

2016

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

Philip Estabrook
University of Maine at Farmington

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umf.maine.edu/ed_leadership_projects
Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Estabrook, Philip, "Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School" (2016). *M.S.Ed. in Educational Leadership Research Projects*. 34.
https://scholarworks.umf.maine.edu/ed_leadership_projects/34

This Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Works at Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in M.S.Ed. in Educational Leadership Research Projects by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works. For more information, please contact sotley@maine.edu.

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

University of Maine at Farmington

Philip Estabrook teaches sixth grade at Skowhegan Area Middle School in
Skowhegan, Maine.

philip.estabrook@maine.edu (207) 474 - 6739

Abstract

Charter schools are in their earliest days in the state of Maine. Since authorizations began for charter schools, ten have been opened in four years. The first charter school in Maine offering services for students between kindergarten and sixth grade was opened in Cornville in 2012. Unlike schools opened in other states, the Cornville Regional Charter School operated in a very rural environment from a building formerly serving as the local public school, in an area that had never offered a real choice to parents. Parents sending students to the school have a variety of reasons for choosing an alternate model for educating their students. Parents sending students to the Cornville Regional Charter School and interviewed for this study, were satisfied with their decision and noted three reasons for sending their children there. First, all three parents felt the agricultural focus of the CRCS was a strong foundation for their students and something that made school more fulfilling and enjoyable. Second, parents were very happy with the smaller classroom populations and the impression that teachers were more able to respond to the needs of their students. Finally, in all three cases, the impression that the administrators at CRCS more quickly responded to the needs of the parents and student were noted as being especially important.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Literature Review	4
Research Design	13
Research Methods	17
Inquiry Narrative	21
Data Analysis	30
Conclusions	34
Implications	39
Personal Learning Reflection	41
Works Cited	44
Appendices	51

Introduction

Education reform is a process dating back to the first time one person attempted to exchange knowledge with another while seeking to do better than the time before. As a dedicated process in the modern era, it has become a science blended with politics and philosophy. Today, one of the main tools being implemented across America is the charter school model. Charter schools are publicly funded schools established outside the normal administrative apparatus in order to facilitate innovation. Charter school proponents claim that the model allows for new and innovative processes of education that can reach students that are unsuccessful in the traditional public setting. Opponents point to the lack of legitimate improvement and the poor scores for many schools as evidence that the movement is more about politics than positive reform. Central to the charter movement is the need for parents to actively choose to send their students to these schools. A multitude of studies have been done over the years involving parent and student satisfaction, the factors leading to school selection, and efficacy of charter school education compared to traditional public schools.

Literature Review

Factors in Parent Satisfaction

Parent satisfaction has been studied in great detail by many researchers since it is considered an integral part in the selection process for schools. Dissatisfied parents seek an alternate educational plan to reach a point of comfort with their child's education. Satisfied parents are unlikely to make any change in their child's educational plan since they perceive that their needs are being met. Buckley and Schneider (2006) determined that charter school parents were more satisfied than traditional public school students when comparing charter experiences with traditional public school experiences. As time passed however, those satisfaction numbers dropped until the two categories were equivalent with the exception of physical facilities. Parents whose children learn in a cyber charter school show some changes in satisfaction as well. Beck, Lo, and Maranto (2014) found that students receiving special education services, males, and black students were more satisfied in a cyber environment than their traditional public school peers. While satisfaction is studied heavily, the actual value of satisfaction as an academically significant factor in student success is challenged. Dwyer (2012) calls into question the validity of parent choice and a school's attempts to address parent concern through modifying educational methods, stating that schools may attempt to make changes to satisfy parents, but there is no indication that parent satisfaction will lead to better educational outcomes for students.

Though the educational outcomes for both charter and traditional schools are not directly impacted by the satisfaction exhibited by parents, there can be minor secondary effects in terms of morale. Satisfaction as a factor is most important when it comes to

the segment of parents who move their children from public to charter schools due to their dissatisfaction. In the Buckley and Schneider (2006) study, it was found that charter school parents gave poor scores to the public schools their children had previously attended, showing clear dissatisfaction on several categories. Dwyer does not take into account the economic motivation schools have when looking at satisfaction as a factor in improving student scores. Charter schools and public schools interest in satisfying parents stems from the dollars attached to those families, dollars which move with the children from one school to the next.

Why parents chose charter schools

Charter schools actively attempt to lure students by marketing themselves to parents. In many cases, charter schools appeal to the parents through the models they follow, the climate, staff attitude, or simply by contrasting what they do to what is occurring in the local public schools. At the core of the charter school model is the empowerment of parents to select the best location for their child to learn, and charter schools attempt to market themselves to fit those needs. Conner (2007) argues that a school must perform extensive internal and external marketing to ensure a cohesive and consistent message to potential customers, in this case parents. Under the current system, parent choice is the key approach states have used to allow charter schools to gain new students. Dwyer (2012) notes that “curiously little attention is given in education reform debates to the question of who is really in the best position to make school assignment decisions in such a way that maximizes overall student well-being” (p. 1840). Much of the political drive for parent choice is the sense of empowerment

and the opportunity to extend market forces to education reform. This hasn't yet proven to be a factor in increased education outcomes however.

Despite charter schools marketing themselves by their philosophy and the promised gains they can offer a child, location seems to be the more significant factor in choosing a school than philosophy or pedagogy. Schlomer, Shober, and Witte (2007) noted that several factors led to districts in Wisconsin choosing to open or authorize charter schools. Spatial consideration and the competition for students in a specific area were found to be key factors in a district choosing to add a charter school to its region and its eventual success or failure. Jacobs (2011) discovered that the selection of schools by parents in Washington DC was most heavily affected by the location of the school relative to the sending family. Parents generally chose the school closest to their residence with most children from a given neighborhood attending the same school. Baker-Smith, Corcoran, and Nathanson (2013) also observed the spatial trend in their study of school choice for New York City. Lower performing students ended up in low performing schools that were closer to home, counter to the intent of the charter school bill in New York which was intended to allow parents to remove students from poor schools and force those schools to then improve or be closed.

North Carolina had similar issues with parents selecting schools based on the school's location but racial make up was also a factor. Ladd (2007) found that parents in North Carolina selected schools in close proximity to their home but also that white parents chose schools with 85 percent or more white students. Black families selected schools whose populations were at least 50 percent black. Self-segregation resulted in diminished performance for those schools that were predominantly black. In the

research studies that looked at the factors of school choice, family proximity to the selected school was the most consistent factor in parents selecting a school for their child.

Comparative Effectiveness

The charter school movement was intended to improve educational outcomes for the students those schools served, but there was the assumption that it would modify and improve traditional public schools through competition and innovation. Despite charter schools marketing themselves along philosophic and pedagogic lines, location has been shown as the main reason parents select the schools. Parents will test out charter schools, but if the charter school movement as a whole is to succeed long term, the schools need to show that they are actually better than the public schools they seek to differentiate themselves from. Kindzierski, Mohammed, and Wallace (2013) found scores for students in third, fourth, and fifth grades were higher in the studied charter schools than the public schools but scores for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were the same, meaning that early gains did not carry through to the later grade levels. In *Charter schools hope or hype?*, Buckley and Schneider (2009) found that charter schools did not outperform their public school peers and were inconsistent. In all cases, the claimed educational advantage promoted by charter school proponents was not observed.

Concerning the secondary effect of charter school competition, Zimmer and Buddin (2009) found that achievement did not improve in the public school in the area of California they studied. Principals in the region felt no pressure to change their school's practices and made no effort to improve their schools as a response to local charter

school pressure. A study by Booker, Gilpatric, Gronberg, and Jansen (2008) found that public schools in Texas did show improvements in both reading and math in regions where they were pressured by charter schools. Analysis of the data showed that charter schools did succeed in facilitating systemic gains though the researchers were not able to determine the cause. The charter schools themselves performed at roughly the district average or below, while the public schools in the same areas showed improved performance on standardized tests.

Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, and Branch (2006) examined the Texas education system for parent choice and school quality. The results of their study showed that charter schools scored under their public school peers for the first three to five years as they began their start up period. Most were then able to reach a level of performance by year five that was roughly equal to the public schools. Arguments by charter school advocates that they offer superior services to public schools seems suspect given the results of this study and others which rarely if ever show charter schools performing above their peers. In almost every case, charter schools underperformed and struggled to reach eventual parity.

Public Money Moved Private

On the national level, the charter school movement has two primary drivers. The first is the genuine desire to find alternate models of education to reach those students that do not find success in the public school setting. The second is the push to move public money into the private sector by privatizing the potentially lucrative field of public education and the massive budgets associated with the system. Research into the specific processes used to shift money from public to private hands is scarce. Buras

(2011) examined post-Katrina New Orleans and found politicians appeared to be working with the private sector to enact a system where the city would serve as “an experimental space for deregulation, so-called innovation, and private entrepreneurial investment” (p. 307). Politicians and business interests promoted the changes as being the gateway to a new and more efficient school system and used the natural disaster as an opportunity for significant reform.

Forman (2007) examined the assertion by many charter school advocates that they could provide services better than public education for less money. Some even went so far as to claim they could actually factor in personal profit yet still come in under the budgets current public schools required. Many charter school companies sell their services under this argument, that their process is so efficient that they can save money currently lost in the public sector, use the efficiency to make a profit, and still provide services that exceed those currently being provided. These claims have not proven true at this point, with many of the large charter school operators scoring at or slightly below the level of the geographic and demographic peers.

Summary and Conclusion

The charter school movement in the United States has been based on broad claims of successfully meeting parent needs, offering clear choices and differentiation in educational philosophy and pedagogy, and providing a better quality of education than public schools. Though charter school parents are generally more satisfied with their child’s education, the promised performance boosts have yet to materialize and parents often select the closest educational resource rather than carefully matching pedagogy and philosophy to their child’s specific needs. In Maine, the relatively new charter

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

movement made all of the same promises as those on the national level. Claims that charter schools would provide a learning environment that would reach students in new ways and meet the specific needs of students and parents were made, but is the Maine movement showing a different set of outcomes compared to the national level?

Two schools have opened within travel distance of several districts in Central Maine, though one draws the majority of its population from the district. The Cornville Regional Charter School opened its doors to local students within the last four years. Every year, more parents apply to the school than the school can accommodate. With the relatively good schools in the area, what is pushing so many families to look at charter schools? In examining school choice in other regions, I hypothesize that there will be a connection drawn between the location of the charter schools and families choosing to send their children to those schools. This study intends to determine what factors are driving parents to seek an alternative for their child at the Cornville school and to determine how successful the school was in meeting the needs of the students sent there. What factors lead parents in central Maine to move their students from a public school to a charter school and are they satisfied with their choice?

The Purpose of the Research

I seek to determine why parents in central Maine are sending their students to the local charter school and to discover what it is they like and dislike about their experiences there. Maine recently entered the national charter school environment with the passage of LD 1553 in 2011, which authorized the founding of ten charter schools in the state. Of the ten charters, two were placed in Somerset county. One, the Cornville

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

Regional Charter School, provides a traditional elementary education in the former Cornville Public School building, while the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences uses an alternate model of education that seeks to reach students who have struggled in traditional settings. For this research, I will focus on the school in Cornville. Since it resides within a building formerly owned by the district, draws the vast majority of its students from district towns, and has had an adversarial role towards the district since its supporters first laid the foundation for its birth, its existence and identity has been defined by its relationship with the district.

I have had first hand experience with school personnel and staff, sending families, principal, and board members at the Cornville Regional Charter School, but I have never looked scientifically at the factors that led parents to send students to the school. Conversations with acquaintances have yielded a number of explanations, including a desire to have a voice in their student's education, opportunities for innovative pedagogical approaches, or simply a lack of trust with traditional public education. I have not been satisfied with these explanations however, and those I have spoken with come from my immediate circle, meaning they have similarities that make conclusions difficult to come to due to built in biases. As a public school teacher, I have a vested interest in determining what draws parents to experiment with their student's education with a charter school.

I hope to define clearly what it is to attend the Cornville Regional Charter School, why parents send their students, and what led to the current situation where local schools are forced to compete for the hearts and minds of parents and students.

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

Previous research in other states has indicated location, racial demographics, pedagogy, and personal satisfaction have been traits that have led parents to select a charter school. I will determine whether or not parents in Maine used similar traits when choosing a school for their students.

Research Design

The Research Question

I hope to define which factors lead parents in central Maine to move their students from a public school to the Cornville Regional Charter School and to determine what they are satisfied with and dissatisfied with concerning their experiences there. Having examined the factors related to satisfaction and selection in several other states, I hope to determine whether Maine is similar or dissimilar to those states. Buckley and Schneider (2006) found that parental dissatisfaction was often a key factor in parents choosing a charter school for their children. Maine's charter school environment is quite different than most states, and the state itself shares few traits with those states that have been examined in other studies, so discovering how it differs may help public schools better respond and compete within this new competitive environment. By explaining the reasons parents have experimented with their student's education in this new and untested environment, I will be able to add to the existing body of research on school choice and satisfaction.

The Central Concepts Related to the Investigation

In order to fully understand where this research is intended to go, some background on the issue needs to be established. The charter school movement has spread rapidly over the last two decades, with significant changes to the landscape of education and the public's opinion on the movement in general. Charter schools are public schools run by private companies or organizations using public money. Some states have pursued a robust system of charter school implementation, with entire regions shifted fully into a competitive model and multiple for-profit school chains operating schools as Buras's (2011) examination of New Orleans post Katrina showed. Others have taken a more measured approach, testing the waters with only a few charters at a time and a careful system that limits saturation and protecting traditional public education models. Wisconsin, as examined by Schlomer, Shober, and Witte (2007), is an excellent example of a state that managed spatial location so as to avoid over saturating regions and applying undue stress to public schools.

Maine has taken a different approach, with ten charters made available for qualifying schools, but no consideration for the type, intent, or location of the approved charters. Additionally, the charter school bill had money coming from the schools in the districts where sending student held residence, meaning public schools were losing money not only by not getting state funds but by effectively writing a check out of local monies to the charter schools for the student's services. This model puts immense burden on the school districts nearest the charters since studies such as Ladd (2007) and Baker-Smith, Corcoran, and Nathanson (2013) showed that parents select schools

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

most often by proximity. The national charter school movement continues to impact traditional models.

Nationally, the movement has been characterized by two significant philosophic concepts represented by distinct groups. The first is made up of a coalition of organizations and individuals who oppose the public school system on philosophic grounds. Made up of school choice advocates, homeschool families, private schools, and religious institutions, these groups seek to break what they view as a monopoly on education and education dollars, freeing parents to find the program that work best for their children. The second group is made up of politicians and private businesses looking to move public funds into the private sector through collusion between the two. Private sector opportunists also assume a business approach to school is more efficient and effective (Forman, 2007) Privately written bills, provided by lobbyists and those within the education industries, which are then sponsored by legislators, are put up in order to draw money from the public sector to then be shifted into the private. Arguments are made that the private sector is more efficient, effective, and profitable than the public, which is characterized as wasteful and ineffective.

