow range and so those students are invited to Saturday academy. So we do a lot of remediation for those students, we extend our day to the 4 or 5 o’clock hour. (Mrs. Richards of Glendale Academy)

In addition to creating a culture of student academic progress monitoring, a number of participants have credited NCLB with influencing positive changes to the communication practices of administrators and teachers with their stakeholders as well. Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary described how NCLB has encouraged administrators to more vigilantly observer the practices of their teachers, become instructional leaders in their schools, and increase lines of communications with stakeholders. While conversing with Mrs. Allen, she was able to detail how NCLB encouraged these changes in her school by stating:

Mrs. Allen: Yes, I think it truly does focus you. And so I do think that it has improved teaching practices, it has made administrators get out of offices, I hope, and really take a look at what instructional practices are going on in the school. I think it has forced administrators to also realize who their customers are, and communicate more with parents and with the community, and with teachers to let them know that what we do each day impacts children; it impacts children’s lives. And so we’re looking at what is best for the child. Is it best, you know, pass him on even though he didn’t pass the CRCT, might have been passing all year in class, but then this one exam says because we’re going to follow the state mandates and state law that says if they don’t pass in the 3rd or 5th grade then they
Mr. Kelly of Life Academy also noted how NCLB has encouraged better communication between educators in his school and stakeholders when he states:

Well we do a lot of different things. We try to make the parents accountable in a way that...we have what we call a Parent Appearance Notice we call PAN. And if a youngster is not doing the things that we think he should do, we’ll send a PAN letter home requesting the parents to come talk with us. The kid is not suspended, but in order for him to get back into school, the parent has to come and have a conference with us. That’s one way of trying to have some accountability. We have what we call Parent University, where we have sessions around Math, Reading, around attendance, and try to get the parents to understand how all these things come into play when you want to look at having youngsters accountable. So basically what we have to do is try to figure out ways to try to make parents accountable, or to hold parents to a certain accountability piece, that will help us in the accountability piece through No Child Left Behind. So just a lot of different creative things we try to do to try to do that. (Mr. Kelly of Life Academy)

Reflecting on the comments made during the course of our conversations, it seems that in addition to influencing the teaching and administrative practices of educators, NCLB is also influencing the type of curriculum these charter schools are providing. According to these administrators, NCLB is a driving force that dictates the points of emphasis in most of their school curriculums. Speaking to these administrators made me question the commonly conceived idea that charter schools are more autonomous (in regards to pedagogical methods, educational goals, and curricular focus) than TPS. According to these administrators, the accountability mandates of NCLB, to some degree, pressure them to narrow their curricular focus to standardized test preparation, Math, and Reading/English Language Arts instruction. The following section details the specific actions administrators have taken, in response to NCLB, in
Narrowing the Focus to Test Preparation, Math, and Reading/ELA

As noted in previous sections of this chapter, mandates associated with NCLB seem to be focusing administrators on the academic subject areas of Math and Reading/English Language Arts, in addition to providing a focus on student preparation for the CRCT and GHSGT. As illustrated in the following dialogue, Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary was able to detail how NCLB accountability mandates, which call for the production of adequate student test scores on the CRCT, have influenced her school’s curriculum:

Davis: Do you think NCLB also helps you to focus on the curriculum and the particular things you guys teach and emphasize?
Mrs. Allen: I think so. Here in our district we do benchmark assessments three times a year to see where kids are going to play out. We’ve taken what we call power standards, what are the power standards, and what should children know in this grade level to do well on any standardized test. We’ve got our test prep segments, and things like that. Whereas before, as a teacher, I can remember we did test prep a couple of weeks before the exam. But in our day we’ve already incorporated a test prep segment where children may look at four or five questions a day and talk through those questions, this is what it means, and language of the questions and things like that. So I think a lot of schools have done a lot more of that, with teaching kids how to take the test and what the questions mean.

Mrs. Richards of Glendale Academy goes further by noting how this emphasis on standardized testing, which according to these administrators has been produced by the accountability mandates of NCLB, has not only influenced her administrative and curricular practices but has also influenced how her community stakeholders perceive and interact with her school. In the following dialogue, Mrs. Richards details specific examples of how NCLB has influenced her school and administrative practices when she states:

Mrs. Richards: You know and now that you have said that, we do notice a drop in attendance after the CRCT. Because we still have Saturday academy after CRCT is over, but we notice that parents are not likely to bring them after the test. We have even lost students; parents that felt like we were not doing enough to prep and emphasize and get
kids ready for the CRCT. And so my question was well what is it that we should be doing? They wanted us to send home packets, and they wanted CRCT rallies, T-shirts…

Davis: So you feel pressure from parents to test prep?

Mrs. Richards: Well we did, we did at one point yes. And I’ve even been guilty though of providing incentives for girls to come to school during testing, to do their best, because we didn’t make a big deal out of testing some girls did not take it seriously and we noticed that. So we wanted them to know it was a big deal, so the way we positioned it was we need you to show the world what you know. And it is a test for us, like how well are our teachers teaching. So if all of your sisters come to school you get a coupon for a frosty. So we did that but it felt cheesy.

Mrs. Turner of Cross Town Academy illustrates how the curricular autonomy of charter school administrators is further limited by NCLB when she speaks about the selection of teaching resources. According to Mrs. Turner, the focus on preparing students for the CRCT influences a number of decisions she makes, including the books her staff selects for instruction. As the following dialogue details, Mrs. Turner perceives the accountability mandates of NCLB as influencing her practices and limiting her autonomy as a charter school operator:

Mrs. Turner: The books that you need to use, even we opt out of what books we can use, but you still have to use the books that are touching something that has to do with the testing. Because you cannot really say I am not going to teach to the test. We are not teaching to the test, but we have to know what’s in the test. Because if you’re not teaching to the test, my kids can be brilliant and read at the 10th grade level when they’re in the 5th grade, but if the teacher don’t know what they are asking the teacher won’t be able to experience those kinds of questions.

Davis: So even being a charter school, even having the freedom and flexibility and autonomy to do what you want, you’re still somewhat pressured to use certain materials because ultimately you do have to, to some degree, teach to the test?

Mrs. Turner: Yes, to respond to what the standard is. Not really teach to the test, teach to what they require on the standards. There’re certain standards that as an educator like me I wouldn’t teach because it doesn’t make the kid think. And that is why, hopefully, the Common Core will change this mindset.

