Characteristics of Competitive Pressure Created by Charter Schools: Charter Schools, their Impact on Traditional Public Districts and the Role of District Leadership

Authors: Cathy Cummins, Bernadette Anne Ricciardelli, Peter Steedman

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CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPETITIVE PRESSURE CREATED BY CHARTER SCHOOLS: CHARTER SCHOOLS, THEIR IMPACT ON TRADITIONAL PUBLIC DISTRICTS AND THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Dissertation in Practice

by

Cathy Cummins

with Bernadette Ricciardelli and Peter Steedman

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

March 24, 2014
Abstract

Characteristics of Competitive Pressure Created by Charter Schools: Charter Schools, their Impact on Traditional Public Districts and the Role of District Leadership:

by

Cathy Cummins

Dissertation Chairperson: Joseph M. O’Keefe, S.J., Ed.D.

Abstract

This mixed methods sequential explanatory designed study applied the economic theory of marketplace competition as a way to frame superintendents’ perceptions of the characteristics of students and parents seeking charter schools. Although studies on charter schools are abundant, there is limited literature on this particular aspect of market competition between traditional districts and charter schools.

Through surveys and interviews with superintendents across Massachusetts, this study found that most of the superintendents reported a perception that charter schools “cream-skim” higher achieving students and under-serve or “crop” high needs or more costly students – particularly special education and English language learner students. Additionally, superintendents generally perceive that parents were most likely to choose a charter school because of a perception that it was a more elite option and that parents making those choices were more likely to have been engaged in a child’s educational life. Many superintendents reported a strong pressure to find ways to retain high-achieving students while expressing resentment that charter schools under-serve high needs students. In three small urban districts, however, superintendents described charter schools that enroll high-needs students proportional to or exceeding the district’s student population, filled a gap or met an unmet need, or provided a specialization from which the district could learn.
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Acknowledgements

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We extend our gratitude to the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) and its Executive Director, Dr. Thomas Scott, and the individual superintendents who volunteered to participate in our survey and interviews.

Our families – collectively including three loving and enduring spouses and eight children ranging in ages from 0-13 - have been relentlessly and patiently supportive of our commitment to scholarship and the study of leadership. We could not have completed this journey without your support, sacrifice, and belief that this has been a worthy endeavor.

Lastly, we extend our gratitude to our dissertation committee for their interest in our topic, confidence in our inquiry, and support to the finish line.
Executive Summary

Abstract

This study explored the perceptions of Massachusetts superintendents about the impact of charter school competition on districts, the characteristics that increase or decrease competitive pressure facing districts as a result of competition from charter schools, and the types of actions, initiatives and innovations superintendents report enacting at least in part due to the competition they face from charter schools. We applied the economic theory of marketplace competition as a framework to explore how district superintendents perceive the existence of charter schools by examining their perceptions about whether or not charter schools have been a stimulus to their decision-making about innovation and reform. As its underlying foundation, the study used the driving forces of competition and innovation as expressed in the legislative intent of the 1993 Massachusetts law that established charter schools. Charter schools were initially designed to provide an alternative to district schools by conducting the business of education differently – by promoting innovation.

Although studies on charter schools are abundant, there is limited literature on the perceptions of superintendents about the types of students and parents choosing charter schools and the subsequent impact on how they report competitive pressure. This mixed methods sequential explanatory study, which included survey and semi-structured interview components, has yielded findings about superintendents’ perceptions of charter schools within the context of competitive educational marketplace.

Findings shed light on the direction of public education within the landscape of choice. Not only do superintendents sense urgency to act within a competitive charter school market, but other schooling options for students similarly add pressure to superintendents. Findings also indicate that superintendents perceive that the impact on their district budget is constraining, and that the funding formula does not take into consideration school systems’ economies of scale. Most superintendents perceive the choice market as limited or a “quasi-market;” unlike in a pure market-based economy where cost is a driving factor, parents who choose charter schools are not faced with a cost issue. This study found that there is considerable sentiment among superintendents that charter schools serve to separate communities and decrease democratic principles of education. Superintendents perceive that there are two echelons of public schools – public and charter – and that this division further separates society into smaller homogeneous groups thus endangering the growth of a multicultural society. And lastly, all superintendents who were interviewed expressed concern that the driving force of this movement – the charter school legislation - has not been implemented as intended.

This study found that most of the superintendents reported a perception that charter schools “cream-skim” higher achieving students and under-serve or “crop” high needs or more costly students – particularly special education and English language learner students. Additionally, superintendents generally perceive that parents were most likely to choose a charter school because of a perception that it was a more “elite” option and that parents making those choices were more likely to have been engaged in a child’s educational life. These
perceptions related to reports that charter school competition drained the district of talent and resources while creating conditions that fostered success in charter schools. Many superintendents reported a strong pressure to find ways to retain high-achieving students while expressing resentment that charter schools under-serve high needs students.

In contrast, superintendents in three small urban districts described three separate charter schools that provided an alternative narrative about the types of students and parents enrolling in these charter schools. Superintendents described that these charter schools enrolled high-needs students proportional to or exceeding the district’s student population, filled a gap or met an unmet need, or provided a specialization from which the district could learn. In all three cases, the superintendents reported lessened competitive pressure and increased motivation to collaborate with the charter school. Conclusions point to important equity, inclusion, and policy considerations as well as implications for further study.

We also looked specifically at innovations reported by superintendents that are influenced, at least in part, by the presence of a charter school in the district. This study highlighted a number of administrative and instructional innovations taking place as a result of increased competition from the educational marketplace. Charter schools were but one factor in the rationale for superintendents to select launching a specific innovation. Competition from school choice and vocational schools were referenced. The findings from this dissertation indicate that the innovations initiated by district superintendents are targeting those student populations who are perceived to be most likely to attend the local charter schools; namely those students considered by superintendents to be high academic achievers. Innovative strategies cited by many superintendents focused less on teaching and learning as promoted by the legislation but rather targeted marketing to potential consumers. Innovations that were aimed to support students identified as low-income, English language learners or special education were rarely highlighted by superintendents as a response to the presence of charter schools in their districts. Evidence indicated limited meaningful collaboration was occurring between districts and charter schools except in three isolated and unique circumstances.

**Context and Background**

The first American charter public school was launched in Minnesota in 1991 as a result of reform efforts to create choice in public education. Charter schools were designed to establish laboratories of innovation and reform that would spur competitive innovation in district schools (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; Toma & Zimmer, 2012). Applying market-style notions of consumer choice and competition, charter schools were designed to provide an alternative to district schools by conducting the business of education differently – by promoting innovative administrative and instructional practices (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Lubienski, 2003; Welch, 2010), by having autonomy that was free from the barriers of some bureaucratic rules and regulations (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; RPP, 2001), and by being accountable to consumers who would be able to choose a school based on results (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 1999; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Kolderie, 1990; Winters, 2012; Wohlstetter et al., 1995). More than twenty years later, research has produced mixed findings about the impact of charter schools on producing substantial and sustainable innovative reforms.
to the public education system (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Grady, 2012; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012).

Charter school proponents argue that charter schools can produce better and/or more efficient results, test, evaluate and motivate competitive innovation, address equity and access issues for high need student populations, and tend to a variety of reform needs that have been long unaddressed within the public education system which has become overwrought with bureaucratic and institutional barriers to reform (Ellison, 2009; Kolderie, 1994; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Toma & Zimmer, 2012; Winters, 2012). Proponents of charter schools argue that they produce a competitive effect that elevates the performance of traditional public schools (Zimmer, 2009; Carpenter II, 2011; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012) by undermining the otherwise “monopolistic political control of public education” (Lubienski, 2003; p. 396).

Charter school opponents argue that charter schools divert necessary local funds, drain public districts of resources and talents, exacerbate issues of equity and access, do not uniformly produce better results, and distract policy makers and decision makers from addressing true reform efforts (Ellison, 2009; Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Imberman, 2011). Charter school opponents also argue that when charter schools and district schools are forced to compete for the same resources, the presence of charter schools acts as more of a distraction from real school reform by “diverting resources and attention” away from other reform efforts (Merrifield, 2006; p. 18) and negatively impacting the conditions of traditional public districts (Arsen & Ni, 2012) without increasing effectiveness or efficiency (Carpenter II & Medina, 2011) of district schools. Opponents also point to the impact on resources that a charter can have on the local public school, especially in areas that face considerable financial constraints. “As highly motivated and engaged families pull their children from traditional public schools, urban districts have fewer resources – both financial and human – to address their many problems” (Dingerson, Peterson, Miner, & Walters, 2008; p. XII).

In addition, some critics of the marketization of the public education sector argue that market-based theories are not applicable to public education for a variety of reasons. Some critics note that the educational marketplace is more of a “quasi market” due to the disconnect between market choosers (parents) and market payers (tax payers) (Merrifield, 2006; Lubienski, 2003; Bartlett, 1993). Other critics argue that the application of market theory to public education is problematic because of the complexities of the system inherent in the varying social/political contexts resulting from local control (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011), or because marketization of public education changes the purpose of publicly funded education from a “public good” to a “private good” (Lubienski, 2003).
Purpose of the Study

Now that charter schools have been in existence for the more than two decades, a complex question remains: Does competition from charter schools spur innovation in traditional public districts? Our study attempted to answer this question by posing the following three additional questions.

1. How do superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?
2. What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in Massachusetts?
3. What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?

Our conceptual framework (Figure 1) seeks to explain how superintendent's perceptions of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school impacts the development of innovation in district schools.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework
Based on our review of the literature, our research team designed a study that addressed our overarching research question by dividing our study into three primary components, which are tied directly to our three sub-questions.

The first component centered on the perceptions of individual superintendents about charter schools and addressed sub-question 1: *How do superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?* Perceptions could be based on how the superintendent views the charter school movement as a whole as well as how s/he views the impact of the presence of a charter school option for students from her/his district. Superintendents may view charter schools differently depending upon their own experiences, the opinions of a collective professional group, or the impact charter school funding methodologies have had on their own district resources, etc. (Imberman, 2011; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001).