The two separate groups working to expand charter schools coincide in their final goal, to break the public school monopoly on publicly financed education and acquire portions of it to use as they see fit. That the private sector groups have coopted the mission started by those seeking school choice doesn't seem to matter to that group. They see the money and lawmaking ability of the private sector allies as useful and essential, regardless of how it might impact the perception of their cause. Only recently

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

have those within the charter school movement seeking legitimate opportunity at alternate education and school choice called out in alarm to the movement being exposed as faulty. Private charter school companies have had lawsuits filed against them, a record of poor performance, and a media backlash, dragging the movement down in the public eye.

The General Approach of the Investigation

I will examine my previous experience during the founding the Cornville Regional Charter School, exploring the town meetings and the opinions of individuals involved in the decision making process locally. Discussing the goals and format at the charter school with the principal, Travis Works, will clarify what is happening academically. Interviews with three families who have either had students at the school or continue to send students there will help expand understandings of why parents chose the school and their opinion on the effectiveness.

The Method of Inquiry

Researching this topic will be most effectively portrayed by drawing on the rich history and contentious environment within which the Cornville school exists. Having attended the meetings which resulted in the closure of the Cornville Public School, I was first exposed to the anger that existed within the town towards the district for what they perceived as the theft of their local school. During the two years that followed, I was present at town meetings where step by step, the charter school supporters leveraged small town politics and public sympathy to lay the foundation for their future charter

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

school. I was personally acquainted with the most ardent supporters of the charter bill as well as politicians working in Augusta to both support and oppose the eventual bill which legalized charter schools in Maine. With this wealth of first hand data, a narrative approach that allows me to effectively share relevant information is the most effective model.

I will hybridize my narrative approach with a more traditional qualitative survey by interviewing the current administrator at CRCS to clarify pedagogy, philosophy, and climate. In addition, three families who have sent students to the Cornville Regional Charter School will be interviewed, focusing on why they sent their students to the school in the first place and whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with their choice. By exploring the personal experiences of those involved, I hope to create a clear understanding of the Cornville Regional Charter School. Combined with my first hand observations, the administrative experiences of Mr. Works, and the family experience, a strong picture of the school, its history, and its impact will be discovered.

Research Methods

Setting

Data will be collected from three parents who have or have had students attending Cornville Regional Charter School. While several charter schools are currently operating in Maine, the Cornville school most directly impacts the operation of districts in central Somerset county, from which the majority of the students are drawn. Prospective interviewees will be contacted personally to establish willingness to be interviewed, with a time and location scheduled once willingness is confirmed.

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

In addition to the parent interviews, Travis Works, current administrator for the Cornville Regional Charter School, will be interviewed to clarify the schools mission and practices. First person details of the work done from 2010 to 2013 in securing the location for the Cornville Regional Charter School and the community interactions contributed to the changed environment within Central Maine schools will be provided by the study author who was an active participant in that process during that time frame.

Sampling/Participants

The participants in this study are three parents whose students are attending or have attended the Cornville Regional Charter School. Travis Works will assist in expressing the mission and practices of the charter school. My own experiences as a Cornville resident will be included to establish an understanding of the process by which the physical building was obtained and the groundwork laid for the school to begin offering services.

Parents will be interviewed using one instrument while Mr. Works will be interviewed with another. By interviewing three parents, I can gain an understanding of what student experiences are like at the Cornville Regional Charter School and the satisfaction of those parents with that experience. The three parents come from different backgrounds. The first interview is a mother and father who only just sent their two students to the school this year. The second interview subject has two students at the school and comes from a local, independent school. The third had a son attend after a poor experience with a district principal and disagreements over the educational processes involving his son. This third parent is also a public educator from the region, bringing a unique perspective to the discussion. My own experiences as a resident,

voter, and tax payer, will fill in the gaps and paint a more complete picture of the overall experience of the establishment and placement of charter school in a central Maine school district.

Methodology

This study will be completed by using a combination of the qualitative analysis of interview data, and a narrative process to facilitate complete understanding. Since the goal of this study is to determine why parents are choosing an alternate path to educate their students, it is necessary to speak with and discuss the experiences of those parents in a personal interview process. Similarly, to fully understand the impact on the community and local schools, my own experiences will be shared as a narrative along with the interview with Mr. Works.

The benefits of a narrative and qualitative study is that a deeper and more textured understanding of the process by which the school was selected can be explored as well as the experiences of those who are attending. A quantitative survey would allow for more participants and likely even out data collection, but it would be a much more shallow examination of the realities of those experiences and it would likely prove difficult to fully understand and explore what those experiences mean.

Operational Measures

The goal of the study is to specifically define why parents chose to send their students to the Cornville Regional Charter School and whether they are satisfied with that choice or not. Data will be collected using two separate instruments. One is a parent interview available in Appendix C, while the second is specifically for Mr. Works, included as Appendix D. The parent interview targets parent's overall satisfaction with

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

their experience at the charter school and clarifies the reasons they chose the school in the first place. The interview will help define the parent's opinion of the public school in order to better understand possible motivators for choosing the charter school in the first place. Mr. Works's interview will explore the day to day operation and philosophy of education at the school, where it has been, and where it is going.

Data Collection

Data will be drawn from the four interviews and my personal experience as an individual who watched the process by which the Cornville Regional Charter School was founded. Subjects were contacted by phone after a set of potential candidates was established. The subjects will be interviewed for roughly twenty minutes to half an hour and the information transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using a qualitative narrative process. The interviews, combined with first hand experiences, will be used to present a picture of the Cornville Regional Charter School as it was at the start and as it is in the present. Parent experiences will be compared and contrasted, with similarities and differences noted.

Expected Findings

Expectations are that parents are satisfied with their experiences at the Cornville Regional Charter School and that they would like to continue to have their students attend. Previous studies have shown that once parents select a school, they often enjoy their child's experiences there barring an event that sours them to those experience. Given that attendance at the school is a product of parental choice, by continuing to enroll that student, it is reasonable to assume that parents continue to be

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

satisfied. Further, the reason for attending the school is likely to be proximity. For the most part, parents select the school closest to their residence or the school where their children's friends attend. I believe this will be the primary reason parents are sending their students to the Cornville Regional Charter School as well.

Potential issues and Weaknesses

The greatest limitation this study has is the small sample size. With only three families, it will not be a comprehensive examination of why parents are sending their students to the charter school. Instead, it is a more focused look at why these specific parents made the choice they did. While still informative, it is not a replacement for a greater study that specifically explores the factors over a larger percentage of the population so as to potentially shape a district response. Further, parental satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the district itself is left mostly unexplored, which could be a potentially more effective means of defining action on the districts part to respond to the needs of the community.

Inquiry Narrative

Maine's charter school movement has had a very interesting path to its current position. The Cornville Regional Charter School exists within the space formerly occupied by the Cornville Public School. Feeling the pressure of tightened budgets following the economic downturn of 2008, School Administrative District #54 put forth the option of closing the small school in rural Cornville. Reasons for this included the shrinking population, poor condition of the building, and the fact that many Cornville families were actually closer to schools in Skowhegan, the largest town in the district.

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

Closing the school would save the district a significant amount of money, an amount that fluctuated between \$400,000 and \$650,000 per year depending on how expenses were calculated.

Cornville was not the first school in the district to be lost due to a shrinking population. Mercer, a small town on the western edge of SAD 54, had been consolidated along with Smithfield, an adjacent town, when a new school was built in Norridgewock. The new Norridgewock school was proposed with the intent that it would consolidate students from the three towns into one new building. While the towns of Mercer and Smithfield lamented the loss of their schools, having a new, modern, and well operated, school made available took much of the sting off the move. Cornville did not have the same positive option. There was no new school into which their population would be moving. Instead, they would be spread over the three schools that served the kindergarten through sixth grade populations of Skowhegan.