When asked about how NCLB influences his educational environment, Mr. Kelly of Life Academy speaks about the stress his students face from taking the CRCT. He then explains why his school has incorporated test preparation as part of its curriculum in the following statement:

And it’s not all about money. I think the stress level on kids, when it comes to trying to meet these lofty goals, and trying to prepare them and...we don’t teach the test, we teach
the taking of the test. So we just teach the students how to take the test. That is with any evaluative tool. So even with the tools we use with our everyday teaching here, we construct that tool in the format, and that’s one way that we look at trying to expose youngsters to the format. Hopefully that piece works, and a lot of times it does and a lot of times it doesn’t. But you really have to get a curriculum, a curriculum that’s going to lend itself to teaching of Georgia Standards, because the Georgia Standards are suppose to be correlated with No Child Left Behind. (Mr. Kelly of Life Academy)

In addition to the topic of test preparation, many of the participants spoke about how they perceived NCLB narrowing the K-12 curriculum nationally. Participants made several comments about how NCLB, from their perspectives, has narrowed the national education focus to the teaching of Math and Reading/English Language Arts at the expense of other subjects such as Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, Foreign Language, etc. However, most participants were reluctant to admit, or were initially unable to recognize, that this narrowing phenomenon was also taking place in their schools.

As our conversations progressed, I asked participants to consider many of the previous comments they had made in regards to the fairness of NCLB, funding mandates, suggested changes to the policy, and how they thought their schools might operate absent NCLB in order to help them conceptualize and describe how they see NCLB impacting specific organizational and curricular practices. As participants reflected on their previous comments, many of them began to detail specific actions they have taken in response to NCLB that may have produced a narrowing in their curriculum by emphasizing Math and Reading/English Language Arts.

Some participants immediately viewed NCLB as narrowing their school’s curriculum, and these participants introduced the subject of curriculum narrowing during the course of our conversation. However, others began to recognize and articulate how this phenomenon is taking place in their school only after being asked to reexamine some of their previous comments. Additionally, there were some participants that perceived NCLB as encouraging the narrowing
of the curriculum, but stated that they were not allowing NCLB to narrow the curricular focus of their school environment.

Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School noticed the impact of NCLB on his practices and found that it did to some degree cause him to narrow his focus on Math and English Language Arts during our dialogue:

Davis: Since Math and ELA are the things that are tested to calculate AYP, do you think that influences the type of curriculum you provide. Like do you focus more on Math and ELA because you know that will be tested?

Mr. Chase: Yes and no. Yes and no. I think there is an emphasis on Math and English, mostly Math, but as far as time in the school, studying, and importance, no. But I am also honest with the staff and our community and saying look these are the two that are measured. So there is a piece of our time, scheduled throughout the day, I’m going to cut out specifically for students to be prepared for the Georgia High School Graduation Test. So it impacts my schedule but the curriculum not per se because we would be teaching that anyway, but it definitely influences my schedule and how I utilize my time to get my students ready for that assessment.

Mr. Brown of Union Middle initially states that since his school receives more federal funding for Math and Reading/English Language Arts it only appears that his school emphasizes those subjects more so than others. He claims that there is only the appearance of the curriculum narrowing at Union Middle when he states:

Now, as an administrator, we may put more resources into say a math camp, or a writing camp, a reading camp, or to do more tutoring. That’s only because federal dollars are connected with school improvement plans, which are connected with Title I budgets, which are connected with your bottom line student achievement. So I think you get more resources in those areas and therefore because you get more resources it would appear that you’re putting more thought into those areas. (Mr. Brown of Union Middle)

However, as we continue our conversation, Mr. Brown recognizes that NCLB does in fact encourage his school to narrow their focus on Math and Reading/English Language Arts, and explains why that focus has been established in his school when he states:

You talked about school goals and objectives and I think that there is a lot there with regard to the connection with No Child Left Behind. Obviously, everything we do with our school improvement plan, our Title I plan, has to align with the federal mandates, and
unfortunately when we do a school improvement plan the first thing we look at is Reading/ELA, and the next thing we’re going to look at is Mathematics. So that is our driver and we are looking at results. And the whole plan is developed around No Child Left Behind. And then that incorporates the triangulation of, you know, here is what we need to do to hit those goals, here’s the resources that’s needed, here’s the money that were going to spend, and here’s the professional learning that we need to make this happen. (Mr. Brown of Union Middle)

As Mr. Brown explained to me during our conversation, his school’s goals are to achieve the AMO set for each year, which are tied to student performance on the CRCT in Math and Reading/English Language Arts.

Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines perceived NCLB as providing an increased focus on Math and Reading/English Language Arts as well. However, Mr. Murphy explained that he did not allow the federal focus on those subjects to narrow the curricular focus of his school when he states:

**Mr. Murphy:** Because I mean we’ve consistently done very well in Science and Social Studies, and we have received some recognition around that. But I think you know, what I feel, and the message that is being sent to me, as an educator is that Reading and Math are the most important.

**Davis:** So you do feel that message?

**Mr. Murphy:** I feel it, I don’t know if that’s the message that they are trying to send but you feel it.

**Davis:** So I want to go back to the beginning, so we were saying earlier that all the subjects get equal time in the school, but in the after school programs Math and Reading will probably get a little more emphasis because of the funding aspect.

**Mr. Murphy:** Not at my school. I am still going to fund, I am going to use the school’s budget, every subject area is going to get the extended, but I am able to use Title I funds for the Math and the Reading and the Science.

While speaking to Mr. Malone about how the accountability mandates of NCLB had influenced his school’s curricular focus, he was able to detail specific ways Quahog Middle’s curriculum emphasized the mastery of Math and Reading/English Language Arts skills. As illustrated below, Quahog implemented a number of programs specific to Math and Reading that are not duplicated for other subject areas:
Davis: I have talked to some other principals and they were saying, as far as their curriculum goes, some of them offer double dose classes, or support classes, for Math and Reading. And they were saying, one, students need to learn Math and Reading of course, but it is also because you are judged in that area. Do you see a pressure or focusing on Math and Reading because that is something that is emphasized in NCLB?

Mr. Malone: We do. We do. Matter of fact we created, I was named principal of this school four years ago, and my first full year we created Math enrichment classes, which are the support classes. We looked at our students that were on the border line of that 800 mark, 810 to 775, and we started incorporating those into that class and we strategically targeted the standards that they had not mastered. Teachers did an individual learning plan for that kid, prior to summer, and so therefore going into next school year we already had that outlined. Last year we started a Reading Enrichment with one teacher, and so this year I have two Reading Enrichment classes and two Math Enrichment classes students take during their exploratory time or connections depending on how it is worded.

After claiming several times that NCLB in no way impacted, or influenced, the curricular structure of Glendale Academy, I presented Mrs. Richards with a hypothetical question and we discovered through her answer that NCLB did in fact influence the curricular structure of her school:

Davis: If AYP was calculated simply by the way your students performed on the Social Studies test, and that was the only test that measured AYP, would you guys change the way you structure classes, or time, would that do anything different to your day?