The second component focused on the nature and degree of competitive pressure experienced by superintendents of district schools and addressed sub-question 2: *What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools’ on districts in Massachusetts?* Competitive pressure may vary depending upon context, market share of students enrolling in charter schools, reasons parents choose to seek enrollment in charter schools, the types of students exiting the district schools to enroll in a charter schools, and a range of other contextual factors (Linick & Lubienski, 2013; Winters, 2012; RPP, 2001).

The third component sought to identify and explore the types of innovations reported by superintendents as being enacted by district schools in response to charter school competition; this component addressed sub-question 3: *What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?* Actions undertaken may vary from creating district-based choices that mirror or replicate those present in charter schools, allocating resources differently to address particular instructional or curricular approaches, investing time or resources in marketing efforts to promote district options, or joining advocacy or legislative efforts to resist charter school proliferation (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Hoxby, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Winters, 2012).

We believe that this study provides superintendents in Massachusetts with insights on collective perceptions about charter schools, the impact of charter school competition on traditional public districts, and the relationship between charter school competition and innovations enacted in public districts. These will lead to recommendations for districts leaders, policy-makers, and charter school leaders and for future study.
Methods

Our study employed a sequential explanatory mixed design because we sought to draw upon the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2012). We collected quantitative data through the distribution of a state-wide survey of Massachusetts superintendents to identify trends in superintendents’ perceptions about the impact of charter school competition on their decisions and actions. We used the survey data to inform the refinement of a semi-structured interview protocol that was used to collect additional qualitative data that deepened our understanding by providing contextual details that support, explain, or diverge from trends that emerged in the quantitative data (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Graphic presentation of sequential mixed design (adapted from Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006).
Quantitative Sample (Tables 1 to 3)

- SURVEY: 69 responses – 61 with a charter school option
- Sample size (n) = 61
- 5 out of 51 = Urban (Definition: assigned to Urban Superintendents’ Network)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Survey Respondents by Geographic Round Tables (n=61)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berkshire County</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut Valley</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Shore</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Colony</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Shore</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TriCounty</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester County</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrimack Valley</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Survey Respondents by Student Enrollment (n=61)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 1,500 students</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500-2,500 students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,501-4,000 students</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,001-6,000 students</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6,001-10,000 students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10,000 students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Survey Respondents by % of Students from District Enrolled in a Charter School (n=61)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>1% to 2%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 6%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% to 8%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% or more</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Sample (Tables 4 to 6)
  - 38 superintendents provided qualitative data
    - 9 superintendents provided both written responses to open-ended sections of survey and also participated in interviews
    - 29 superintendents provided written responses to open-ended sections of the survey (62% of survey respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
<th>Interview Participants by Geographic Round Tables (n=9)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berkshire County</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut Valley</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Shore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Colony</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Shore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TriCounty</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester County</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrimack Valley</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>Interview Participants by Student Enrollment (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 1,500 students</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500-2,500 students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,501-4,000 students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,001-6,000 students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6,001-10,000 students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10,000 students</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
<th>Interview Respondents by % of Students from District Enrolled in a Charter School (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% to 2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 6%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% to 8%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% or more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings and Discussion
The research team identified themes within individual lines of inquiry that led to overarching findings and conclusions. Table 7 displays the themes and the connections between the lines of inquiry. These themes are explored in greater detail in sections following the table. To ensure the privacy of our participants, pseudonyms were utilized for all superintendents, districts, regions and charter schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Perception of Marketplace</th>
<th>Characteristics of Students/Parents</th>
<th>Example of Innovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts</td>
<td>Charter schools exist in a landscape of other choice</td>
<td>Lack of support for students with disabilities and other high cost students</td>
<td>Revamp/start programs to compete with technical schools; capital and technology improvements; Training for teachers to improve skills targeting specialized populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds</td>
<td>Enrollment/Funding implications; difficult decisions about staffing and programming</td>
<td>Types of students and parents leaving (&quot;low cost&quot; &quot;high performing&quot;) increases this pressure; budget cuts cause more to leave; other cuts affect other kinds of students</td>
<td>Pressure to keep certain kinds of students influences district’s innovative priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response of Superintendents to Parent Consumers</td>
<td>Parents (as consumers) are perceived to be making choices – but because they are not paying for it, it is not a rational market</td>
<td>More engaged parents are making choices; choices perceived to be to support private goals, not community needs</td>
<td>Specific programs targeting marketing, outreach and communications to parent community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Equity, Diversity and Priorities</td>
<td>Charter Schools serve to separate communities and decrease democratic principles</td>
<td>Underrepresentation of some populations; perceived homogeneity; focus on high performers</td>
<td>New program development seems to cater to high performing students (honors, AP, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Funding Formula and Implications</td>
<td>Fairness in charter market – funding formula unfair</td>
<td>Lost funding exceeds the expense to educate charter choosers; charters serving high needs students results in less pressure and more collaboration</td>
<td>Advocating and taking active stance in opposing charter schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Realization of Legislative Intent</td>
<td>Implementation not as intended legislatively</td>
<td>Market does not benefit all learners</td>
<td>Funding formula disincentives collaboration and sharing of best practices as intended by legislation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts

While the focus of this study was on the competitive pressure of charter schools on public school districts, data from superintendents indicate that the competitive pressure they are experiencing emanates from a larger landscape of schooling options. Among the most talked about non-traditional public school public options is the Massachusetts Inter-District School Choice Policy. Massachusetts legislation provides inter-district school choice as an opportunity for parents to enroll their child into a district that has opted into the program. Some superintendents reported gaining revenue from school choice while others noted significant expenses due to school choice. Superintendents noted competitive pressure from technical, vocational and, in some cases, private schools.

Several superintendents expressed frustration over the ability of non-traditional public schools to be selective in serving “high cost students.” One superintendent commented that “if a student in a wheelchair wanted to take welding in [the district school]…I have to find a way to let that happen. That could be a $200,000 expenditure…. but the regional [vocational school] doesn’t…because there’s a fallback. There’s a mandated local education.” Many participants stated that charter and vocational schools did not have the same mandates to serve all students, and could therefore promote programs to attract low cost students.

Superintendents report that their response to competition depends on the choices available for their students, but that many of their responses reflect innovations they would have undertaken anyway. Yet, they did report that the competitive landscape did have at least some influence. They have undertaken capital and technological improvements, conducted program and curriculum reviews, and developed training designed to address the reasons they believe parents are making other school choices within their respective communities. Considering the competitive choices in his community, one superintendent reports having built a state of the art performance venue. The superintendent of another district reports that her district conducts rotating self-studies of curriculum and programs, and that they make field visits to other public districts and private schools so that the district can remain competitive with private and vocational/technical high schools. A third district has established a unique language immersion program and a progressive Montessori program to attract the largely middle to upper-middle class population to support district schools over primarily private school options.

According to the superintendent from Paulberg, the school choice program hurts his district more than charter schools. He commented, “It’s probably in the neighborhood of 350 students to 400 students that choice out…it's like 1.5 to 2 million dollars out going annually.”

According to the superintendent from Paulberg, the school choice program hurts his district more than charter schools. He commented, “It’s probably in the neighborhood of 350 students to 400 students that choice out…it's like 1.5 to 2 million dollars out going annually.”
Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds

As one would expect, we found that the higher the percentage of students enrolling in charter schools, the greater the impact on district budget, priorities and decisions. We found that districts that experienced the greatest impact on their budgets were more likely to initiate changes, at least in part, in response to the presence of a charter school. As districts lose funding for students who leave, superintendents are faced with difficult decisions about staffing and programming.

Our findings indicate that the percentage of students leaving a district to enroll in a charter school may have less influence on how the superintendent experiences and reacts to that pressure than the type of students and parents reported to be most likely and least likely to leave. Several superintendents expressed concern that charter schools cater to low cost, high performing students – one labeling this as “cherry picking.”

“They report that the students leaving cost less to educate than the per-pupil funding they take with them – leading to a disproportionate financial impact. Budget cuts then cause districts to reduce staff or programs, leading more parents to seek choices outside the district.

All superintendents who were interviewed expressed the need for them to positively convey the merits and achievements of district schools to their respective communities in order to attract or retain low cost, high performing students. Superintendents reported the budgetary necessity to retain these students as an influence on the types of innovations they were compelled to prioritize within the district. Many expressed this as difficult decision-making and not in line with their view of the mission of public education.

“If I may use a baseball metaphor, Commonwealth Charter Schools start with a 3-0 count for their student achievement goals: they have strong and persistent parental buy-in, and they do not have serious behavior issues, whether related to disabilities or otherwise. The challenge of educating a child with the advantage of engaged parents, no matter how demographically “disadvantaged” the child is, is simply not as great as it is for regular public school.”

--Survey Respondent
Superintendents consistently identified the parents as the consumers in the educational marketplace. However, one superintendent argued that parents are not participating in a “rational market” in which price and product influence winners and losers because they are not “footing the bill” and because they are not fully investigating the charter school’s or district’s achievement results. Another superintendent described a mother who reported that despite a “great 9th grade year,” her daughter still enrolled in the charter school in 10th grade when selected from the waiting list. He reported that her choice was not based on a negative experience at the district’s school. Many superintendents argue that it is not a real market since parents go shopping with the district’s funds.

It was reported by more than half of the interviewees and survey respondents that certain kinds of parents were aware of and taking advantage of charter schools, while certain types of parents were left out of the market place. Charter school choosers were described as “highly engaged,” as parents who were likely to have “had their kid on their lap reading a book,” or simply those who were invested in finding options that would best serve their individual child.

Several superintendents described this phenomenon as “getting a private school education with public dollars.”

Superintendents described parents left out of the market place as being unaware, uninformed, or unable to meet the parent requirements. One superintendent reported that charters could require school-day volunteering and attendance at meetings – reducing access to parents who could not afford to take time off from work, or for whom transportation or language was a barrier. Several participants noted that democratic principles of public education were in conflict with market-based programs.