Though fiscally prudent, there was significant backlash against the idea of closing the school. Supporters, the vast majority of whom were Cornville residents and alumni, felt that the school's strong performance on standardized tests and its position as the heart of the community should outweigh the money that could potentially be saved with a closure. During the numerous meetings to discuss the closure, supporters spoke passionately about their positive experiences and tried to impress upon the rest of the district how vital it was to retain their small school, pointing to the unifying force that a school can have in a community lacking other institutions.

Unfortunately, in many cases, the passion to retain the school took the form of attacks on other schools or educators. More than once the comparatively good scores

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

the school received were compared to the lower scores of other school that would be the destination for students if the Cornville school was closed. Teachers would celebrate the wonderful work they were doing at Cornville while implying that similar work was not happening elsewhere in the district. Within the teaching community, there was tension given the nature of these comments during the very public meetings. Students were brought forward to give testimonials of the work they were doing in Cornville and on more than one occasion, speaking through tears about their fear of having to attend school in another town with a room full of strangers.

In the end, the efforts of the supporters were not enough. The school board approved the closure of the Cornville school effective at the end of the 2010 school year. As soon as the decision was made, efforts began by a small group of families in Cornville to support a charter school bill that would allow them to reopen the school on their own terms. At the time, the notion that a charter school bill could be written, proposed, passed, and signed by a Maine government mostly controlled by Democrats seemed unlikely in the time frames required. Several separate events had to happen in sequence for there to be a charter school in Cornville, many of which seemed very unlikely.

First amongst the events necessary for a school was a location. The district, upon approving the closure of the school, immediately notified the town of Cornville that the school could revert to their ownership if they wanted it. A set of emergency meetings occurred where issues concerning the school closure and the building were discussed. Charter school supporters were determined to obtain access to the former school building with the intent to create a new charter school at the location. During one

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

meeting, a heated discussion occurred where several community members supported accepting the building and turning it into a community center similar to the one that was created in the former Mercer school building. Mercer took their small school and retained it as the heart of their community by renting it out for weddings and maintaining a public library there. It was also used for town meetings and other functions. Charter school supporters did not like this idea since the building would effectively be encumbered if it was going to be used as a community center, which would have made it nearly impossible to obtain a charter.

The two sides discussed the issue at the meeting and it was determined that a committee would be formed to investigate the community center approach and the charter school option. After the first couple meetings of the committee, several of the volunteers abruptly quit. When asked why, it came to light that though discussion occurred within the committee supporting a community center, it became obvious that the majority of the volunteers were looking to establish a charter school. Whenever possible, data showing that a community center would cost too much money and could never recoup the costs associated with maintaining an old building were put forward. Very little effort was made to reach out to the Mercer group that had successfully established their community center. Discussion pushing for that outreach was quickly quashed in the committee, forcing many to feel it was a forgone conclusion that the committee would report out in support of a charter school. The feeling that there was an agenda from the start soured the process. In the end, the committee did come forward supporting the establishment of a charter school.

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

With the location secured, the local group began advocating for a charter school bill to be drafted in the legislature. Many national groups sought to support the grass roots movement to pressure representatives for a bill, and a large group of charter school supporters were already active in the state. National representatives spoke during one town meeting in Cornville and answered questions of skeptical townspeople. Another impediment, Maine's long term Democratic government, had been replaced with a much more conservative and willing Republican administration in 2010. The newly elected Governor Paul LePage was extremely supportive of a charter bill, patterning much of his gubernatorial policy on that supported by groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). A bill was brought forward, passed, and signed by the Governor on June 30, 2011 that would allow for the authorization of 10 charter schools in Maine. Work began to produce an application for a charter school in Cornville.

Cornville's application was brought before the approving body in Augusta and was initially rejected for lacking detailed financial and educational plans on July 3, 2012. Revisions were made, as well as tearful pleas for a second chance from parents and prospective children. For his part, LePage took the charter commission to task, demanding they review the application and reminding them that they served by his authority. On further review, Cornville was given the first charter for an elementary school in the state of Maine. Several issues were noted with this award however. First, under Maine's charter school bill, charter schools were not intended to reopen or replace a school that was closed for consolidation for budgetary reasons. The Cornville public school had been closed to save money on the district budget. By placing a

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

charter school there, the actual cost to the district doubled over the previous cost. This came about because districts were required to send the charter school money equal to the per pupil cost. This method of funding ended up putting budgetary pressure on some regions that had not previously felt the pinch. In Skowhegan, costs were roughly one million dollars per year once the school became operational.

After approval, the school held a lottery to fill the majority of its 60 seats. Several seats were saved for those individuals who had worked hard to see the school come to fruition. On October 1, 2012, the school opened its doors (Harlow). The years that followed saw the school expand from its initial offering of kindergarten through sixth grade to kindergarten through eighth. Its current population is allowed to be up to 135 though the actual number fluctuates between 120 and 128. At the moment it is in the middle of its accreditation process which will certify it for another five years. In 2015, funding was modified with the passing of LD 131, shifting funding costs to the general fund instead of requiring per student expenses from districts.

Modern Practice at Cornville Regional Charter School

Currently the CRCS is administered by Travis Works, who has been both a public school teacher and an administrator in two public school systems. During the course of gathering data, I took the time to interview Travis so as to gain a better understanding of where the school currently is academically and its goals. Over its 4 years of operation, the path taken has changed significantly. During the first two years, efforts were focused on “making it a school” according to Works. With nothing but second hand furniture, old teaching materials, unpainted walls, and the building in a general state of disrepair. Those who supported it moved to restore a sense of

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

professionalism and cleanliness. Paint was donated which at least allowed walls to be covered even if there was not a consistent appearance.

Furniture was donated, resulting in a ramshackle appearance. The board for the school was voted on by the parents whose children attended the school. Mr. Works explained: "We were the only charter school that had a publically elected board and it was really just whoever wanted to show up could be on the ballot." This approach caused numerous problems however. Since anyone could come and put their name forward, "It was kind of like open season [and] whoever brought the largest group of friends" had the best chance of winning according to Mr. Works. This was not an uncommon practice amongst the charter school supporters during the steps to found the school.

In each case where there was a Cornville town meeting with issues involving the potential charter school, the meeting would be mobbed with supporters who would easily tip the ballot since meetings that often had 18 to 20 people suddenly had 40 or 50, most of whom came exclusively to ensure passage of favorable initiatives. It was typical small town, low engagement politics that can be seen throughout rural Maine. The issue with the board has since been solved according to Works: "So our bylaws were just changed by the board and accepted by the charter commission and now its basically appointed by the current board, so its not publically elected."

The first administrator was hired out of retirement. William H. Crumley provided administration and by most accounts was a kind, grandfatherly individual, but the school had little real structure during his time there. According to parents, children would often be seen "running through the halls without their shoes on" or milling around out of

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

classrooms. The stresses and struggles of trying to pull a first time in the state charter elementary school off the ground took its toll on both staff, students and Chumley. Eventually, mid way through his second year, he “shut down and stopped doing his job” according to several parents. Justin Belanger, the father who took point in moving the charter school from dream to reality, took over and held the school together until Works could be hired for the next year. With Works on board, Belanger directed him to move the school fully into Performance Based Education and grading, increase technology use, and achieve accreditation.

The current philosophy of the school focuses on what is referred to as Ag Ed, meaning an agricultural foundation to the education model. According to the parent information packet offered by CRCS, the school pursues the student’s ideal learning experience by focusing on intrinsic motivation factors, supported by staff and peers. In theory, this isn’t significantly different from what is done in other schools. Works clarifies: “Ideally we are proficiency based and have a great deal of value into making sure students are highly engaged and they are motivated and part of the learning process.”