Mrs. Richards: You know what, that is interesting. Now I’m a little nervous about how I answer this because our day is structure around Math and ELA. So we have two hours, non-consecutive hours, in Math and two non-consecutive hours of English Language Arts. So it is broken up with an hour of literacy and literature, an hour of writing, an hour of Math computation, which we call math operations, and then we have one hour of Math analysis, and our scores rock in those areas and I’m wondering if it’s because there is more time. What if someone said, ok now we’re throwing in Science and Social Studies, and your AYP determination is going to be measured by your performance in those areas? You know that is such a hypothetical question I don’t know, but maybe it would. And we tell our students all the time we don’t focus on the CRCT we focus on the SAT and the ACT. That is a hard question, but I’m afraid that my answer would probably be yes. Especially if you are going to be measured by how well you do on those subject areas.

When asked if NCLB narrowed his curricular focus, or constrained his practices in any way, Mr. Chase supplied the following answer:

It probably holds me back from the perspective that I probably wouldn’t focus as much of my time on Math and English. I would definitely be spending more time, or trying to
push, my other content areas. But at the end of the day I know those are the two that count. So when it’s down to the nitty gritty, unfortunately those are the two areas that I am going to look out for. I know that is unbalanced, to me it’s also unhealthy; it doesn’t make me feel good as a leader because I know every content area is just as important. (Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School)

Although Mr. Chase does not explicitly say NCLB narrows his curricular focus, his above statement makes it clear that his curricular focus has been narrowed on Math and English and perhaps to the detriment of other subjects.

As we spoke about the impacts NCLB has had on her school environment, Ms. Campbell explained how difficult it has been for her to balance the educational interest of Thurgood Marshall’s student body and the accountability mandates set forth by NCLB. Ms. Campbell was one of the few administrators that presented this dilemma of maintaining a focus on the school’s mission vs. narrowing the curricular focus of the school in an effort to reach AYP and keep the school open. Ms. Campbell expresses her dilemma in the following dialogue:

**Davis:** Do you think it forces you guys to put more emphasis in those subjects that are calculate for AYP vs. those that are not?

**Ms. Campbell:** Yes. Yes.

**Davis:** So how do you guys emphasize those subjects more than others?

**Ms. Campbell:** Well actually for this year what we are doing…last year it was helpful for our reading and language arts, math we bombed. Reading and Language Arts have held steady, because for a while that was where our focus was. So that is pretty solid, but now it is like our goal is to maintain and increase Language Arts, and pull up Math, but we can’t lose everything else. Now Social Studies and Science have just been forgotten subjects for years, but now that this coming school year the Science part of the CRCT is going to count toward AYP now it is like ok we have to get this STEM stuff we have to get a Science initiative. So it is almost like the subjects are not important until the test is going to determine your AYP. So it definitely does, so I try to be really conscious of not getting caught up in that because it is easy to. It’s like ok my doors might get closed, because we don’t have the luxury of the typical district school where you can be on Needs Improvement for three years. This is our charter renewal year, you know, and we got to make AYP this year. And then it’s like but wait a minute, our responsibility is to educate the children. So what do I need to do to make sure that those things are in place?

Lastly, in an attempt to explain how NCLB has influenced schools to narrow their curricular focus to Math and Reading/English Language Arts, as well as intensify their focus on
standardized test preparation, Mrs. Allen of Oakwood Elementary summed it up best in our following dialogue:

**Davis:** Do you think NCLB also provides a focus, or forces you to emphasize certain subjects more than others like Math, Reading…

**Mrs. Allen:** Math, Reading, and Language Arts, that is going to be your focus at a lot of schools because it is such a high task thing, so of course. High stakes, as teachers and administrators you want to make sure they do Math well and they do Reading well because those are the grades. Now Science is about to come into play, with kids, so I guess everybody is about to all of a sudden make sure we really focus, focus, focus, on Science. Because you don’t want your school to be on one of those list that say kids at this school aren’t performing.

*Programs Provided by NCLB*

As previously discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, titled NCLB and Funding, Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Turner, Mr. Chase, and Ms. Gold all detailed how Title I of NCLB supplied their schools with useful educational resources. Mrs. Allen noted that Title I supplied her school with extra funds to support student learning. Although limited to only supporting students targeted by Title I, Mrs. Turner explained how those funds supply books and other needed materials for her students. In addition, Mr. Chase noted that Title I funds were used to support tutoring services offered during a Saturday program at his school, as well as provide absolute enrichment during normal school hours. Even further, Ms. Gold noted that her school would not have been able to purchase technology used to support student learning, resources in Spanish, or provide an after school tutoring service without funds provided by Title I. Continuing on that theme, this section briefly details a number of programs, geared toward increasing the academic achievement of students in these schools, which are made possible through funds provided by Title I of NCLB.

According to Mr. Malone, not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) allowed his school to receive federal funds to support tutoring programs at his school when he states:
From the standpoint of, because we did not make AYP, we offer supplemental educational services, which is after school hours of tutoring provided by different services. So we don’t have extended day from a full staff standpoint, but we do have after school opportunities. (Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle)

Unlike Ms. Campbell of Thurgood Marshall Academy, who worried about making AYP during her charter renewal year and her school possible being closed, Mr. Malone operates a school located in a charter district and therefore is not concerned with charter renewals or school closures. Although Quahog Middle is technically a charter school, as part of a charter district its existence is similar to a TPS. Therefore, Quahog Middle School has the luxury of falling into Needs Improvement (NI) status and remaining open.

During the course of our conversation, Mr. Murphy of Cedar Pines Academy was also able to detail how NCLB has supported programs in his school as illustrated by the following dialogue:

**Davis:** How do you see the No Child Left Behind policy impacting what you do here on a day-to-day basis?

**Mr. Murphy:** So the way I think NCLB impacts my children is that, through the Title I program. And of course Title I was established to provide schools that have a majority of families who are on either free and reduced lunch, or below the poverty, lower income families, the same resources that other schools would have. So Title I really provides us with a lot of support and resources to help our kids in terms of funding salaries for extended day, so our teachers are able to stay longer with our kids. Giving us the resources to have a parent resource room, which would have technology, computers, different types of information for the parents so they know their rights as a parent of a child in a Title I school, as well as supplying us with much needed instructional materials, manipulatives, things like that, and providing us with a parent liaison that works very closely with us.