Marketing, advertising and strategic communications were reported to be prevalent responses to charter school competition. Given the perceptions of superintendents about certain kinds of parents being drawn to charter schools, it is not surprising that superintendents have responded with outreach, public relations, and strategic communication – including advertising. It seems superintendents are responding by making sure that parents are aware of how their own public district may in fact be the best personal choice for a child.
Many superintendents expressed a concern that charter schools (and school choice) presented equity dilemmas – particularly when parents were perceived to be making choices based on desires for homogeneity or being with like students. One superintendent described parent choice behavior as “white flight” and another superintendent described an inability to combat “deep-seeded beliefs” of parents that caused them to prefer sending their child to school with fewer “brown” or “poor” students.

Parent choice behavior and reasons were one factor in superintendents’ perceptions of equity threats; however several also referenced the behavior of charter schools as limiting diversity – particularly for high needs or lower performing students. Superintendents reported that students were “returned” to the district when a charter school identified that a child’s needs were too great and that they “didn’t have a program for them.” Other superintendents reported “counseling out” behaviors that included convincing parents that it was in their best interest to voluntarily withdraw from the charter school thus defaulting to the local public option.

Despite this concern about equity and “resegregation of schools” as one superintendent named it, superintendents largely reported new program development aimed to retain high-performing students – namely Advanced Placement, Honors Academies, Gifted & Talented programs, etc. It could be argued that efforts to attract or retain high performing students could be designed to maintain diversity in a student body and to, as one superintendent called it, “retain the brain trust” as high performing students and highly engaged parents clearly have benefits to offer a school community. However, although superintendents consistently reported a concern that charter schools were underserving special education, ELL and in some cases lower income students – there was only one interviewee who indicated collaborating with a local charter school to build their capacity to better serve higher need students.

They say, “‘Listen... the best thing for you is to go to the public school because if you don’t you are going to be retained,’ or ‘You will have a very difficult time for the rest of this year; why don’t you just get a new life for yourself by going back to the district?’ And back they come. ... So ... they now have filtered their [student body] after they get them using tactics that are very similar to elite private schools.” - William
A large number of superintendents expressed opposition to the way the charter school law has been implemented in the Commonwealth. In its current iteration, it is perceived by superintendents that the way the funding is formulated is a considerable liability to the district public school. There is a perception that the students who score the highest on MCAS as well as other high achieving pupils are leaving the district schools to enroll in charter schools.

Superintendents believe that this choice by the savvy consumer is having a direct impact on their bottom line. This causes students who cost little, yet who have the potential to boost test scores, to seek alternatives outside the district, disproportionally leaving behind higher cost, lower performing students.

There are reported instances where charter schools are serving a high-needs population of students who had not been successful within the district public schools. Examples of this can be found in charters that might serve a higher percentage of students on the autism spectrum or schools that serve teen-age parents or students who have been incarcerated. As a result, there is less market pressure felt in the district that send these students to these charter schools with a unique mission and/or approach to learning. In these instances, where the charter serves a particular niche for students whose needs were not being met in the traditional setting, there seems to be greater programmatic collaboration between the charter and the district school.

As these instances of collaboration were not the norm, most superintendents indicated that they were not interested in collaborating with charter schools, as most felt that in terms of academic programming, student support, athletics or the arts, the charters were not providing anything particularly innovative in comparison to what was being offered in the district. This led some superintendents to take on a more active, political role in advocating for a specific policy to be changed.

“Compliance is the enemy of innovation.... I think if funding can be addressed then local school districts will not see charters as the enemy and we can start actually saving some money by collaborating and cooperating. Charter schools are the drunken brother-in-law of families in Massachusetts. ...Superintendents want nothing to do with them. They won’t collaborate with them. They tolerate them and hope they go away. Local public schools can learn something from them, but that information is stuck in that charter school because nobody’s talking to them because ...because they took our money away.”

-- Jonathan
Limited Realization of Legislative Intent

The perceptions of superintendents indicate that the initial hopes of the designers of the 1993 Education Reform Act are not being fulfilled. As the data suggest, the debate surrounding the funding formula has inhibited many superintendents and charter school leaders from working together to innovate, experiment and reform.

The competition that is brought forth by the marketplace seems to be having the opposite effect from what the legislators intended. Although there were examples of specific innovations that were developed in response to the presence of a charter in the district, like new STEM initiatives and innovation schools that focus on the arts, the fact that superintendents in our survey listed advanced marketing and targeted communications as the most selected innovation demonstrates one of many perceived unintended consequences of the implementation of the statute.

Massachusetts charter school legislation (MGL Ch. 79, Section 89, 1993; 2010) was intended to assist struggling schools and to infuse a sense of competition in the educational marketplace. It predicted that the dynamics of competition would reward districts that demonstrate strong student outcomes, while requiring lower performing districts to change or risk losing market share. All boats would rise in this grand experiment.

The evidence suggests, however, that superintendents perceive that consumers view the charter as an elite option thus perpetuating stratification in public schools. The implication of this perception contradicts the intent of the law in that parents, as consumers, seek opportunities at the charter, thus disproportionately leaving behind students who may be more expensive to educate and who may be less likely to be high performers. Actions often were targeted to those students that the superintendent did not wish to lose because of the impact on budgets and test scores.

Our research team heard from superintendents who blame the funding formula for disincentivizing collaboration and the sharing of best practices. There was no evidence that teachers and administrators were attempting to share best practices because the structure, as it stands now, forces both sides to attempt to out-perform the other.
Conclusions

Overall, our study emerged as relevant and timely as demonstrated by the level of interest from our participants. Charter schools are a hotly debated topic in Massachusetts and superintendents who volunteered to participate in our survey and in our interviews expressed great interest in sharing their opinions, experiences, and suggestions related to the topic. We learned that overall, charter schools are certainly impacting traditional public school districts in a variety of ways and that districts are responding in a variety of ways. Most prominent within our study is that superintendents reported feeling a greater amount of competitive pressure when charter schools are perceived to be attracting high performing students from their districts and/or are perceived to be underserving higher needs students. Within this competition for higher achieving students, superintendents reported concerns about equity and diversity but also largely reported responding to this competition with strategic communication, marketing and development of programs that, at least on the surface, appear to be targeting higher achieving students and their parents.

Policy Recommendations

Massachusetts DESE to play a role in bringing district and charter school leaders together. Our recommendations for district and charter leaders, as well as for public policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, suggest the need to bring both sides together. Although governmental interference may contradict the concept of the free market, there are likely some issues that the DESE could identify where it would be mutually beneficial for charter and district leaders to address together.

The state needs to create policy incentives and remove barriers for district/charter school collaboration. Current policy is perceived by district leaders to have established a “zero-sum game” in which competition is perceived as creating an educational environment of winners and losers. At the base of this perception is the funding formula that is perceived to penalize public school districts by decreasing funding for their district based on charter enrollment. This “winner-loser” mentality is counterproductive to collaboration. Massachusetts should consider enacting initiatives that stimulate collaboration instead of stifling it and thereby creating a “win-win” situation for all students.

The state should commission a study that identifies how the current funding formula affects both public school districts and charter schools. Both the survey and interviews indicate a resounding feeling of animosity toward the funding formula established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Study respondents overwhelmingly expressed concern that competition cannot exist within a context in which the funding is unfairly distributed. This unequal playing field has contributed to a “quasi-market”. Advocacy by district leaders about how the charter funding formula directly and adversely affects their school districts to lawmakers may eventually create a more even playing field for which competition can occur. Given that both districts and charter schools identify the funding formulas as being unfair or disincentivizing the enrollment of high needs students, the state should commission a study to measure the impact of the funding formula on equity in Massachusetts schools. Current policy exacerbates an existing equity problem in Massachusetts’ schools: higher cost students including
special education and English language learners typically cost districts more money to educate – and they are perceived as the students less likely to apply and enroll in charter schools. Massachusetts policy needs to address how to increase the enrollment of these groups in charter schools, and secondly mitigate the effect of the cost differentials among high cost and low cost students.

Recommendations for District Leaders and Charter Leaders

**Maintain a balance between competition & collaboration.** Given the current policy and funding environment that is perceived to promote competition and inhibit collaboration, it is our recommendation that district leaders make personal efforts to reach out to their local charter school(s) in the spirit of creating the best public educational opportunities for all students. Our research has indicated that, in several communities, healthy competitive and collaborative relationships exist and do benefit students by capitalizing on joint teacher professional development opportunities. Our study however, has revealed that this is not the current norm. District leaders and charter school leaders should consider developing partnerships to address the under-representation of special needs populations including ELL students and students with disabilities. Competition will be most productive if district leaders and charter leaders seek examples of effective charter/district relationships as part of their advocacy.

**District leaders must be political players.** Public school superintendents would be well served to engage in the political game – both in their local districts and in the statewide political advocacy arena. As the voice of their district, it is important that they engage in consistent dialogue with various constituent groups including students, parents, educators, town/city and state level policy-makers, and the local business community about the merits of the public school system. Education and advocacy beyond the typical communication media are important as the superintendent capitalizes upon his/her “bully-pulpit.” District superintendents should continue to engage in state level policy advocacy with an added emphasis on the equity issues that the current policy fosters. It is important that this advocacy not only occur in the state bureaucratic framework of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, but also perhaps more importantly in the legislative arena with regard to educational and advocacy efforts to state legislators. District leaders are highly respected members of the educational community and policy-makers often seek out their technical expertise regarding educational issues.

Superintendents should consider more vociferous advocacy to policy-makers and by making themselves available to them for advice and consultation about the direct effect of state policy on district schools.

**District and charter school leaders should have an astute understanding of the funding formula.** Given the complexity and nuance of the charter funding formula, it is important for superintendents, business managers, building leaders, charter leaders, and community members to better understand the actual funding impacts in districts on an ongoing basis. This is especially important as district leaders engage in policy-level change in the current funding formula. Our research has suggested that there is a wide range of the level of understanding of the complex formula – and its effects - among district level leaders.