The schedule is relatively comparable to what might be seen in other Maine elementary schools. The morning is broken into reading, writing, and math. The afternoon features three blocks of structured learning goals for science and social studies, power goals, and independent learning twice per week. The other two days per week the afternoon is divided between science and social studies seminar which varies in its subject matter and finish the day with Student Interest Groups (SIG).

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

During the course of interviewing parents, the SIGs came up multiple times. Works points to the important concept supported by the school, voice and choice. He noted that the SIG model has “staff, community members, parents and even students that run like, electives” where students select choices from a list and take part in those activities during their SIG blocks each week. Activities can include jewelry making, vinyl siding, coding, robotics, wilderness survival, welding and crafts. As Works explains, “we usually have those in groups of 6 to 8 unless the group can accommodate more” and “students chose their top three choices, sometimes there is up to 14 choices for the whole building so each learning might have five or six choices.” Students then do their two choices for six weeks.

Science and social studies seminars use a similar process. Works again pointed to the choice and voice idea, claiming that “students have a choice in what they sign up for and from there the instruction is tailored around their needs.” Options include things like Westward Expansion, Medieval Times, Government, and the Revolutionary War. The idea is that the seminars are used to theme lessons to meet PBE requirements for individual students.

Friday has a very different schedule. Students do not do their regular morning rotation, instead doing Friday seminar and a variety of other skill building classes. The most unique aspect however is the learning coach. The learning coach is essentially a student’s academic advisor. The coach meets with the student once every week or two and goes over what the student has covered in the preceding week and notes where that student needs to move to next. The coach has a roster of students from kindergarten to eighth grade to oversee.

Data Analysis

The three parent interviews were carried out between February 8, 2016 and February 12, 2016. Responses to questions were varied, but several clear trends appeared during the course of the interviews and surrounding discussions. Three areas were reviewed for the purpose of this research: Why did the parent select the charter school, are they satisfied with that decision, what are their feelings toward the public school system. Three key reasons came up during the interview process, parents liked the Ag Ed approach to instruction, they felt their students would receive a more agile and tailored education due to smaller class sizes and responsiveness, and dissatisfaction with how the public school was responding to their student's needs, or the general landscape and climate being pursued.

Agricultural Ed

The preference for an agricultural foundation came up in all three interview. Brian and Sam, whose students are in 4th and 6th grade, felt the agricultural focus was a huge selling point to having their student's attend CRCS. When asked, Brian stated "I really liked that it was more of an agriculturally focused school, they recently became a 4H school, and that was important to me because I feel like a lot of kids today have lost that connection to what Maine used to be and what it actually takes to provide food." Brian's wife, Sam felt that the student's access to animals and the care and feeding of those animals created opportunities for learning that simply didn't exist in the public school. As part of course work at CRCS, Sam's oldest student was part of a program where school chickens had their eggs collected, packaged, and sold to another nearby

agricultural charter school. Students had to produce labels, learn to take care of and clean eggs, and generally care for the hens in order to manage their business. “No public school offers that you know, so they are really learning business stuff at a young age so they are learning how to budget money and how to use money,” Sam said.

John has a single student attending the school, but he too liked the agricultural focus offered by CRCS. John is himself a high school English teacher at the nearby public school district, so his understanding of what public schools can and cannot do is deep. “I enjoy that he’s learned a lot of other skills and things that he probably wouldn’t have gotten through public education just because, just because of the size of the school and their ability to do a lot more at this time than public education can,” John said. Those additional skills included agricultural instruction such as raising plants and animals.

Unlike the other two interviewees, Mary did not place as much emphasis on the agricultural education as a reason for selecting the school. She did feel it added to the experiences, but it was not itself a significant factor in her decision to move her two children. One of her two children however, Ellen, age 6, did say she enjoyed having access to the animals at school and learning the skills associated with them.

Class size and responsiveness

For all three parents, class size was something that was considered. For one parent, it was the primary reason for selecting a school. John felt that his son was lost in classrooms that were too full to meet his needs. As an educator, he recognizes that smaller class sizes are a pathway to better intervention and can help students learn. “He was behind in a lot of classes,” John said. The smaller class sizes and increased

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

one on one teacher time were the strongest factors that led John and his wife to send their son to CRCS.

Mary was excited by the ability of the school to adjust the rate material was presented to her children. The claim that students were able to approach material at their own pace was seen as an important factor. The PBE model does allow students to approach skills at their own pace and does not put restrictions on skills that are designated as higher in grade level, though upward movement in the standards to higher grade levels is rare. She noted how happy she was with the extra help her youngest was receiving in reading. Her youngest daughter's teacher is trained in Reading Recovery and requested the student come to school fifteen minutes earlier each day to receive targeted intervention.

For Brian and Sam, the issue of class size and responsiveness are immensely influential, particularly for their youngest. Their youngest previously attended school in Madison but his parents decided to try something different in response to his ADHD diagnosis. In referring to her son, Sam was disappointed with how the old school dealt with ADHD sensory issues and felt that the 504 established to help her son was rarely used and mostly ignored. On the other hand, she felt that CRCS took her son's needs to heart, giving him constant motor breaks, as she calls them, and allowing him to leave a subject and move to the next when he was no longer being engaged effectively. While the schedule is fixed in a manner similar to any public school, there does appear to be opportunities for teachers to adjust how students are presented material. Additionally, since class sizes are so small, it is much easier for teachers to make time for students to work on something new.

Previous School Experience

Experiences within the public schools proved to be an obvious factor in the decision to move students to the CRCS. This came as no surprise given rural setting in question and the difficulties often associated with transporting students to the school. All three families had different public school experiences and the factor had differing effects on their choice.

Mary had a very good experience at the Athens Elementary School where her oldest child attended. The Athens school was an interesting school by Maine standards. While part of the Madison school district, it actually only used Madison schools for high school. Athens served kindergarten through eighth grade. Unfortunately, after Madison went through a difficult mill reevaluation, the school budget was cut. Rumor began to spread that the seventh and eighth grade students would need to begin attending the middle school in Madison, which was very upsetting to staff and parents. Mary found the entire affair very stressful for her family. The idea that her daughter could continue to attend a school closer to home was very appealing. Looking to avoid further drama, she decided moving the students to CRCS was the best choice. Mary was not the only one for whom dissatisfaction with the public school was the prime factor in moving to the charter school.

John's son also had a poor experience in the elementary schools within the district he worked. The low reading scores, lack of enjoyment, and general poor attitude concerning school led to his parents considering an alternative. Despite being an educator, John also expressed his disappointment in the opportunities offered within the

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

district. The lack of field trips and low one on one teaching opportunities struck him as being detrimental to his son's education. Since moving to the CRCS, his son has improved in reading and writing and seems to enjoy school much more.

Brian and Sam had the most to say about their previous experience in public school. This is the first year they have had students in CRCS. Both of their children had a bad year last year at the Madison elementary and middle schools. The oldest struggled the most. Brian described the experience of speaking with his daughter: "And she, everyday the year before she had come home and said 'I hate going to school.' She didn't like a lot of her teachers, and she had problems with like the gym teacher." Curiously, this was not the reason they moved her to the CRCS. It was because they had already chosen to move their son. Since one was going, and the oldest was so unhappy at Madison, they decided to try both at the charter school.

Results have been mixed however. The oldest misses her friends and dislikes the lack of structure that the charter school has. For her, knowing her schedule, having a clear set of guidelines for getting good grades, and consistency is the best environment for her comfort. For her little brother however, it has been a boon. Access to the SIGs, ample opportunities for movement, and the numerous hands on learning opportunities have led to a terrific learning experience for him.