During our conversation, Mrs. Richards explained how Title I funds are needed to support Glendale’s Saturday Academy (which focuses primarily on the development of Math and English Language Arts skills) and its extended day program. The need for Title I funds was further illuminated when Mrs. Richards explained how the decision to designate Glendale as a non-Title I school (by Glendale’s new authorizer Shire County Public Schools) impacted
Glendale when she states:

So Shire County Public Schools as a system has a certain number that a school will have to reach in order to be considered Title I. As a school, that is a part of that system, that number is not high enough for us. Is what we have been told, who knows if that is the truth, I don’t know, all I know is that we lose our Title I designation. So now that we don’t have that, we don’t have the additional federal resources to offer those supplemental services like Saturday academy. So now the only way that we can provide those interventions and remediation activities and services is to try to fund it out of our operational budget. (Mrs. Richards of Glendale Academy)

Within a few months of this conversation, Glendale Academy had to eliminate its Saturday Academy due to lack of funding. According to Mrs. Richards, the building is often opened for teachers who volunteer to host Saturday tutorials for groups of students from time to time, however the Saturday Academy is no longer a consistent schoolwide program.

Mr. Harper detailed how, after conducting a research study, his district decided to use Title I funds to initiate a supplemental services program at his school to increase the academic gains of students when he states:

So the thing that we did arrive at was that we currently have an extended after school program that has been very elusive in terms of a metric that we could use to measure whether or not it’s making a difference. How about we, since we can’t prove or disprove whether or not it is being effective, how about we shift the funds and think of a way that we could still capture the extra time but not necessarily come on the heels of maybe burning out your teachers or your students, and then come up with a different way to capture that time that should benefit them. So that’s what we did, and what we proposed out of the feasibility study was intersession opportunities for our students. So when everybody else is getting ready to leave, let’s just say on Thanksgiving break, there will be a certain group of students that we want to see for three days of that break for a half day program. So we are looking at capturing about 15 days out of an entire school year to see if that will impact those specific students. How is it being funded? With Title I funds. (Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary)

As shown by the conversations displayed in this section, as well as in other sections of this chapter, Title I funds are needed by these administrators to support their school programs. The interesting aspect of this study was learning how accepting those funds, which come with regulations and stipulations tied to them, have impacted the practices of these administrators.
The following section briefly details the impact NCLB Title II requirements have had on some of the participants.

*Hiring Practices and High Quality Teachers*

According to participants in this study, Title II of NCLB has impacted their hiring practices as well as the way in which they evaluate candidates for teaching positions at their schools. During our conversations, most every participant mentioned the highly qualified (HQ or High Q) teacher mandates of NCLB, and how they see these mandates as increasing the productivity of schools; with the exception of Ms. Gold who explained how HQ mandates have constrained her administrative practices in an earlier section. Many participants also stated that HQ mandates encourage them to use data driven decision-making when hiring staff, as well as impact their administrative practices in regards to communication with community stakeholders.

Although authorized by different districts (Mr. Brown’s Union Middle School is authorized by Lawrence City Schools, while Mr. Chase’s Engineering Academy High School is authorized by Hayes City Public Schools), both Mr. Brown and Mr. Chase describe HQ mandates as encouraging them to use a data driven decision-making process for hiring new staff members. Moreover, both administrators see HQ mandates as providing guidelines for hiring educators, and encouraging them to hire content specialist; these perceptions are illustrated by their following statements:

So the mandates with regard to hiring, now we have to have high Q teachers, they have to be highly qualified in their areas. So what we’re doing now more than anything else is we’re going out and finding those content specialist. And before we could do things with provisional certifications and things were not as tight. So we know now that there is some accountability with regard to who we hire, and making sure we have the best people in the right places to do the right thing. The next thing is, it forces you to look at other things like experience, test results, things that you wouldn’t normally be concerned about if you were say hiring someone on a recommendation, but now you want to see the data. You want to say tell me about his CRCT results, tell me how he did with subgroup performance, what were his or her evaluations like. So you’re now really concerned
about those things that high Q did make you consciously aware of. (Mr. Brown of Union Middle School)

I think when I am hiring my teachers I want to know about their data. So prior to AYP that probably wasn’t a big thing. I actually grew up as a principal, I am a young principal, but I grew up as a data driven person. So, not all principals were nurtured in that environment. So when I hire my teachers one of the first things I am asking is how did you do on your EOCT, or how did you do on the CRCT, or how did you do on the Georgia High School Graduation test, how many of your students passed? That impacts whether I hire that person or not. If I see high numbers and they can explain to me how they got those high numbers; my ears are open. But if I see low numbers and they can explain why they have the low numbers, because the high number doesn’t always indicate that you’re a great teacher, but if you can explain to me what happened then I know you’re in tune with not only your data but you’re in tune with instructional practices and you’re in tune with your students, you know their needs, and how to get them there and what were the barriers that enabled them from not getting to where you needed them to be. (Mr. Chase of Engineering Academy High School)

As shown earlier, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), as guided by Title II of NCLB, has given charter school administrators detailed guidelines for hiring highly qualified teachers (For clarification on the requirements mandated by Title II of NCLB please refer to the section above titled (2) NCLB Not Supporting School Goals). When speaking with Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary, he explained how the requirement of his district that all teachers be certified (Lawrence City Schools is a charter district and requires all of its schools to be charters requiring certification) has impacted his hiring practices, as well as mandated that he inform his community stakeholders of his teachers credentials when he states:

Bottom line there are two preliminary criteria to work at Grove Shoals Elementary, you have to be highly qualified. No if ands or buts about it. The other piece is… as a Title I school…we need a clear renewable [certification]… the other piece is the No Child Left Behind processes. If a teacher for some reason is not deemed highly qualified for a subject area, or content they are going to be teaching, I then have to notify the parents in writing that this teacher does not meet No Child Left Behind qualifications, however these are their credentials. And to be honest with you in this district that can only be a temporary situation. So for example, there will be occasions when you have a teacher that has to be out for an extended period of time. So now you have to go out a get a highly qualified substitute. If that substitute teacher is not clear renewable then I have to notify each parent of that particular classroom in writing that this teacher is not highly qualified under No Child Left Behind. (Mr. Harper of Grove Shoals Elementary)
Mr. Kelly also spoke about the mandates requiring all teachers to be highly qualified, and notes that Title II of NCLB has impacted his hiring practices as well when he states:

Well I think the first thing we do is that we look at highly qualified teachers. I mean it’s in there that we should have highly qualified teachers, even the charter school. I know in some charter schools certification is not an impacting piece as far as hiring, but here at Life Academy we do make sure that teachers are certified in the areas that they’re going to be teaching. So I think that No Child Left Behind is a determinate factor of that. (Mr. Kelly of Life Academy)

In an interesting contrast, two of my participants presented very different perspectives on NCLB and its impact on their hiring and retention practices. Mr. Malone of Quahog Middle stated that because of his schools status he was required to hire only highly qualified staff members, but that this requirement caused him very little stress or concern due to the availability of qualified applicants in his district. “Well because we’re Title I and Needs Improvement we have to hire highly qualified individuals, otherwise we have to send the letter out. But I will speak from my tenure here we have been fortunate with the applicants.” However, in the section of this chapter titled (2) NCLB Not Supporting School Goals, Ms. Gold spoke about how the Title II highly qualified mandates have kept her from being able to hire “high quality” candidates to teach in her school’s dual language program. Ms. Gold was the only administrator that seemed to view the mandates of Title II in a negative way as it pertained to her administrative practices.