**Learn from charters that serve a particular need.** A majority of the interviews with
superintendents revealed that they were unaware of the niche or area of specialization of the
charter school. Since legislation requires that charter schools identify their mission or area of
specialization before getting state approval, each charter school must have a specific
identifiable niche or goal. In some cases, the area of specialization can be a supportive outlet to the public
school district rather than a competitor. For example, one district superintendent reported that a
local charter high school that addresses the needs of teens with one or more children of their own
was actually a source of support for the district rather than a source of competition. He reported
that he maintains a professional relationship with the leadership of that school and oftentimes
refers students to that charter school because of the added support it offers that specific
population of students. Awareness of a niche or area of specialization could actually provide a
means of support - rather than source of competition – to the public school district.

While there are currently disincentives for districts and charter schools to collaborate and
share best practices, district leaders may want to learn from charter schools in other regions who
are identified as serving a particular need. Our study has revealed that the most collaborative
public school district/charter school relationships exist in areas where the charter school has
identified a targeted niche.

**District and charter school leaders should identify commonalities.** District leaders should
consider initiatives or programs that would benefit the district and charter to undertake in
common such as sharing teacher professional development opportunities and the sharing of
curriculum initiatives.

**Promote the notion of “our students.”** District leaders should embark on an advocacy
campaign throughout the community that the students from that locality are “our students”
regardless of where they opt to attend school. This may weaken the “us” versus “them”
mentality and encourage a “win-win” educational philosophy among community groups – one
that is central to our democratic principles in public education.

**Ensure all programs promote equity and access for all learners.** District level superintendent
and charter school leaders should work to ensure that high quality specialized programs offered
in district schools and charters promote equity and access for all learners. The mission and goals
of school districts and charter schools must be carried out with fidelity – not simply in a
superficial manner to seemingly address a requirement.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explored the perceptions of Massachusetts superintendents about the impact of charter school competition on districts, the characteristics that increase or decrease competitive pressure facing districts as a result of competition from charter schools, and the types of actions, initiatives and innovations superintendents report enacting at least in part due to the competition they face from charter schools. The study draws upon the economic theories applied to public education–known as the educational marketplace–as our theoretical framework through which to study the impact of competitive environment on the actions of superintendents in traditional public schools. Our Executive Summary provides an overarching view of our study including our literature review, methods, findings and conclusions.

In Chapter 1 we framed the nature of the problem and explained why we undertook the study of it and framed the research questions. Chapter 2 provides an overarching literature review which provides historical and emerging context for the educational marketplace, including the evolution of competition in other markets and its emerging application to public education, the social-political nature of school choice and its role in the ongoing education reform agenda, research from the field about the competitive effects of charter school competition on districts, research from the field about the responses districts take in reaction to charter school competition, and finally the historical, evolving, and current context for charter schools in Massachusetts. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in our sequential mixed-method study in depth and will also describe our quantitative and qualitative sample.

Because this was a collaborative research study including group research conducted by a research team of three as well as individual studies contributed by individual members of our research team, Chapters 4 (Cummins, 2014; Ricciardelli, 2014; Steedman, 2014) include results
and findings for three separate (yet inter-related) lines of inquiry. In our first Chapter 4 (Ricciardelli, 2014), our research focused on superintendents’ perception of the education marketplace, ranging from enrollment trends to funding formulas and national and state policies. In our second Chapter 4 (Cummins, 2014), our research focused on the perceptions of superintendents about the types of students most and least likely to enroll (or stay enrolled) in charter schools and the types of parents most likely to seek choice options and how those characteristics influenced the competitive pressure faced by traditional districts. In our third Chapter 4 (Steedman, 2014), our research focused on the ways superintendents reported responding to the competitive pressure from charter schools-noting both innovative and not innovative reactions, and noting patterns in the types of parents/students particular innovations and actions appear to be designed to retain or attract.

Chapter 5 provides the overarching conclusion, bringing together the individual findings within our individual lines of inquiry (Cummins, 2014; Ricciardelli, 2014; Steedman, 2014) to synthesize overarching results, findings and conclusions including implications for policy, district leadership, and future study. In this final chapter we demonstrate various ways in which perceptions of market pressure (Ricciardelli, 2014), nuances to the types of pressure experienced (Cummins, 2014) and actions taken by superintendents (Steedman, 2014) intersect revealing trends and patterns that lead us to overarching conclusions.

**Problem Statement**

The first American charter public school was launched in Minnesota in 1991 as a result of reform efforts to create choice in public education. Charter schools were designed to establish laboratories of innovation and reform that would spur competitive innovation in district schools (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Bulkley & Wohlstetter (2004), Finnigan, 2007; Toma & Zimmer,
Applying market-style notions of consumer choice and competition, charter schools were designed to provide an alternative to district schools by conducting the business of education differently, by promoting innovative administrative and instructional practices (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Lubienski, 2003; Welch, 2010), by having autonomy that was free from the barriers of some bureaucratic rules and regulations (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; RPP, 2001), and by being accountable to consumers who would be able to choose a school based on results (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 1999; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Kolderie, 1990; Winters, 2012; Wohlstetter et al., 1995). More than twenty years later, research has produced mixed findings about the impact of charter schools on producing substantial and sustainable innovative reforms to the public education system (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Grady, 2012).

Charter school proponents argue that charter schools can produce better and/or more efficient results; test, evaluate and motivate competitive innovation; address equity and access issues for high need student populations; and tend to a variety of reform needs that have been long unaddressed within the public education system which has become overwrought with bureaucratic and institutional barriers to reform (Ellison, 2009; Kolderie, 1994; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Toma & Zimmer, 2012; Winters, 2012). Proponents of charter schools argue that they produce a competitive effect that elevates the performance of traditional public schools (Carpenter II, 2011; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012; Zimmer, 2009) by undermining the otherwise “monopolistic political control of public education” (Lubienski, 2003; p. 396).

Charter school opponents argue that charter schools divert necessary local funds, drain public districts of resources and talents, exacerbate issues of equity and access, do not uniformly produce better results, and distract policy makers and decision makers from addressing true
reform efforts (Ellison, 2009; Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Imberman, 2011). Charter school opponents also argue that when charter schools and district schools are forced to compete for the same resources, the presence of charter schools serves as a distraction from real school reform by “diverting resources and attention” away from other reform efforts (Merrifield, 2006; p. 18) and negatively impacting the conditions of traditional public districts (Arsen & Ni, 2012) without increasing effectiveness or efficiency (Carpenter II & Medina, 2011) of district schools. Opponents also point to the impact on resources that a charter can have on the local public school, especially in areas that face considerable financial constraints. “As highly motivated and engaged families pull their children from traditional public schools, urban districts have fewer resources – both financial and human – to address their many problems” (Dingerson, Peterson, Miner, & Walters, 2008; p. XII).

In addition, some critics of the marketization of the public education sector argue that market-based theories are not applicable to public education for a variety of reasons. Some critics note that the educational marketplace is more of a “quasi market” due to the disconnect between market choosers (parents) and market payers (tax payers) (Bartlett, 1993; Lubienski, 2003; Merrifield, 2006). Other critics argue that the application of market theory to public education is problematic because of the complexities of the system inherent in the varying social/political contexts resulting from local control (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011), or because marketization of public education changes the purpose of publicly funded education from a “public good” to a “private good” (Lubienski, 2003).

Now that charter schools have been in existence for more than two decades, a complex question remains: Does competition from charter schools spur innovation in traditional public districts?
Our study applied the economic theory of market place competition as a framework to explore the impact that competition (in the form of charter choice) has had on the decision-making of superintendents in traditional public schools in Massachusetts.

We explored the actions taken by superintendents in response to the competitive effect of charter schools. We focused on how Massachusetts superintendents perceive and react to the existence of charter schools by examining their perceptions about whether or not charter schools have been a stimulus to their decision-making about innovation, reform, or initiatives. Research on the competitive effects of charter schools on traditional public school districts is emerging and still limited (Arsen & Ni, 2011; Carpenter II & Medina, 2011; Maranto, 2006; Toma & Zimmer, 2012). There is little in the literature that explores the impact of charter schools on traditional school district superintendents’ decision-making and actions to promote reform in their districts. Our research is intended to contribute to this literature.

**Research Question**

How does a superintendent’s perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school in her/his district impact the development of district innovation?

**Sub-Questions**


2. What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in Massachusetts? (Cummins, 2014).

3. What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that have been influenced by competition from charter schools? (Steedman, 2014).
Audience

The focus audience for this research study is comprised of Massachusetts’ superintendents of district schools. We relied on professional connections with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) to assist in gathering data and have disseminated our findings to the leadership of MASS. Our study included an analysis of their collective views. The mission and vision statement of MASS includes as a core value a commitment to “invest in the ongoing learning, support and development of local education leaders” (MASS, 2013). To this end, we believe that this study will provide superintendents in Massachusetts with a wealth of substantive information on collective perceptions about charter schools, the impact of charter school competition on traditional public districts, and the relationship between charter school competition and innovations enacted in public districts.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework we devised to frame our study is provided below (Figure 1-1). Our conceptual framework seeks to explain how superintendents perceptions of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school impacts the development of innovation in district schools.
Figure 1-1

Conceptual Framework

Based on our review of the literature, our research team designed a study that addressed our overarching research question by dividing our study into three primary components, which are tied directly to our three sub-questions.

The first component (Ricciardelli, 2014) centered on the perceptions of individual superintendents about charter schools and addressed sub-question 1: *How do superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?*
Perceptions could be based on how the superintendent views the charter school movement as a whole as well as how s/he views the impact of the presence of a charter school option for students from her/his district. Superintendents may view charter schools differently depending upon their own experiences, the opinions of a collective professional group, or the impact charter school funding methodologies on their own district resources (Imberman, 2011; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001).

The second component (Cummins, 2014) focused on the nature and degree of competitive pressure experienced by superintendents of district schools and addressed sub-question 2: What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in Massachusetts? Competitive pressure may vary depending upon context, market share of students enrolling in charter schools, reasons parents choose to seek enrollment in charter schools, the types of students exiting the district schools to enroll in a charter schools, and a range of other contextual factors (Linick & Lubienski, 2013; Winters, 2012; RPP, 2001).