Sam states that "Compared to public schools, you would go to them and it would take forever for them to get on top of something." On the other hand, they feel listened to and respected when they speak to Mr. Works. One event that they recalled involved their daughter that reinforced their satisfaction with CRCS. Brian related the fact that their daughter found her course work much too easy and was bored. "And we've gone

to and spoke with Travis about that. And they got right on it. Within a week they were moving her into another class,” Sam happily related.

Conclusions

After reviewing the information derived from the interviews, several concepts were clear. All of the parents interviewed made choices that they felt were best for their children. More than a few components do require discussion. The implication that an agricultural foundation was somehow better than a traditional educational model bears investigating. Concerns over class size and school responsiveness also need to be addressed.

Agricultural Education

The idea that connecting back to the earth in some way or another and to have that be viewed as a better model is a typical belief for many of us in modern society. Even Thomas Jefferson famously pushed his Yeoman Farmer ideal in the south with the belief that a closer connection to the earth would result in better citizens. Similarly, parents advocating for an Ag Ed curriculum seem to be doing so with the assumption that it is a more pure approach to their student's education, more of a bottom up rather than a top down process. Almost every parent I spoke with stated that they disliked the amount of testing happening in the public schools, certainly not an unusual position amongst parents in all school types.

It would be easy to dismiss the notion that Ag Ed is a preferable model by saying parents aren't familiar with how education is provided, but the fact that John is an educator himself and expressed his support for the Ag Ed model shows that this isn't an

effective counter. The model was introduced by the parents at the time of the schools inception, potentially in a bid to match the style that had been done at the charter school in Hinckley. The parents who worked hard at the beginning of the CRCS movement were generally homeschoolers, farmers, and independent outdoorsmen, all of whom saw value in the simplicity of a Ag Ed model for education while having some distrust for the traditional apparatus of public education.

In interviewing Mr. Works, it seems the school does honor the intent of the Ag Ed curriculum, but it is used to theme lesson goals and support the PBE model. Shifts from the Ag Ed being the foundation have taken their toll however as more than a few of the founding families have left the school since the changes have been made to the curriculum. Mary mentioned the turmoil within the school as Belanger was leaving and Works was coming in. Many families saw Works as the source of the changes being made, ignoring the accreditation issues that were looming and the need to move from being a building that looked like a school and an actual school doing the business of education. Works stated that it was Belanger who pushed for increased technology use and the move to PBE's.

Class size and responsiveness

There is an undeniable advantage in the lower class sizes CRCS has when it comes to targeting each student and their specific needs. On average, CRCS has noticeably fewer students per educator, which facilitates both more one on one teacher to student interaction as well as specialized intervention. According to Works, the average classroom at CRCS has around 15 students. The closest district has a student to staff ratio of 13 to 1, though actual regular education classroom settings are higher,

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

more on the order of 17 to 20 per classroom. Research supports the assertion that smaller class sizes can lead to increased performance, as long as the programs have an effective model to take advantage of those reduced numbers. It is not clear whether or not that holds true for CRCS, given the fact that they are relatively new and are pursuing a program that includes the voice and choice model and less of a consistent educational model in all settings.

The agility exhibited at the CRCS when it comes to responding to parent concern is noteworthy. Sam and Brian expressed this as an important factor in moving their children to CRCS. John did not mark it as especially important, but did express his approval in how administration handled other aspects of his student's education. The key issue with using administrative or teacher responsiveness as a factor in deciding if you are satisfied or dissatisfied with a school is that there is no way to determine whether or not what you are seeing is the norm. In a typical school, each teacher deals with parent concerns initially. They do their best to respond to the needs of parents so long as it lay within their personal ability to correct. Unfortunately, in many cases school policy is the exact issue parents are struggling against, meaning the issue must be moved to the administrators for the school or district. As a whole, most principals are very responsive to parent needs. They communicate as soon as possible with parents and do their best to solve the problem. They are at times restricted by policy, most of which is established for legal and liability reasons. To parents, this can appear unfair or unnecessarily restrictive. However, policy is established by the school board and it can only be changed there.

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

When it comes to the application of 504 or IEP, the subjectivity of things like extra time or help can create conflict between educational professionals and parents. With Sam and Brian's son, the concern Sam brought up that teachers were ignoring the 504 makes for a clear example of the subjective nature of interventions and accommodations. Sam felt her son's teachers were ignoring the 504, though it is difficult to know exactly what the circumstances were that led to that conclusion. A parent will not be able to know how much extra time is being offered or whether or not an effort is being made to allow a student who needs to let out energy an opportunity to move. Unless an observation occurs, parents must rely on the statements of their children, which often provide only a partial view of reality.

The smaller size of CRCS's student population, the greatly streamlined bureaucratic processes, and lack of long standing practice and policy does allow for a more aggressive and rapid response to student needs. In general, the charter schools are not required to behave in a fashion similar to established districts. They are intentionally given fewer restrictions though they do still need to meet performance goals and follow state and federal education law. As a whole, the charter schools benefit from the lack of prying eyes and the desire from the governor's office that they succeed. All of this gives administrators at the charter schools more freedom to respond in ways that satisfy parents, whether or not those changes result in the best educational decisions for the student.

Implications

The state of charter schools in Maine is still very much in flux. There continues to be significant challenges that face them and how the schools respond will have an impact on where they go moving forward. Changes at CRCS have resulted in a stronger model that might give it a better opportunity to succeed in Maine's educational environment. Previously, the school was clearly a patchwork institution with minimal administrative control and a school community trying to craft an experience that they felt a school should be without considering what the school was required to be under law or from a practical sense. The turmoil that has been seen since Works took over is indicative of what happens when grassroots supporters are forced to accept that there are limitations placed on actions when state and federal money is involved. The school was poorly run, educational opportunities were limited, and it was starving for expert knowledge.

While the parents interviewed for this study had common reasons for sending their students, and they were mostly satisfied with the experience, they expressed some concern that the model being followed is not necessarily best for all students. Brian and Sam will be moving their daughter back to her previous school for the next school year since she has not taken to the free form approach offered at CRCS. John has chosen to move his student back to the local district for his seventh and eighth grade years and plans on having him attend the local high school. For both families, despite having the grade levels available for their students, are reverting back to a traditional model. Retaining families and students will remain a challenge for CRCS as the school continues to improve and move forward.

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

Works mentioned that many of the early adopters had left the school, upset with the new direction it is taking. Some misattribute the changes to Works' arrival and his introduced initiatives, unaware of the PBE and standard based diploma mandate the state has approved. Some more recent families have left for other reasons. Several students returning to the local school district have come because their parents did not feel they were making gains at CRCS. While anecdotal and illustrative of the previous model CRCS followed, before Works begin introducing the PBE revisions to the curriculum, it shows that the school needs to be aware of parent needs after students arrive and can't simply sell a philosophy and hope parents follow along. Being an alternative may not be enough to maintain its student population by targeting the sorts of parents interviewed for this study. There are parents who have tested the waters at CRCS and found it lacking.

The exodus of many early adopters is cause for alarm for the school, though there continues to be no shortage of parents willing to try CRCS out with their children. Parents removing their students from the school because of the lack of growth is a more troubling issue. The model pursued by CRCS is unique, a key selling point, but it is also a concern in that it is not proven and the educators attempting to execute on it are going to have significant growing pains, resulting in lost teaching time and critical opportunities that will be missed and never recovered for the students attending.