Lastly, Mr. Brown made a compelling case for how NCLB has informed the professional development practices of his school in a positive way. Mr. Brown illustrates how due to the mandates of NCLB he has had to more aggressively address the professional needs of his staff when he states:

The professional learning is huge as well, because once you get folks you want to meet the mandates of No Child Left Behind, which typically are, you know, let’s make AYP or at least AMO. And so, what we start doing with professional learning is to say ok we got some deficits in some folks, and so what do we need to do. Do we need to do professional learning communities, do we need to do some job imbedded professional learning, what
is it that your lacking quintessentially, because the bottom line is student achievement. So, we’re starting to look at where are the gaps with regard to your instruction, your methodology, your pedagogy, and we’re starting to address that more and more now because we know that student achievement is the drive. Student achievement again is the driver, but we’re looking more into what are your personal and professional goals with regard to your own development. Because some things that we think are important as a school may have very little relevance to you individually. For instance, all of our staff have to be trained on differentiation, because we know that that is one thing that we don’t do well as a staff. But we have some experts, on staff, that don’t need that training. But they may have said, you know what I do need some training on classroom management. So we allow them to go out and find that training that fits their needs or we will go out and find it for them. (Mr. Brown of Union Middle School)

The following summarizes the claims in this chapter that NCLB has: created (1) Unfair Assessments of Schools, (2) Failed to Support “The Whole Child” and Limited Autonomy, (3) failed to protect schools from Inequitable Funding, and (4) created some Positive Impacts on majority-minority charter schools in Georgia. An analysis of Race and NCLB will be discussed in chapter 5. The concluding analysis in chapter 5 will help illuminate why using a CRT framework was most appropriate for the current study.

**Unfair Assessments of Schools**

According to participants of this study, Georgia inaccurately and unfairly assesses the adequacy of its schools by failing to implement an assessment system that incorporates multiple assessments, as well as a value-added assessment tool, when measuring the adequacy of its schools. Currently, Georgia’s accountability system uses the performance results from the CRCT (for grades K-8) and the GHSGT (for grades 9-12), which are both standardized test using cut scores to determine student performance, for measuring the adequacy of its schools.

The use of the CRCT and the GHSGT as the sole measures of school adequacy were perceived as creating a particular and unique experience for schools serving multiple subgroups; due to the NCLB mandate that each subgroup met AMO in order for a school to make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress). This particular and unique experience was described as encouraging
an emphasis on standardized test preparation over student knowledge attainment, neglecting the development of the “whole child,” restrictions on curricular autonomy, an emphasis on Math and Reading to the detriment of other subject areas.

It was stated numerous times during the course of this study that NCLB fails to recognize the academic achievement levels at which schools receive their students and that it also fails to assess the level to which their schools increase the performance of their students.

**Failing to Support “The Whole Child” and Limiting Autonomy**

Participants noted that in some ways NCLB does not support their goal of developing the “whole child.” NCLB is seen as encouraging the narrowing of the curriculum to the subjects of Math and Reading/English Language Arts by limiting its financial support to programs addressing these subject areas exclusively. Participants further cited the practice of only using the Math and Reading/English Language Arts portions of the CRCT and GHSGT to assess school adequacy with narrowing the curriculums in their schools. It was noted that most schools focused on Math and Reading/English Language Arts, in order to ensure making AYP, and that resulted in their school curriculums becoming narrowed to various degrees, and limited their ability to develop the whole child.

Although funds supplied by NCLB were seen as needed and helpful in supporting the implementation of Math and Reading/English Language Arts programs, from the perspective of these administrators, mandates associated with NCLB have also limited their autonomy and made it more difficult to provide (and in some cases has kept them from providing) the level of robust educational programs necessary for developing the whole child.

According to these administrators, especially those of start-up charter schools, Title I spending restrictions (including those on supporting the implementation of programs such as
extracurricular activates, Band, Orchestra, Art, Theater, Foreign Language, etc.) might be limiting their curricular and organizational autonomy, as well as impacting how well they are able to produce a well-rounded student.

In addition, NCLB was perceived by many of the participants as creating a culture of test score achievement, which includes an emphasis on test preparation, over student knowledge attainment. Georgia’s assessment system, which as stated above uses one standardized test in two or three subject areas to determine the adequacy of schools, was credited with creating and perpetuating this culture of test score achievement over student knowledge attainment. It was also noted by participants that the current single statewide accountability system fails to provide educators with adequate and useful data that can be used to inform their practices when attempting to increase student academic achievement.

**Inequitable Funding**

Conversations with participants revealed that their local authorizers are inequitably funding start-up charters in this metropolitan area of Georgia, and that NCLB is failing to protect these schools from being inadequately funded (as reported by the administrators participating in the study). In contrast, administrators of conversion charter schools perceived their districts’ funding practices as equitable and adequate. The two distinctly different perceptions regarding funding seemed to be contingent upon the type of schools administrators operated, Start-up vs. Conversion.

It was further found that the inequitable funding practices of these districts might be creating impediments to the ability of start-up charters to provide an adequate educational experience for their students. As noted by participants, all charter schools do need the extra funds provided by NCLB in order to maintain their operations. However, start-up charters seemed to be
much more dependent on these funds to support academic programs, and for the acquisition of resources, than conversions.

**Positive Impacts of NCLB**

Participants in this study revealed that NCLB has influenced their practices in a number of positive ways as well. An increased level of communication between administrators, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders (in relation to student academic performance) was noted as a response to NCLB. For instance, as part of NCLB, parents and community stakeholders are notified when students are being taught by less than highly qualified teachers.

In addition, it was shared that NCLB has increased the monitoring practices of administrators. According to these participants, due to the heightened accountability mandates of NCLB administrators are now monitoring the practices of their teaching staff, as well as acting as the instructional leaders in their buildings. Participants also detailed how NCLB has encouraged and perpetuated schoolwide student progress monitoring.