The third component (Steedman, 2014) sought to identify and explore the types of innovations reported by superintendents as they were enacted by district schools in response to charter school competition; this component addressed sub-question 3: What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools? Actions undertaken may vary from creating district-based choices that mirror or replicate those present in charter schools, allocating resources differently to address particular instructional or curricular approaches, investing time or resources in marketing efforts to promote district options, or joining advocacy or legislative efforts to resist charter school proliferation (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Hoxby, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Winters, 2012).
Exploring the perceptions of superintendents through surveys (Appendix A) and individual interviews (Appendix B) has supported our effort to learn whether the infusion of educational marketplace competition is perceived by superintendents to have had the impact intended by Massachusetts’ legislators when they enacted the charter school statute in 1993 and when they amended the charter school statute in 2010 (Massachusetts General Law [MGL], 2010).

Our research team hypothesized that the perceptions of the superintendents impact how they experience the pressure of charter school competition, which then in turn impacts their responses to that pressure. Our conceptual framework (Figure 1-1) is designed to demonstrate that one component can influence the others without requiring a sequential relationship. For example, we predicted that how superintendents have experienced the pressure of charter school competition will also impact how they perceive charter school competition in general and that individual and collective experiences may also impact their decision-making to undertake certain initiatives. We also predicted that initiatives they undertake in districts, whether influenced wholly, in part, or not at all by competition will impact how they experience competition and perceive the marketplace as whole. Our conceptual framework demonstrates our prediction that the educational marketplace is impacting superintendents in ways that cause them to respond or not respond, which in turn impacts their perceptions and future actions. In designing our conceptual framework, our research team relied on the advice of Joseph Maxwell (1998):

Your conceptual framework is a formulation of what you think is going on with the phenomena you are studying - a tentative theory of what is happening and why...It is a simplification of the world, by a simplification aimed at clarifying and explaining some
aspect of how it works. It is not simply a “framework,” although it can provide that, but a story about what you think is happening and why (p. 222-3).

Our conceptual framework represents an attempt to tell the story of the impact of charter school competition on superintendents in Massachusetts.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

There has been considerable debate over the impact of charter schools on district schools over the past 30 years. This review of the literature will provide a brief history of the charter school movement, will explore the application of market theory to public education, will discuss the implications of competition as evidenced through political and governmental actions, and will summarize the existing research on the competitive effect and influence of charter schools on innovation. Finally, the literature review will conclude with a review of the history and current status of charter schools in Massachusetts to frame the current context for our study.

History of the Charter School Movement

The genesis of the charter school movement can be traced back to 1974 when Ray Budde, a University of Massachusetts a professor, presented *Education by Charter: Key to a New Model of School District* to the General Systems Research Society. His call for individual public school districts to establish “charter schools” within their districts did not gain a lot of traction at the time. It was not until 1988 when Budde’s ideas resurfaced in *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts. Key to Long-Term Continuing Improvement in American Education*, in which he reiterated the need for public schools to offer options in schooling for children. Albert Shanker, American Federation of Teachers President (AFT), publicly expressed support of Budde’s ideas at a speech at the National Press Club, and expanded upon them by
proposing that teachers start their own schools (Bulkely & Fisler, 2003; Kolderie 1987; Grady 2012). Ted Kolderie’s 1990 publication, The States Will Have to Withdraw the Exclusive fueled the drive to redefine the exclusive role of the traditional public school district in educating our nation’s students. According to Kolderie, “This idea makes it possible to be for public education and for the peoples’ power to choose at the same time” (p. 59).

Kolderie was instrumental in helping to write the nation’s first charter school legislation in Minnesota in 1991. In 1992 California enacted charter legislation, and six more states followed in 1993. Federal interest in the charter school movement began in 1993 when President Clinton proposed the Public Charter Schools program, and in Congress a bipartisan group of senators and representatives proposed the Public School Redefinition Act; a year later the proposed legislation passed as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). By 2000, 19 states had charter legislation, and in 2014 all but 11 states have laws supporting the creation of charter schools.

Theory of Market Based Competition

In 1955 Milton Friedman put forth an idea that was considered radical at the time: that there should be competition and choice within the field of public education, and that all parents should have access to their child’s education funding so that they may choose whatever learning environment is best for their child. Friedman’s Role of Government in Education unleashed a firestorm of debate over redefining the role of government in education by asserting that it “... serves its proper function of improving the operation of the invisible hand without substituting the dead hand of bureaucracy” (Friedman, 1955; p.14). A year later in 1956, Charles Tiebout, an accomplished economist and geographer, wrote A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures in which he touted the virtue of “voting with one’s feet” with regard to the public sphere’s inability to
meet the demands of all citizens (p. 417). The dissatisfaction with a product – in this case the schooling of their children – would cause parents to seek other educational opportunities for their children. According to Tiebout, the status quo may need to be circumvented by a physical/geographic change in schooling, and by doing so, this option to make a different selection will provide a competitive effect.

Political scientists John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) revived the competition in education conversation in their book, *Politics, Markets, and American Schools*. Applying this theory to the educational system, when funds are provided to families to cover expenses at their choice of a government-approved, privately operated school, the state could generate healthy competition between schools that would increase and improve the schools available to families. Government funding of privately run schools would stimulate a competitive effect among public schools. Privately operated schools “were accountable to the demands of consumers in the educational marketplace, while public schools were entwined in the conflicting interests of constituency groups, politicians, and other democratic forces” (Loeb, Valant, & Kasman, 2011). Traditional public school districts are subject to the political interests of labor unions and other well-organized interest groups, and as a result are more responsive to these organized groups rather than to the constituents including citizens, parents, and teachers that they supposed to serve (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Chubb and Moe were in essence writing to support the Tiebout model that advocated choosing an alternative to the provided resource; In other words, if public schools are inadequate, then the way to spur competition would be to establish a means by which the open market can participate in private school education. This argument fueled the charter and voucher program movements.
The rationale for reform in public education has its roots in this belief that competition among schools will cause greater responsiveness to consumers’ interests through a thorough range of options, and an increase in efficiency and efficacy in attaining higher academic achievement (Hoxby, 2003; Lubienski, 2006; Miron & Nelson, 2002).

Today, many educational reformers believe that a market-based competitive environment between schools will spur innovative educational practices in curriculum and pedagogy, thereby increasing the level of student achievement (Lubienski, 2003). The critique of a “one size fits all” bureaucratically administered public education system is rooted in market-theory; it presumes that traditional public schools are insulated from market discipline and are not accountable to their consumers. Exposing schools to the dynamics of the open market where schools are subject to the preferences of consumers will theoretically result in a more rapid rate of curricular and pedagogical innovation (Friedman, 1955; Chubb and Moe, 1990).

**Critics of the Market Approach**

In England, researchers have observed that a focus on competition has resulted in an education system that shifts the focus from students' needs to student performance, and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school (Bowe, Gewirtz, & Ball, 1994). Research in England and Wales suggests that school choice impacts social class by adding to the disadvantage of working class families (Bowe et al., 1994, Grace, 2005). These researchers conclude that the market rewards children for the skill and cultural capital of their parents, which further adds to the social stratification of society. Parents’ capacity to engage is heavily influenced by class and race, and thus has implications for schooling equity (Bowe et al., 1994). Parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling is a social activity, and is a function of their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977). This *habitus* – or accumulation of life experiences including
familial, economic, political experiences serves as capital. For those with stout habitus – have an advantage in the educational choice marketplace.

Critics of marketizing public education also assert that charter schools create an elitist political environment that aims to tip the balance of power in the favor of the privileged class (Apple, 2001; Harvey, 2005). These opponents of privatization often highlight the failures of marketization of other industries – particularly health care (Gollust, 2006; Kohn, 2005; Rhim, 2007). Many critics claim that market-based competition may dilute democratic values and will undermine public education by diverting resources from the traditional district schools (Maranto, Hess, & Milliman, 2001). Opponents of marketization also question the validity of a market approach to the complex social-political structure of schools, while many others fear it will change the purpose of education from a “public good” aimed at developing an informed and just citizenry to a “private good” based upon economic principles of global competition, choice, efficiency, and local job growth (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011).

In an editorial demonstrating the dangers of privatizing health care and education, Gollust (2006) notes that marketization is dangerously misapplied to education and health care because the two industries “pose a particular theoretical challenge…because both can be characterized as ‘public goods’ with two essential properties: ‘nondiminishability’ and ‘nonexcludability’” (p. 1734). Both industries provide services that do not diminish when consumers access them and both industries include a mandate to provide service to the public – regardless of a consumer’s ability to pay or perform. Still other scholars note that although market force reforms can inspire some useful strategies or competitive motivation to innovate, if too broadly or expediently applied, they “do not consider the politics of implementation” (Rhim, 2007; p. 264) unique to public education. Rhim argues that market theories are often applied hastily to public education...
resulting in compromises which can “undermine the potential of the market by increasing bureaucracy” (p. 245) and that are unpredictable given the highly variable contexts (state and local conditions) which are “burdened by institutional and organizational limitations” (Rhim, 2007; p. 264).

According to Scott & DiMartino (2009) prevailing definitions of educational privatization [or marketization] “underemphasize [the] political and social aspects [of public education] and instead focus on the administrative, economic or technical characteristics” (Scott & DiMartino, 2009; p. 433). Scott & DiMartino (2009) argue that privatization is not simply the process of shifting economic control (and revenue) from public to private actors but a more complex set of processes and players; they define privatization as “a range of reforms that redistribute resources and control over most aspects of schooling away from traditional public governance structures to a disparate assemblage of parents, teachers, school leaders, community members, private sector actors, and private organizations” (p.433).

The law of supply and demand as it applies to the educational marketplace has its detractors because of the theory’s application limits, primarily because of the absence of price or cost in this specific economic equation. John Merrifield (2005) questions the notion of a competitive market in public education because of the zero price movement inherent in a public system. Because price movement influenced by the activities of consumers is such an integral factor in competitive market dynamics some refer to the educational market-place as a “quasi-market” (Bartlett, 1993; Lubienski, 2003; Merrifield, 2006). The identity of the consumer in K-12 education is the student, and unlike consumers in traditional markets the consumer is not the decision-maker. Rather, the student indirectly affects the decision-maker, who is the parent
adding to the argument that charter schools are part of a “quasi-market” (Bartlett, 1993; Lubienski, 2003; Merrifield, 2006).