As an educator, I continue to question how effective the model is and whether or not it can even be pursued in the manner described to me by Works. The logistical challenges of running what are essentially individualized education programs for all students are practically insurmountable. Tracking PBE standards has proven difficult in

traditional schools, so the notion that CRCS will be able to not only do that while also allowing students choices in classes presents clear concerns. Add that mixing grade levels within subject areas while assuming all students will remain engaged at their skill level and you have an environment that will require an immense amount of attention from the teacher to maintain control.

Works stated that CRCS has contracted with an outside company to produce software that will allow for the flexibility necessary to manage 130 students as they move between teachers, class group, and subjects throughout the week. Since there will be times when students will be in class groups or subject for only a couple weeks at a time, teachers will not know who they will have from one class to another, which raises clear concerns. In a traditional setting, students do move regularly throughout the day, pulled for Title 1, enrichment, special education, music lessons, or other activities. This is a disruption that does impact learning and forces adjustments for both students and teachers. Students will be even more disrupted in their schedule and learning opportunities in the CRCS model that is proposed, losing crucial education time.

Charter schools are here to stay in Maine, and the CRCS is in a position to greatly improve its position and ability within that system. The first three years have been a struggle for students at CRCS and for the school itself as it attempted to create a new school from scratch. Many of the parents who pulled their students did so after seeing poor educational gains. Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, and Branch (2006) did observe that charter schools often do perform poorly in their first few years but that they

generally reach a level equal to nearby schools by year five. Under Works' guidance, the CRCS may be able to achieve similar results.

Personal Learning Reflection

Completing this research has led to a rather eye opening realization. During my initial research survey on the topic of charter schools, there was wide variation on how or why states were implementing the process. Maine's approach seemed to have the same driving factors as other states, but a more measured approach. By restricting the number of schools allowed, it didn't have the free for all appearance seen in places like New Orleans or Washington DC. Growing pains still existed, but there was less of a corporate feel to the process and more of a local control approach.

Having lived in Somerset County my entire life, and having seen the charter movement take hold in Cornville itself, I had a first hand opportunity to watch CRCS become a reality. The school does not match what was generally shown to be the trend in many of the studies, since it is neither a corporate owned chain school or even a modified private school taking advantage of the new charter system. Instead, it was the product of a coalition between school choice advocates, home school parents, disgruntled Cornville residents, and a Republican administration. Together they facilitated the passing of the charter school bill, the establishment of their local school, and the opportunity for all involved to successfully complete their goals.

Through the process of interviewing parents and the administrator, I obtained a better understanding of what draws parents to the school and how the school has reacted to attract and keep parents and students engaged and satisfied. For the most

part, it is the impression that student needs are being met. Future research into the efficacy of the practices at CRCS would certainly be useful. Looking at state testing data does not offer a clear picture, since the population at CRCS is not typical and is a small sample size. Time will tell if the model pushed by CRCS is more effective. One thing is certain, parents will continue to send students there for many different reasons, whether there is data showing successful educational outcomes or not. Choosing an alternative for your child will itself be seen as a proactive step for a parent to take, leading to a satisfaction.

Work Cited

- Baker-Smith, C., Corcoran, S., & Nathanson, L. (2013) *High school choice in New York City: A report on the school choices and placements of low-achieving students*. New York, NY: Research Alliance for New York City Schools.
- Beck, D., Lo, W., & Maranto, R. (2014). Determinants of student and parent satisfaction at a cyber charter school. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 107(3), 209-216.
- Booker, K., Gilpatric, S., Gronberg, T., & Jansen, D. (2008). The effect of charter schools on traditional public school students in Texas: Are children who stay behind left behind? *Journal of Urban Economics*, 64, 123 – 145.
- Buckley, J., & Schneider, M. (2006). Are charter school parents more satisfied with schools? Evidence From Washington, DC. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(1), 57-78.
- Buckley, J., & Schneider, M. (2009). *Charter schools hope or hype?*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Buras, K. (2011). Race, charter schools, and conscious capitalism: on the spatial politics and whiteness as property (and the unconscionable assault on black New Orleans). *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(2), 296-330.
- Conner, M. (2007). *It's what's inside that counts: maximizing marketing to advance your school's mission* (White Paper). Sacramento, CA: Conner Associates. Retrieved from <http://www.connor->

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

associates.com/sites/default/files/resources/Its%20Whats%20Inside%20That%20Counts%20-%20Maximizing%20Internal%20Marketing%202005-2012.pdf

Dwyer, J. (2012). The parental choice fallacy in education reform debates. *Notre Dame Law Review*, 87, 1837-1860.

Forman, J. (2007). Do charter schools threaten public education? Emerging evidence from fifteen years of a quasi-market for schooling. *Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository*, 2007, 839-880.

Hanushek, E., Kain, J., Rivkin, S., & Branch, G. (2006). Charter school quality and parental decision making with school choice. *Journal of Public Economics*. 91, (5-6), 823-848.

Harlow, D. (2012, October 1). A Maine first: 60-student Cornville charter school opens. *Morning Sentinel*. Retrieved from http://www.centralmaine.com/2012/10/01/60-student-cornville-charter-school-opens_2012-10-01/

Jacobs, N. (2011). Understanding school choice: location as a determinant of charter school racial, economic, and linguistic segregation. *Education and Urban Society* 45(4), 459-482.

Kindzierski C., Mohammed A., & Wallace, N. (2013). State assessments: does a charter school truly demonstrate higher proficiency than its public counterpart? *Current Issues in Education*, 16(2), 1-14

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

Ladd, H., & Bifulco, R. (2007). School choice, racial segregation, and test score gaps:

Evidence from North Carolina's charter school program. *Journal of Policy*

Analysis and Management, Nov., 1 - 40.

Schlomer, P. A., Shober, A. F., & Witte, J. F. (2007). Going charter? A study of school

district competition in Wisconsin. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 82(2/3), 410-

439.

Zimmer, R., & Buddin, R. (2009). Is Charter School Competition in California Improving

the Performance of Traditional Public Schools? *Public Administration Review*,

69(5), 631-845.

Appendix A Parent Consent Form

Dear Parent,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Phil Estabrook in connection to a class at the University of Maine at Farmington. The purpose of this research is to identify the reasons parents send their students to Cornville Regional Charter School and their satisfaction with that decision. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in one interview that will take 20 – 30 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. After the interview is transcribed, any identifying information will be removed

Risks:

1. There is the possibility that you will be uncomfortable with some of the questions. Feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
2. The time and inconvenience of the meeting and interview may be risks to participating in this study.

Benefits:

There is no direct benefit for you from participating in this study. However, as a participant you may enjoy sharing your perspective and experience as the parent of a student at Cornville Regional Charter School.

Confidentiality:

This research is being conducted under the direct supervision of the course instructors at University of Maine at Farmington. Your identity will be known to myself and the instructors, and you may/will be identifiable. The original Informed Consent and a participant key will be kept by course instructors in locked file cabinets. The audio file, and my original transcription will be kept until the course is completed, and then deleted. The transcripts, with no identifiable information, may be kept for up to five years by the researcher.

Voluntary:

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer. If you do not wish to be recorded, you may instead respond to the interview questions in writing using a paper

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

copy of the interview questionnaire.

May I audio tape you during the interview? ☐ Yes ☐ No

I _____, have carefully listened to and fully understand the purpose of this research and the procedures to be followed. I understand that my records will be kept confidential, my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also recognize that I may skip any questions I don't wish to respond to. Results of this research may be shared in class, in publications, or in verbal presentation. If I have any concerns or inquires about my rights as a subject or the manner in which this research is conducted, I understand that I can contact Phil Estabrook at (207) 474-6739 or philip.estabrook@maine.edu. I can also contact Karol Maybury of UMF at karol.maybury@maine. By signing below, I assent that I fully understand the above and give my consent to serve as a subject in this research (if you would like a summary of the results, please make the request of the researcher at the contact given above).