As noted by participants in this study, the focus on subgroup performance has been seen as positive and negative. Some administrators noted that focusing on subgroups has helped to ensure that all students are served within the school. However, it was also detailed how the focus on subgroup performance may be unhealthy in so far as schools might be labeled as failing due to a small percentage of their student body not performing well on the CRCT or GHSGT. Also, some of the administrators believe that subgroups begin to command such a strong focus that students not fitting into subgroups find themselves neglected. It would seem that serving majority-minority student populations has forced many of these administrators to pay special attention to the performance of their subgroups since they serve large percentages of students in subgroups, as well as multiple subgroups.
Another positive of NCLB, as noted by participants, is that it has set uniformed standards for highly qualified teachers. Moreover, NCLB has influenced the way these administrators hire, evaluate, and provide staff professional development. According to participants, the influences on staff hiring, evaluation, and development have been positive and help guide these important decisions.

As illustrated in this chapter, NCLB has had significant impacts on the organizational and curricular practices of these charter school administrators. It was found that although charter schools are (depending on their authorizer and other variables) to some degree autonomous, they are influenced and impacted by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As described by these participants, the impacts of NCLB may manifest themselves differently in different schools, however it is clear that these participants view NCLB impacting their practices in numerous and distinct ways. The following chapter will summarize the findings, detail the significance of this study, and present topics that require further research.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Although this research study intensely analyzed the charter school reform model, the main focus of this study was to closely examine the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on majority-minority charter schools in Georgia. As stated earlier, the goals of this research study were to both answer the following research questions, and give charter school administrators an opportunity to inform the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The study’s research questions included:

1) How does NCLB influence the organizational and curricular practices of Georgia charter school administrators serving majority-minority student populations?
2) How does NCLB influence the goals and objectives of these charter school administrators?
3) How might NCLB support majority-minority charter school administrators in educating their students?

As these administrators shared their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with regard to NCLB, the importance of developing sound education policy became evident. It was found by this study that the current federal education policy has impacted the educational environments of these minority students, and the practices of these administrators, in a number of ways.

By interviewing participating administrators, the current study was able to present the ways in which NCLB has impacted the educational environments of these 12 charter schools. Ultimately, the data presented in chapter four illustrates how NCLB, which was intended to support the academic achievement of students classified as at-risk, has actually impeded the ability of these schools to develop adequate educational environments. Although the use of a small sample size limits these findings, and does not allow them to be generalized to all
majority-minority charter school settings, this study does provided a perspective on how this policy has impacted these schools.

According to participants, NCLB has caused schools serving majority-minority student populations to narrow their curricula, become test preparation environments instead of knowledge attainment educational environments, as well as become less autonomous and flexible. If charter schools are indeed losing their flexibility due to accountability mandates of NCLB, then they will most likely be no more effective at narrowing the academic achievement gap between racial groups than TPS. Limiting the flexibility of charters, and causing them to behave as TPS, defeats the purpose of establishing charters and state charter laws.

Administrators participating in this study welcomed waivers that would excuse them from (1) meeting the accountability mandates of NCLB, which require the use of standardized test as the sole means of measuring school adequacy, and (2) the unrealistic requirement of 100% of schools achieving 100% student proficiency on standardized test by the year 2014. Administrators also welcomed a reauthorized version of the bill that eliminates the focus on Reading and Math exclusively.

**NCLB’s Unique Impacts on Minority Schools**

As noted in chapter 4 under the section titled: *(4) NCLB and Subgroup Student Populations*, it was found that these administrators did perceive unique experiences (which were described in some cases as pressure, the request for being measured differently than other schools, a call for an understanding of their situation, seeing the mandates of NCLB as unfair, and describing the expectations of NCLB as unrealistic) with NCLB due to having various subgroups (including Race, Poverty, English Language Learners, and Special Needs) distributed across their student bodies.
Throughout the study, participants describe how serving majority-minority student populations did in fact intersect with NCLB to create unique impacts on their practices and school environments. Even when administrators described their unique administrative experiences in terms of serving the Economically Disadvantaged and or English Language Learners (thus leaving race out of their analysis and our discussion), the correlation between racial demographics and impacts of NCLB remain evident.

As illustrated by the following graphs, Black and Hispanic students are disproportionally represented in the subgroup categories of Economically Disadvantaged and English Language Learners (ELL) in the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).
As shown above, in 2011 Hispanics made up only 12% of Georgia’s student population, but represented 77% of the ELL population and 17% of the Economically Disadvantaged population. In a similar pattern, Black students in 2011 comprised 37% of the student population in Georgia, while constituting 50% of the Economically Disadvantaged population in the state.

Given these facts, the unique impacts connected to serving the Economically Disadvantaged and ELL students in Georgia tend to be synonyms with serving Black and Hispanic students in the state. Therefore, I would argue that incorporating a Critical Race Theory
framework was most appropriate for conducting this study. It was shown that as administrators described the ways in which NCLB impacted their environments uniquely, these impacts could also be correlated with serving Blacks and Hispanics. Simply stated, the problems of the Economically Disadvantaged and ELL are typically the problems of Black and Hispanic students in Georgia.

According to Rothstein (2004), student academic performance could have much more to do with issues of race and class than with the adequacy of their schools; a point that was to some degree shared by participants of this study. In his 2004 work, Rothstein notes how social-class dynamics influences the academic performance of students in the United States when he states:

Americans have come to the conclusion that the achievement gap is the fault of “failing schools” because it makes no common sense that it could be otherwise. After all, how much money a family has, or the color of a child’s skin, should not influence how well that child learns to read. If teachers know how to teach reading, or math, or any other subject, and if schools emphasize the importance of these tasks and permit no distractions, children should be able to learn these subjects whatever their family income or skin color. This common-sense perspective, however, is misleading and dangerous. It ignores how social class characteristics in a stratified society like ours may actually influence learning in school… For it is true that low income and skin color themselves don’t influence academic achievement, but the collection of characteristics that define social class differences inevitably influence that achievement… As a result, no matter how competent the teacher, the academic achievement of lower-class children will, on average, almost inevitably be less than that of middle-class children. (Rothstein, 2004, pp.1-2)

Rothstein further notes:

Although conventional opinion is that “failing” schools contribute mightily to the achievement gap, evidence indicates that schools already do a great deal to combat it. Most of the social class difference in average academic potential exists by the time children are three years old. This difference is exacerbated during the years that children spend in school, but during these years the growth in the gap occurs mostly in the after-school hours and during the summertime, when children are not actually in classrooms… For nearly half a century, the association of social and economic disadvantage with a student achievement gap has been well known to economists, sociologists, and educators. Most, however, have avoided the obvious implication of this understanding – raising the achievement of lower-class children requires amelioration of
the social and economic conditions of their lives, not just school reform. (Rothstein, 2004, pp. 10 – 11)

As illustrated in the graphs above, Black and Hispanic students are overrepresented in the Economically Disadvantaged subgroup, and therefore may need additional reforms, outside of education, enacted in order to encourage the narrowing of the academic achievement gap.