**Competition in Public Education: The Role of Choice**

Maranto & Raemdonck (2011) justify the need for marketization in education to combat the Educational Industrial Complex (EIC) – critically referred to as “The Blob” by some education reformers (Allen, 2009). Key actors in the EIC include teachers unions, education preparation programs within higher education institutions, researchers that influence the fifty state education agencies, accreditation bodies, textbook publishers, major foundations, journalists, and politicians. According to Maranto & Raemdonck, actors in the EIC together advocate that the reforms needed to improve public education include increasing school funding, decreasing class sizes, lengthening the school year, and providing more training for teachers. These same EIC actors, the authors contend, generally oppose reforms that increase transparency, measure academic results, pay teachers based on merit, and offer parental choice – even though “there is a strong empirical case that the latter array of reforms have proven more successful at promoting student achievement than have the former” (Maranto & Raemdonck, 2011; p. 304). The EIC, the authors argue, is fueled by the public: particularly an upper-class elite portion of the public that is willing to acquiesce to the status quo because of its familiarity.

Proponents of marketization of public education support their theories by drawing parallels to successful non-education related marketization including: telecommunications, air travel, postal services, automobile manufacturing, prisons, and health care (Caves et al, 1987; Friedman, 1997; Maranto, Hess & Milliman, 2001). A study assessing the impact of airline deregulation in the mid-1970s found that privatizing the industry resulted in reducing costs by $4 billion while increasing technical efficiency (Caves et al, 1987). Milton Friedman (1997), an
architect of the school choice movement, summarizes the rationale for applying market
principles to public education:

We know from the experience of every other industry how imaginative competitive free
enterprise can be, what new products and services can be introduced, how driven it is to
satisfy the customers. That is what we need in education. We know how the telephone
industry has been revolutionized by opening it to competition, how fax has begun to
undermine the postal monopoly in first-class mail, how UPS, Federal Express and many
other private enterprises have transformed package and message delivery and, on the
strictly private level, how competition from Japan has transformed the domestic
automobile industry” (Friedman, 1997, p. 343).

Initially Friedman’s call for change (1955) centered on the use of vouchers, but within
nearly 40 years it opened the door to the charter school initiative. Vouchers are government
subsidies that allow parents to apply public funds to a private education. Interestingly, it
appears that the notion of paying for private education – including religious schools with
vouchers - was seen as radical and a possible threat to the Establishment Clause of the First
Amendment (Saiger, 2013). Perhaps the most important legal development in the choice
movement was the decision the Supreme Court rendered in Zelman v. Simmons-Harris (2002).
The Court held that vouchers could be used for private, religious based schools. In reality this
never really materialized, probably because the charter school alternative gained strength and
was more politically and socially palatable to those concerned about the perception of a
commingling of religious schools and public funding. The charter school movement was
perceived as less threatening to the public/private dichotomy, and therefore was able to gain the
support of multiple coalitions including those typically considered liberal, conservative,
Democrat, Republican, etc. (Saiger, 2013.) Both charter schools and vouchers are philosophically rooted in neo-liberal ideology that advocates the dynamics of competition as a force that will produce a better product.

**The Changing Political Culture: From Progressivism to Neo-liberalism**

During much of the twentieth century, progressivism was the dominant educational philosophy, and it was used to make schools more effective instruments of a democratic society. Hallmarks of this approach are the respect for diversity and the assertion that an individual should be recognized for his or her own abilities, interests, ideas, needs, and cultural identity in a collaborative effort to achieve a common good. The term “progressive” arose from a period during the late 1800s – early 1900s when many Americans looked critically at the political and social effects of corporate power and private wealth. With the decline of local community life and growth of big business, John Dewey (1915) observed that citizens were losing valuable opportunities to learn about democratic participation, and he concluded that education would need to make up for this loss. In recent years, neo-liberal approaches have challenged progressivism and its perceived hegemony in the field of public education. With a preference for markets and competitive pressure over bureaucracy and complacency, the neo-liberal approach has gained momentum and has manifested itself in the school choice movement, as seen in the growth of charter schools. In his book, *Brief History of Neo-liberalism*, David Harvey (2005) identifies the essence of the neo-liberal movement: “Neo-liberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2).
The market-driven nature of neo-liberalism changes the public education charge from one of popular sovereignty to one of consumer sovereignty (Minow, 2010). In the former, local school boards and citizens serve as a bloc to control schools whereas in the latter, parents exercise the right to shop around for the most appropriate educational product for their children. In its fundamental form, neo-liberalism and classical economic liberalism that dominated society through the mid-1800s are closely related. Both share the notion that competition drives quality, and ultimately drives out non-contenders from the market. However, there are differences; classical liberalism generally looks at state power as a negative force, whereas neo-liberalism relies on the state as an organizing force that creates an environment more conducive to charter schools through legislation. In classical liberalism the individual is considered to be a rational actor subject to his/her own innate human strengths, weaknesses, and initiative. Neo-liberalism posits that the state must provide the structure and incentives for which individuals can best compete. The role of the “invisible hand” in laissez faire economics is prominent in classical liberalism but is considered to be inadequate in neo-liberal philosophy (Olssen, 1996).

In the current neo-liberal educational environment where the state is requiring more standardization in learning standards, curriculum, and assessment, a classical liberal agenda is simultaneously encouraging choice and competition within the market. The trajectory of American education appears contradictory. Simultaneously, the government is both centralizing and decentralizing the locus of control. The federal government’s allocation of funding through the Race to the Top (RTTT) program provided the financial help needed by states, and therefore served as a catalyst for change. In accepting RTTT funding, states essentially were required to adopt the Common Core, adjust teacher evaluation criteria to include student achievement, and to adopt either the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or
Smarter Balanced as a means to uniformly assess progress on the Common Core. These national assessment systems are a manifestation of the interests of neo-conservatives. At the same time RTTT legislation encouraged states to lessen restrictions on school choice options by encouraging states to lift caps on charter schools – thus decentralizing control of schools from local school districts with the aim of stimulating competition among schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The selection of Arne Duncan as President Obama’s choice for Secretary of Education over progressive educator Linda Darling-Hammond made clear that the President intended to advance a neo-liberal policy of free-market school choice. As the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Duncan demonstrated a commitment to working with business partnerships to open new autonomous schools and to shut down underperforming schools (Mora & Christianakis, 2011). While the Common Core State Standards are not administered by the federal government, these common standards were used as a tool by the national government to get state governments to adopt the Common Core into state curriculum frameworks. In Massachusetts, for example, the commonwealth’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) voted to incorporate the Common Core into its curriculum frameworks for English language arts and mathematics while reserving a 15% discretionary allowance for state options in the Frameworks. At a July 2010 meeting, all board members present voted to accept the Common Core into the Massachusetts Frameworks. In absentia was board member Sandra Stotsky, who has gone on record as a vocal critic of the common standards (MA BESE, 2010). With regard to the creation of national standards, Kristen L. Buras (2008) questions the authority of those who created the Common Core. Ideologically considered neo-conservatives, she questions those who supposedly have the authority to determine what knowledge is of most worth. Buras identifies E.D. Hirsch’s
landmark book *Cultural Literacy* (1986) and think tanks such as the Fordham Foundation as the driving forces of the neo-conservative standards-based movement. The evolution of the debate over the past fifty-nine years of the role of marketplace competition in public education can be defined in terms of John Kingdon’s multiple stream framework (1995).

Kingdon’s *problem definition* in the case of charter schools is politically dichotomous: on the political right the problem has been defined as one of inefficiency and as a result, schools need to be run like a business and subject to intense competition. On the political left, the problem has been defined as one of social injustice and segregation in education. Initially embraced by market-oriented political conservatives, the charter school movement now encompasses a more diverse political coalition. Some typically considered liberal or “left-leaning” now view the charter school movement as a form of redistributive social justice. The establishment of charter schools makes it possible for students who do not have the wherewithal to live in a good school district or to pay for a private school, to have a choice of option for their education (Vitteriti, 2010). The *policy response* has been the incremental state approval of charter legislation, which, comparatively speaking, is remarkably similar across the states in legislative intent and language. The *political process* has been surprisingly smooth with the exception of the limited discord among teachers’ unions (McGuinn, 2012). Charter advocates form an odd coalition comprised of conservative small government advocates and liberal civil rights leaders – both seeking to increase parental choice in education.

**Government Action**

The rationale for the establishment of charters schools in Massachusetts is defined in the General laws, Chapter 71, Section 89 (1993) “The purposes of establishing charter schools are: (i) to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education.” These
innovations were described as needing to have an impact on the district schools in which they were situated. This language is consistent with the charter school and school choice authorizing statutes across the United States.

A number of district schools have responded to the presence of charter schools in a myriad of ways. Some have, indeed, developed programs that would be considered innovative (Ellison, 2009), altering either the programmatic offerings to students, altering the systems within the school or allocating resources to promote the achievements of the district school (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Hoxby, Murarka, & Kang, 2009; Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998).

Choice policy varies considerably from state to state. Approximately 5% of all public schools in the nation are public charter schools. Arizona, California, Florida, Ohio, and Texas have the most charter schools. Twenty-one of the forty-two states that have approved charter legislation have done so with caps; some limit the number of schools allowed and others limit the number of students per school. In schools with high demand, the selections are usually made through a random lottery process. In Hawaii the total number of charter schools allowed is 48; in New Mexico no more than 15 charter schools can be approved per year; and in Illinois charter schools are limited to 120 with 75 of those schools designated for the city of Chicago. The federal government has tried to stimulate parental choice by offering incentives to states to increase the supply of charter schools. In November 2009, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that in order for states to compete for $4.35 billion in “Race to the Top” funds, restrictions on the growth of charter schools, including caps on the number of charter schools or the number of students who can enroll in charter schools, would need to be curtailed (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b). Policy changes are also emanating from state level legislation. Michigan state senator Buzz Thomas has proposed a “smart cap” approach in which
schools with a demonstrated record of performance would be exempt from limitations to expand (Dillon, 2010).