Date: _____ **Signature** _____

Appendix B Mr. Works Consent Form

Dear Mr. Works,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Phil Estabrook in connection to a class at the University of Maine at Farmington. The purpose of this research is to identify the reasons parents send their students to Cornville Regional Charter School and their satisfaction with that decision. In order to full identify the circumstances surrounding the creation of the original charter school bill in 2011, your insight would be useful. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in one interview that will take 20 – 30 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Risks:

1. There is the possibility that you will be uncomfortable with some of the questions. Feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
2. The time and inconvenience of the meeting may be risks to participating in this study.

Benefits:

There is no direct benefit for you from participating in this study. However, as a participant you may enjoy sharing your perspective and experience as a legislator who assisted in the creation of the Cornville Regional Charter School.

Confidentiality:

This research is being conducted under the direct supervision of the course instructors at University of Maine at Farmington. Your identity will be known to myself and the instructors, and you may/will be identifiable. The original Informed Consent and a participant key will be kept by course instructors in locked file cabinets. The audio file, and my original transcription will be kept until the course is completed, and then deleted. The transcripts, with no identifiable information, may be kept for up to five years by the researcher.

Voluntary:

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer. If you do not wish to be

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

recorded, you may instead respond to the interview questions in writing using a paper copy of the interview questionnaire.

May I audio tape you during the interview? ☐ Yes ☐ No

I _____, have carefully listened to and fully understand the purpose of this research and the procedures to be followed. I understand that my records will be kept confidential, my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also recognize that I may skip any questions I don't wish to respond to. Results of this research may be shared in class, in publications, or in verbal presentation. If I have any concerns or inquires about my rights as a subject or the manner in which this research is conducted, I understand that I can contact Phil Estabrook at (207) 474-6739 or philip.estabrook@maine.edu. I can also contact Karol Maybury of UMF at karol.maybury@maine. By signing below, I assent that I fully understand the above and give my consent to serve as a subject in this research (if you would like a summary of the results, please make the request of the researcher at the contact given above).

Date: _____ **Signature:** _____

Appendix C: Parent Interview Instrument

1. What factors led to your decision to enroll your child at the Cornville Regional Charter School? Were any of the following something you considered and why: proximity to the school, specific learning styles supported at the school, general school climate, and/or opposition to traditional public education models?
2. How did you hear about the charter school?
3. What were your experiences in the public school system that resulted in you considering an alternate educational model for your child/children?
4. From what you have seen at the CRCS, are you satisfied with your child's education? Why or why not?
5. Is there anything that you would need to see from the public school system that could motivate you to put your student back into that system and if so, what would that be?
6. Where will you send your student when they are promoted into a grade level that is no longer offered at CRCS?

Appendix D: Mr. Works interview instrument

1. Can you describe the philosophy or mission the Cornville Regional Charter School uses?
2. What pedagogical approaches has the school instituted and how does it differ from the traditional public school model?
3. Does the charter school handle outreach with parents differently than a public school? Are parents given the same voice through the board as they would through a traditional elected school board model?
4. What efforts have been made to adjust services each year? Were the changes made in response to parent request?
5. Has there been tension within the school community as changes have been made as the school has matured in the services provided?

Appendix E: Mr. Colbry research consent form

Dear Mr. Colbry,

My name is Phil Estabrook and I am a graduate student at the University of Maine Farmington. I am interested in conducting a research study in the Spring of 2016. I will be collecting data in January-April and presenting my research to my peers in an open symposium. I am interested in determining the reasons why parents have chosen the Cornville Regional Charter School for their student's educational needs and whether they are satisfied with the services offered.

I would like to interview three parents on those experiences at the school. These parents will complete a written consent form. Participation is voluntary and participants can leave the study at any time. Participation is voluntary and participants can leave the study at any time. I will not share identifiable data about specific students, parents or others involved in the study. Experiences I will be studying include:

- What parent's previous public school experiences were, if any
- Why they chose an alternate model of education for their students
- Whether they are satisfied with their students education at the charter school

Factors in School Choice And Parent Satisfaction At Cornville Regional Charter School

- What their plan is for the years of education not offered by the charter school

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact the principal investigator, Phil Estabrook at University of Maine at Farmington, at (207) 474-6739 and philestabrook@yahoo.com. You may also reach the faculty advisor on this study at (207) 778-7066 or johanna.prince@maine.edu. Thank you for considering my request to conduct research.

Sincerely,
Phil Estabrook

I have reviewed Phil Estabrook's research plan for "Factors in School choice and satisfaction." I give my consent to conduct this research in the Spring of 2016. I am aware that I can review the data and discuss the research project at any point during the research. I may also ask to view the report at the end of the study.

Date	Name	Position in District/Site
------	------	---------------------------

Appendix D: Mr. Works research consent form

Dear Mr. Works,

My name is Phil Estabrook and I am a graduate student at the University of Maine Farmington. I am interested in conducting a research study in the Spring of 2016. I will be collecting data in January-April and presenting my research to my peers in an open symposium. I am interested in determining the reasons why parents have chosen the Cornville Regional Charter School for their student's educational needs and whether they are satisfied with the services offered.

I would like to interview three parents on those experiences at the school. These parents will complete a written consent form. Participation is voluntary and participants can leave the study at any time. I will not share identifiable data about specific students, parents or others involved in the study. Experiences I will be studying include:

- What parent's previous public school experiences were, if any
- Why they chose an alternate model of education for their students
- Whether they are satisfied with their students education at the charter school
- What their plan is for the years of education not offered by the charter school

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact the principal investigator, Phil Estabrook at University of Maine at Farmington, at (207) 474-6739 and philestabrook@yahoo.com. You may also reach the faculty advisor on this study at (207) 778-7066 or johanna.prince@maine.edu. Thank you for considering my request to conduct research.

Sincerely,
Phil Estabrook

I have reviewed Phil Estabrook's research plan for "Factors in School choice and satisfaction." I give my consent to conduct this research in the Spring of 2016. I am aware that I can review the data and discuss the research project at any point during the research. I may also ask to view the report at the end of the study.

Date

Name

Position in District/Site

Appendix E: CRCS schedule

Cornville Regional Charter School Daily Schedule 2015-2016 Yellow indicates "common times" which means we can flexibly group students and there are no schedule barriers in doing so.					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:15	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
8:15-8:45	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Thinking Skills (8:15-8:45)
8:45-9:45	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	HOM (8:45-9:15)
					Snack (9:15- 9:30)
9:45-10:00	Snack	Snack	Snack	Snack	Learning Coach (9:30-10:30)
10:00-10:45	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	
10:45-12:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Friday Seminar (10:30-12:00)
12:00 - 12:30	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess
12:30 - 1:00	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess
1:00 - 1:40	AE/L/M/A/PE Sci Power Goals Structured Research Independent Learning	Science/SS Seminar	AE/L/M/A/PE Sci Power Goals Structured Research Independent Learning	Science/SS Seminar	Dismissal at 12:45pm
1:45 - 2:2	AE/L/M/A/PE Soc. Power Goals Structured Research Independent Learning		AE/L/M/A/PE Soc. Power Goals Structured Research Independent Learning		
2:30 - 3:10	AE/L/M/A/PE Sci/SS Power Goals Structured Research Independent Learning	SIGS/AE	AE/L/M/A/PE Sci/SS Power Goals Structured Research Independent Learning	SIGS/AE	
3:15-3:30	Closing Circle	Closing Circle	Closing Circle	Closing Circle	Staff time

AE = Agricultural Education / L= Library / M = Music / A = Art / PE = Physical Education