In relation to education policy, participants viewed NCLB as failing to consider the initial academic levels of students prior to entering their schools when assessing school adequacy. Consistent with Rothstein’s argument (relating to class and academic achievement) participants viewed NCLB as failing to recognize the challenges subgroups present to educational environments when these schools are attempting to perform to an adequate level. This sentiment was noted several times as participants discussed how a value-added assessment model would more fairly assess the impact of their schools on student learning. Participants believed that assessing students’ gains, versus assessing student absolute achievement goals, would allow schools to display their effectiveness. In setting absolute achievement goals, Georgia may be effectively measuring the academic performance of each student. However, participants felt that in using this method the state is failing to accurately measure the effectiveness and efficiency of these educational institutions.

Although participants did to a large degree agree with the argument presented by Rothstein, the analysis provided by participants goes further than Rothstein’s and suggest that flaws in NCLB have kept their schools from adequately serving their students. This further analysis will be provided in the reexamination of CRT below.
Reexamining the Use of CRT: A Further Analysis and Final Findings

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the framework employed for the current study. As part of CRT scholarship, researchers are encouraged to:

1. Expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy.
2. Adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
3. Insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society. (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p.9)

Using this framework allowed the researcher to examine the intersecting relationship of education policy (NCLB), American race dynamics, and minority educational environments. After conducting this study, it is the researcher’s belief that NCLB has been conceived in a manner (without regard for the conditions created by America’s endemic problems associated with race and racism) that prevents the policy from properly serving those it claims to support, the underserved and most “at-risk” students.

It was found here that NCLB has denied these local communities and educators the ability, and right, to develop educational goals and curriculums appropriate for addressing the needs and interest of their students. By doing this, NCLB has eliminated the autonomy and flexibility of these institutions to develop the “whole child,” and has seriously impeded these schools from providing students with the requisite skills and valuable knowledge (as defined by these ethnic and racial communities) that will enable them to positively impact, and succeed in, our global society.
As noted by a prominent Black radio personality (Rickey Smiley) today (April 5, 2012), the current education system has played a complicit role in perpetuating the plight of Black men in America. Mr. Smiley reasoned that the elimination of Black History courses has had a particularly negative impact on Black boys. He further argued that by eliminating these courses, schools have taken away the opportunity for Black boys to learn about their power, culture, uniqueness, and history. Moreover, Mr. Smiley argued that this lack of self-study has contributed to the devaluing of Black people by ethnic and racial groups; including Black Americans themselves. Mr. Smiley stated how difficult it is for Black men to succeed in America without a proper foundation, which included among other things an intense study of Black History.

In 2004, Derrick Bell detailed Ellis Cose’s work, which found that Black men in America are constantly bombarded with negative self-images. Bell (2004) illustrates that unless these images are addressed, they could possibly be detrimental to the educational achievement of Black men when he states:

> In *The Envy of the World*, Ellis Cose surveys their status [Black males]. Overcome by the obstacles of poverty and racism they view as insurmountable, they determine to flout social conventions and, as they put it, live so as to “keep it real.” For many, the results are a disaster that inevitably leads to death or imprisonment...Out of his many interviews, Cose constructs a mosaic of the temptations of the street, its powerful allure, its seduction: Young black males feel it is “offering us a place to belong, the only place – or so we are made to believe – that we alone can own.” “From the moment our brains are capable of cognition, we are primed to embrace our presumed destiny.” Their perception of reality is shaped by movies, television, and radio, all portraying the black man as a “street-wise, trash-talking operator, as the polar opposite of the refined, cerebral white male, who, coincidentally, may control the world but lacks our style and soul.” For many raised in inner-city poverty and some in middle-class surroundings, education becomes a casualty of the street mind-set. Black males who lose interest in school at an early age seldom complete even high school. (Bell, 2004, pp. 183 – 184)

The current study found that by failing to thoroughly consider and address issues of race, and socioeconomic dynamics created by racism in the U.S., NCLB has limited the ability of schools participating in this study to adequately serve minority children. Moreover, NCLB was
found to have wrest control from these local education authorities, concerning curriculums and educational goals, by determining what knowledge and skills are of value. Due to the cultural and racial insensitivity of NCLB, majority-minority charter schools in this study felt unique impacts on their educational environments.

In accordance with CRT scholarship, Yosso (2005) explains that racism has influenced every aspect of American society, as well as why scholars should employ CRT when conducting research on American institutions by stating:

Racism overtly shaped US social institutions at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues, although more subtly, to impact US institutions of socialization in the beginning of the twenty-first century…CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses. (Yosso, 2005, p.70)

Ladson-Billings (1998) further stresses the need for researchers to explore the influence of race when conducting studies on contemporary American issues by stating:

CRT begins with the notion that racism is ‘‘normal, not aberrant, in American society’’ (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv), and, because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture…Thus, the strategy becomes one of unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations. (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.11)

In an effort to understand how NCLB impacted these majority-minority educational environments, the current study employed many aspects of CRT. As the study progressed, the notion of using a “colorblind” lens while developing education policy became a prominent tenet of CRT that needed further examination. In researching this notion, it was found that colorblindness (or employing a colorblind lens) has been a tactic used to skirt addressing issues of race and racism for many years. These issues of race and racism have influenced the economic, political, and social spaces in which individuals, and groups, occupy in America. As noted by CRT scholarship, these issues of race and racism have attributed to, “all contemporary
manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p.9).

Moreover, as noted by Bell (2004):

Color blindness, now as a century ago, is adopted as the easy resolution of issues of race with which the nation would rather not wrestle, much less try seriously to resolve. It is an attractive veneer obscuring flaws in the society that are not corrected by being hidden from view. (Bell, 2004, p.10)

Bell goes further in his analysis of colorblindness when he states:

Today, black people and many Hispanics are trapped in a racial time warp. We are buffeted by the painful blows of continuing bias as the law upon which we relied for remedies is reinterpreted with unsupported assurances that the disadvantages we suffer must be caused by our deficiencies because, we are told without even a trace of irony, racism is a thing of the past. The hypocrisy so apparent in the claims of a color-blind society illustrate the harsh and disconcerting truth about racial progress. We prefer to ignore or rationalize rather than confront these truths because they disrupt our long settled expectations of eventual racial equality. (Bell, 2004, pp. 186 – 187)

It is the belief of this researcher that employing a colorblind lens can only impede American policymakers’ ability to thoughtfully consider our nation’s flaws. Absent a fully functional vision, American policymakers will be unable to create policy that supports educators in developing adequate educational environments. Therefore, this notion of a colorblind approach when formulating education policy should be rejected. To be “colorblind” in policy making is to be insensitive to the plight of minorities in America. To reject this notion of colorblindness is to reject the notion that policies should be made without consideration for the United State’s historical, and present, dynamics of race, racism, and inequality. Unless policymakers apply a lens that examines race when creating education policy, their policies will never appropriately support the needs of those they claim to aid.