The federal government has added incentives for states to move in this direction. The 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT) funding application applied pressure to states to create legislation supportive of charter school growth. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, is quoted as saying, “States that do not have public charter laws or put artificial caps on the growth of charter schools will jeopardize their application under the Race to the Top Fund” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Central to state legislation across the country is the acknowledgement that supply and demand forces in a competitive market are at the core of the educational reform movement. Model legislative language promoted by the Center for Educational Reform includes suggestions that legislation include intent language that supports parents’ flexibility to choose among diverse educational opportunities and that the demand for quality public school choices in states surpasses the available supply. Several states, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wyoming include specific language around “providing parents and pupils with expanded choice in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system” in their charter school legislative intent. In Massachusetts, charter schools were established to “stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education” and to provide “models for replication in other public schools” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 1993).

Charter schools in the Commonwealth have followed a national trend of increasing popularity of this alternative over the past five years, which has led some scholars to explore the reasons for the long waitlists. Have charters become, as initially intended by the legislation,
laboratories of innovation that specifically target teaching and learning? In Minnesota the purpose of charter schools includes the ability to “encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; and to create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes” (Lee, 2009). Lee (2009) addressed this in looking at how charters could be seen as a laboratory as a result of competition. “This perspective posits that charter schools, when liberated from governmental regulations, will experiment with new educational practices. Should these new practices prove useful or innovative, they can then be adopted by regular public schools” (p. 42). Under New York State law, charter schools are expected to encourage the use of different and innovative techniques. Lubienski (2003) states, “choice, competition, and innovation are cast as the necessary vehicles for advancing academic outcomes” (p. 397). Market driven reform, however, was not only trumpeted at the state level. Some at the federal level see the opportunity to launch innovations as a response to the market as the most appealing features of the charter school movement.

The Competitive Effect of Charter Schools

Charter schools represent one form of marketization of the public education sector and were predicted by theorists to create competitive pressure on the public education system that would inevitably lead to improvements and efficiencies. Now that charter schools have been in the educational marketplace for more than two decades, research is beginning to uncover patterns and themes about the competitive effect, responses to competition, and impact on the decision-making activities of traditional public schools. Competitive effects vary depending upon complex state, local and district characteristics as well as the nature of the competition. Influences on the competitive effect include the volume of students leaving public districts for charters, the conditions in the traditional public district, the culture of the traditional
district, the reasons parents choose to enroll their students in charter schools, and the achievement results at both charter schools and traditional public schools.

Research on competitive effects and districts’ response to competitive effects has had mixed conclusions. Zimmer & Buddin (2009) explain that the “inconsistency of these results may stem from researchers using inconsistent measures of competition, or it could stem from examining the competitive effects in different states and districts with different competitive environments” (p. 832). The authors describe the multi-layered contexts that complicate the study of competitive effects, noting that the delivery system of education—teachers—are managed by principals, who receive resources allocated by central office leadership, who are governed by a school board. “While actors in any single layer may feel competitive pressure, this might not ultimately affect the performance of students if the other layers are not equally motivated to improve” (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009, p. 832).

Findings about competitive effects also vary by the intensity of the charter schools’ market share of students from a district (Maranto, Hess & Milliman, 2001; Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). While some researchers have attempted to quantify competitive effect as 6% or more of market share (Carpenter II & Medina, 2011; Hoxby, 2003), Zimmer & Buddin (2009) have found it varies by context and remains unclear “whether competitive pressure is felt when a single charter school appears on the landscape or when charter schools encompass a certain percentage of the market” (p. 832). Inconsistencies in the research are also related to variations in how researchers define and/or measure ‘competition’ – with some using distance between district schools and charter schools as a proxy (Bettinger, 2005), some using the number of charter schools in a geographic area as a proxy (Teske et al,
2000), and still others using enrollment of students from district schools in a charter school as a proxy for market penetration and competition (Hoxby, 2003; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009).

Additional complexities in studying the competitive effect include the conditions within the local district, the reasons parents choose a charter school, and the types of students who leave district schools for charter schools (Maranto, Hess & Milliman, 2001; Maranto, Milliman & Hess, 2010; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). In areas experiencing population growth such as California, the presence of charter schools may not induce competition, but rather serve as a welcome “relief valve” (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009; p. 836). Several studies have found that, despite the hope that parents would choose charter schools if they demonstrated better academic achievement results, many parents choose charter schools for other reasons – including specialization, size, teacher to student ratios, or diversity (Maranto, Milliman & Hess, 2010; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). When reasons for choosing charter schools are not related specifically to academic achievement, the competitive pressure on districts to reform their delivery of instruction is lessened, although they may experience competitive pressure to respond in other ways.

The type of students attracted to attend charter schools from a district may have a strong influence on the competitive effect in districts. As Maranto, Hess and Milliman (2001) found, “Some student losses are more influential than others” (p. 1110). When districts lose high performing students the pressure they face to improve schools is greater, while the loss of low performing students or students requiring more interventions and supports reduces the competitive pressure. In a case study of marketization in Philadelphia, Cucchiara, Gold & Simon (2011) noted a concern about equity of access when it was revealed that the district specifically created attractive choice options for specific kinds of students (offspring of residents
of the high rent downtown area) who were prone to exit the district to charter schools, private
schools or by relocating to suburbs when their children became school age. At the same time,
the authors note that it became apparent that this same group of parents/community members
received more privileged responses from the district policy makers, while community organizers
who represented underserved and “deprioritized parts of the city” (p. 2487) had less influence
(Cucchiara, Gold, & Simon, 2011).

These findings raise questions about the role of equity and access as well as the purpose
of public education. In a case study of one choice school in Louisiana, Beal & Hendry (2012)
found that choice “works in complex, contradictory ways to both empower and disempower
parents as participatory citizens in democratic change and that market-driven school choice
situates parents as consumers and thus redefines education as a private versus public good” (p.
521).

In a study exploring the identity of choosers and the reasons for choosing charter schools,
Stein (2009) noted the competitive pressure that school leaders can face when charter school
competition emerges. Stein described how a district superintendent publicly advocated for a
“moratorium on the opening of new charter schools” because charters were “luring” students
away from the district. If it continued he would be required to close buildings and/or eliminate
programs or services (Stein, 2009; p. 1).

This superintendent’s public and political response to charter school competition in his
district exemplifies one of the many responses district superintendents may enact as a response to
were coupled with declining enrollments, district leaders were much more likely to perceive the
charter school as a challenge and respond with market-oriented strategies” (p. 101). In this case
cited by Stein, the superintendent chose to combat the competition by lobbying for legislation to restrict the opening of more charter schools, placed the blame on charter schools for “luring” students as opposed to committing to examine weaknesses in the district that may be causing parents to look for alternatives, and publicly predicted the need to make cuts to important programs or services as a result of the charter school competition.

The perceptions may not be all negative. Some superintendents may view the charters as a way to elevate pressure on the district schools. “If public schools are overcrowded, they may welcome the charter schools, since they would serve as a release valve” (Imberman, 2011, p. 850). The next section reviews research on the impact of charter schools on district schools’ motivations to innovate through a review of various responses of superintendents of district schools enact in the face of charter school competition. As Zimmer and Buddin (2009) note, it is difficult to ascertain the full effect of charter school competition on superintendent decision-making:

Districts respond to competition to the degree they have an incentive to do so, in the ways they are able, and with the tools they possess. These school systems are not market actors in the sense that private firms traditionally are – they are not seeking to maximize their profitability. Rather, these systems show evidence of trying to reassure their communities, of offering the services the families appear to want, and of seeking to maintain their political legitimacy.... [The] simple assumptions of market response - whether cast positively or negatively - may fail to capture the response of constrained political bodies” (p. 1120).

A review of the literature finds that, although there is the potential for charter schools to influence district schools and there are some indications that district schools have responded to
the presence of charters in their district, “there appears to be no direct causal relationship—counter to what market advocates have assumed—between bringing market mechanisms to education and inducing educational innovation” (Lubienski, 2003, p. 428).

Arguments in favor of charter schools revolve around the idea that competition and choice will foster innovative initiatives in districts that will, in theory, lead to higher student achievement (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). Other scholars claim that charter school adoption “would lead to the creation of new schools or the reinvention of existing ones” (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003, p. 319). Both ideas ascribe to the notion proposed by the innovators of the charter school movement that freedom and flexibility would stimulate district schools to change current practices as a way to retain students (Kirst, 1990; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). In some respects, this belief has come to fruition in select parts of the country, as scholars believe that district administrators have had no option but to take notice of the practices of charters schools in their backyard. According to Osborne (1999) “Competition forces administrators to take the initiative. If they don’t shake things up, their districts and schools will shrink…charter schools add power to public school choice by creating both new choices and excess capacity in the system” (p.33). Several district schools have selected to respond to the market competition of charter schools by launching innovations with the intention to retain students, teachers and parents (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Maranto, Milliman & Hess, 2010; Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012).

Innovation as an Output of Competition

As noted previously, most state charter school authorizing statutes reference innovation and replication of innovation in public districts as a primary function of the charter school movement. While innovation may be interpreted in a variety of ways, for the purposes of this
study our team intends to use the word innovation as described by Scott Ellison (2009) who categorized educational innovation as being either administrative or instructional innovation:

   Administrative innovation denotes experimentation with and transformation of school organizational models and administrative functions, labor policies and incentive structures, and professional development and training. Instructional innovation denotes experimentation with and the transformation of pedagogical practices, curricular approaches, student assessments and professional collaboration (p. 31).

   In many ways, Ellison’s separation of administrative and instructional innovation is very similar to the different innovations described by Lubienski, (2003) in which he “distinguished between educational changes (practices regarding curricular content and instructional strategies with immediate impact at the classroom-level) and administrative changes (organization-level practices and structural designs that do not directly affect classroom techniques or content)” (p. 404-5). For the purposes of this review of the literature, Ellison’s terminology will serve as the lens through which analysis of specific innovations will occur.