While conversing with participants, I noticed they continually stated how NCLB did not realistically consider their communities or the students they served. More telling was the finding that NCLB ultimately dictated the type of curriculums these schools provided their communities; instead of the communities dictating the type of educational environments and curriculums they
wanted (which is the original concept of a charter school). As noted in this study, NCLB has forced these schools to implement a Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) based curriculum that may not be appropriate or valuable for Black and Hispanic students.

The forcible implementation of this curriculum has been accomplished by utilizing standardized standards-based tests each year to determine the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of these schools. Moreover, this assessment practice, which is mandated by NCLB, was found to have encouraged a narrowing of the curricular focus of these schools to Math and Reading/English Language Arts. In addition, through the use of this same assessment practice, NCLB has forced these schools to adopt its value system pertaining to knowledge and skills. By doing this, the cultural experiences, languages, histories, and forms of expression deemed valuable by minority communities have been devalued and ignored. Simply put, this type of knowledge is not assessed when measuring Adequate Yearly Progress and therefore it is not part of the curriculum.

While discussing these findings with my committee members, one professor inquired about how participants spoke about their students. She asked if participants used a deficit model perspective when speaking about their students. Yosso (2005) explains the term deficit thinking when she states:

Indeed, one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. (Yosso, 2005, p.75)

Yosso (2005) goes on to further explain how this model of deficit thinking could impact the practices of educators when she states:

Scholars Shemaz Garcia and Patricia Guerra (2004) find that such deficit approaches to schooling begin with overgeneralizations about family background and are exacerbated...
by a limited framework to interpret how individual views about educational success are shaped by personal ‘sociocultural and linguistic experiences and assumptions about appropriate cultural outcomes’ (p.163). Educators most often assume that schools work and that students, parents and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system. (Yosso, 2005, p.75)

During the course of our conversations, participants did note the academic deficiencies of their students. However, the claim that these schools were sufficient and that any failure occurring was due to the deficiencies of their students and communities was never made. Administrators did present a degree of deficit thinking while discussing the academic abilities of their students. It was observed that administrators applied deficit thinking more frequently when speaking about students of poverty than when speaking of ESOL students. When administrators spoke about students of poverty, they tended to note the lack of parent involvement and lack of value placed on education in the household. When speaking of ESOL students, administrators rarely stated that these students were deficient. In fact, administrators tended to argue that the education system failed to accurately assess ESOL students by not presenting content specific tests (Math, History, Science, but not English) in their native languages.

This degree of deficit thinking, in relation to the academic abilities of students, was presented within the context of our current NCLB goal driven educational environment. It would be interesting to hear how these administrators would speak of their students’ deficiencies if they were given the autonomy to create goals and objectives for their schools free of NCLB mandates. The ultimate critique presented during these conversations was that NCLB was deficient because it failed to adequately support the school in addressing student needs.

The current study has presented the argument that racism, the fear of race, or the unwillingness to address issues of race in our nation, has contributed to NCLB negatively impacting these schools in a unique manner. Instead of supporting these schools in providing
adequate educational experiences, as determined by local education professionals and community members, the current policy has limited these charter schools’ autonomy and flexibility, as well as kept them from making decisions based on the needs of their communities and students.

**Possible Negative Impacts of NCLB**

It is possible that charter schools are producing mixed academic performance results, and incorporating some of the discriminatory practices detailed in chapter 1 and chapter 2, as a result of NCLB constraining the autonomy of charter schools to develop and implement their desired organizational structures and curriculums. As illustrated by participants, start-up charter schools, which more closely reflect the concept presented by Budde and Shanker than the conversion charter schools, are unable to financially support their academic programs or implement the robust curriculums they would like due to NCLB spending restrictions. In addition, the manner in which the Single Statewide Accountability System measures school Adequate Yearly Progress has also been noted as influencing these administrators’ practices and keeping them from presenting curriculums that best develop the “whole child.”

According to the participants in this study, charter school administrators do not have the autonomy to operate their schools in a manner they believe would best serve their children. In regards to curriculum implementation, these charter operators shared how their schools are forced to narrow their curricular focus to Math and Reading/English Language Arts. Moreover, although this study did not find that these schools discriminated against students based on special needs, race, wealth, or English proficiency status, it was detailed how schools serving majority-minority student populations are penalized by the Single State Accountability System when these schools are unable to bring underperforming students up to standards. Therefore, it is
conceivable to believe that some charter schools may be implementing the discriminatory practices described in chapters 1 and 2 to maintain their charter contracts, reach AMO targets, and meet AYP to remain operational.

It was further found here that these administrators believe that they would have more autonomy, and be better able to increase the academic performance of their students, if their schools were assessed for adequacy using multiple assessment (including academic-value-added models or growth models), if NCLB spending restrictions were relaxed, if a provision was added to NCLB requiring states and districts to adequately fund charters, if the focus on Reading and Math was broadened to all subject areas, and if the mandate that 100% of students reach proficiency on a standardized test by 2014 was eliminated (which could be replaced by measuring the Adequate Yearly Individual Progress of each student).

**Significance of Study**

This study is significant for two reasons. First, this study will contribute to the research literature on charter flexibility and autonomy by exploring how polices impact charter school administrators' practices. Second, this study will contribute to literature analyzing NCLB and its impacts on school environments. This study has the potential to inform policymakers, as well as academics, of the impacts NCLB accountability mandates have on charter schools serving majority-minority student populations.

Even further, Presidential administrations could use this research to inform their reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 currently titled the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
Future Research Topics

During the current study, it was found that issues most important to start-up charter schools centered on authorizer relationships, funding, and assessments. Topics of further study that should be explored included:

1) How do charter authorizer relationships impact the performance of charter schools?
2) How could NCLB support equitable funding of charter schools?
3) How would using a growth model, or value-added school assessment model, impact the performance of schools in Georgia?
4) How would academic performance, in a Title I school, be impacted if administrators were allowed to fund all programs with Title I funds?

Limitations of Study

This study was an examination of 12 charter schools in a metropolitan area of Georgia. Therefore, the findings presented here on the impact NCLB has on majority-minority charter school environments cannot be generalized for all majority-minority charter schools in Georgia or the Nation. However, this study does provide insight on how some charter schools are impacted by NCLB.

Implications of Study

This study may be used to support the rationale behind Georgia seeking a waiver from NCLB. This waiver has allowed Georgia to implement a new performance index in order to measure the adequacy of its public schools. This study may also inform other state policymakers on their decision to apply for a waiver from NCLB.
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