   Innovation in charter schools, be it structural, administrative or programmatic, was to influence change within district schools (Carpenter II, 2011; Lubienski, 2003; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012; Zimmer, 2009). According to Imberman (2011), “Charter schools have the potential to generate strong incentives for public school administrators and teachers to increase effort and improve student performance” (p. 861-2). Proponents of charter schools have argued for decades that competition in the marketplace would spur innovation – not only by creating new schools where innovation could occur, but also by creating a competitive environment in which district schools would be compelled or motivated to innovate as well. They have noted that charters are in a unique position to influence district schools. Charter schools, free from the
bureaucratic stranglehold that prevents “out of the box” thinking in district schools would have more independence to innovate and those innovations would create a competitive environment in the educational marketplace that would foster innovations across the entire public education system (Garn & Cobb, 2001; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). As stated by Andrews & Rothman (2002),

One of the fundamental reasons for the creation of charter schools was to enable these schools to serve as small laboratories in which innovations could be tried and outcomes brought back to the larger public school system. In Massachusetts, the legislation that created the charter schools is explicit about the need for charter schools to influence other public schools, and replication and innovation are cited among the central purposes for the existence of charter schools (p. 510).

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who spoke to the attendees at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Conference, stated that, "The charter movement is absolutely one of the most profound changes in American education, bringing new options to underserved communities and introducing competition and innovation into the education system" (2009). Four years later, Secretary Duncan’s message included more critique as he addressed the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools “Delivering on the Dream” conference:

Now, charters are also supposed to be laboratories of innovation. They were to be the [research and development] wing of public education. And while charters have pioneered a number of critical innovations, too many charters still look like traditional public schools, instead of developing and adapting cutting-edge, science- and research-based innovations to accelerate learning. The bottom line is that the charter school brand has to stand for quality, accountability, cost-efficiency, and transparency. … To fully deliver on
the dream, charters schools must do more to take innovation to scale and continue to
tackle the very toughest educational challenges (Duncan, 2013).

Maranto (2006) believes that charter schools have acted as a catalyst to spur change in
district schools. In his study, he found that “charter schools do in fact push district schools to
improve, most typically by improving public outreach, empowering teachers, providing new
curricular options, and replacing ineffective principals and superintendents—all changes somehow
not possible before substantial competitive pressures” (p. 138). Ellison (2009) regards this
pressure on district schools to innovate as part of a larger effort to expand the conversation
surrounding how best to prepare students with the necessary 21st Century skills to compete on a
global stage. Ellison sees the argument “grounded in the language of globalization and
economic competition, [as] the idea of educational innovation is a response to the perceived need
on the part of policy makers for institutional flexibility in public education to meet the changing
needs of technology-based economies (2009, p. 30). Numerous scholars have pointed to 21st
Century skills as a way to keep students engaged in relevant curriculum (Schoen & Fusarelli,
2008; Symonds, Schwartz and Ferguson, 2011). As charter schools seem to be advancing
programs and structures that address these basic 21st century needs, district schools may have
had to adjust and reform.

Several innovations taken on by district schools were spurred by witnessing the some of
the structural and curricular flexibility allowed for charter schools. Ellison (2009) states that
significant innovation is occurring in regards to merit pay and soliciting private capital for
schools to enhance programmatic offerings. Other innovations include alternative teacher
licensure requirements, creative teacher pay structures, revamped hiring practices that do not
require traditional state licensure, and extended learning time opportunities (Bulkley & Fisler,
Parents, in particular, were seen as a unique target for charters. As stated by the U.S. Department of Education in a 2001 report, “although charter schools are a relatively recent phenomenon, a growing body of literature suggests…ways that charter schools might affect the public education system—namely, that charter schools will provide additional choices, especially for those parents and students who traditionally have had the fewest opportunities in the public education system” (RPP, 2001, p. 4; Duncan, 2009; Hanushek et al, 2007). It is this group, the parents, who represent the decision makers in this quasi market. Although they are not the ones who receive the goods, as they are not present in the classroom to receive the instruction, they decide whether to send their children to charter schools. In this way parents exemplify administrative innovation as envisioned by Ellison.

**Decision-Maker/Administrative**

The concept of the decision maker is similar to that as discussed by Lubienski (2003) who explains that, “charter schools are premised on individual (or family) choices where such choices are thought to best reflect the diverse preferences of the choosers rather than the dictates of monolithic bureaucracies” (p. 398). As choosers participating in a market driven competition, decision-maker innovations fall primarily in the administrative innovation category as defined by Ellison (2009) since these are the changes that most directly impact the relationship between parents and schools. Toma and Zimmer (2012) state that district school superintendents need to understand the rationale of why parents choose charter schools in the first place. “They are not choosing these alternatives because they are required to do so. The choice is voluntary. At least from an *ex ante* perspective, these families, by definition, expect to be better off in the charter schools than in the schools from which they transfer” (p. 211).
Innovations of district schools do not always have to emulate structures used by charter schools. One way that a district school can react to market pressure is through actively combating the presence of a charter in the district. District schools may see charters as a threat to their resources, and for good reason. Many charters, in an effort to attract students and parents, often use aggressive marketing strategies to promote a certain type of curriculum or program. Some of these offerings can be viewed as very traditional in comparison to district schools. According to Ellison (2009) “In the face of market uncertainty and top-down accountability pressures, private actors appear to face strong incentives to introduce marketing techniques to target specific populations and help ‘shape’ their student bodies…it is important to note that the messages used to target high-achieving student populations (or more specifically their families) stress traditional methods, values, and curricula over innovation” (p. 36). In response, the district schools also begin to advertise aggressively. Researchers have noted that the district school innovations that some charter proponents believed would have centered on curriculum and instruction have, instead, gone to new and aggressive forms of marketing campaigns in response to charter schools (Lubienski, 2003; Winters, 2012). This often takes the form of aggressive marketing campaigns by district schools to attract both decision makers and consumers. As described by Ellison,

The primary innovation in administrative functions appears to be the development of educational marketing practices. In contradistinction to the [research and development] laboratory of educational innovation envisaged by the market-model, schools operating in competitive environments face strong incentives to eschew innovative (risky) classroom practices focusing instead on symbolic representation and marketing to shape their student bodies. A competitive educational marketplace would appear to provide strong
incentives for education providers to “shape” their consumers and attract the highest performers in order to maintain market position and ultimately viability. The high costs of educating the lowest performers and the unpredictability of the many externalities that can affect their academic achievement create strong disincentives to service those students (Ellison, 2009, p. 38).

Other scholars have noted marketing campaigns enacted by district schools (Lubienski, 2003; RPP, 2001).

There are some districts that encourage a greater role for parents and increased autonomy for teachers, yet scholarship has indicated that there is a mixed record of academic success with charter schools (Grady, 2012), leading numerous district schools to be wary of launching innovations (Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). Academic gains may not be able to be trumpeted, but some charters have been able to attract parents as they focus on health and safety structures. As explained by Maranto (2006), “charters are typically small schools…this impacts safety and perceived safety” (p. 135). Schools that demand accountability and an emphasis on standardized tests and even SAT preparation could attract the approval of parents rather than a significant curricular or structural innovation, yet, “these conventional desires can only thwart the forms of innovation that many envisioned at the dawn of the charter school movement” (Welch, 2010, p. 60).

Looking at the reason for the mixed record of student achievement can be complicated which makes it difficult for parents to choose between the competing alternatives. Some researchers would argue that charters attract greater percentages of students that have been traditionally marginalized by the district schools (Winters, 2012; Maranto, 2006). Their academic success has not improved dramatically once they enter the doors of the charter school.
According to Imberman, 2011, “Secondary charters appear to attract students with worse behavior and lower test scores, making this theory consistent with the discipline improvements seen in the public schools” (p. 862). Others argue that test scores should improve dramatically as charters attract students whose parents are motivated to ensure a quality education for their child (Ellison, 2009), resulting in charters that are highly segregated in comparison to district schools, with higher populations of students that are white and wealthy. A review of the literature indicates there is disagreement as to whether curricular and pedagogical innovations in charters directly influence district schools.

**Consumer/Instructional Innovation**

Consumer innovations fall primarily in the instructional innovation category as defined by Ellison (2009). These are the changes that most directly impact the relationship between students and schools. In response, district schools will make changes to keep the students that they already have. Osborne, in his 1999 study, inquired into the root cause of districts making changes. He found that when charters took a significant amount of funding and other resources away from public schools, districts would usually make changes. The struggle over resources often influences decisions made by districts (Lubienski, 2003; Winters, 2012). “When strong charter operators are competing for desirable students…district schools will be under relatively intense pressure to respond. Conversely, districts feel less need to respond to charter schools that have trouble retaining students” (Maranto, Hess & Milliman, 2001; p. 1120).

District schools often reacted to market competition by implementing changes (Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001) that Ellison would describe as innovative curricular approaches, such as all-day kindergarten, before and after school programs, and additions to technology offerings (Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998). One hope was that charter schools would spur
curricular and instructional innovation in the district schools. Lubienski’s (2006) investigation of district schools’ responses to charter schools found that there was not a tremendous amount of innovation occurring in district schools as a result of charter schools. Others however report that changes in district schools do occur with regard to student achievement (Winters, 2012), but this is not due to any curricular innovation, but rather due to the fact that students who leave public schools and enroll in charter schools may not have been performing well academically in district schools. Other scholars, such as Ellison (2009), do not really see innovation with instruction but that perhaps the market is forcing teaching and learning through collaborative models. He states that “to ensure that innovations generated at the school level are spread throughout the system, policy makers need to foster the development of school networks by providing ample opportunities for continuous professional development, collaboration, mentoring, and training programs” (p.44).

There is some evidence that the collaborative culture established in some charter schools amongst the staff is serving as a model for district schools. As Welch (2010) explains, “pockets of innovation are difficult to create, scale, and sustain—not just across districts but within buildings. Collaborative cultures have the power to address each of these concerns by growing and sustaining improvement, but only if teachers have the opportunity to genuinely interact with each other’s practice and ideas” (p. 62). This evidence of increased collaboration has led some district schools to reach out to charters to enhance their own instructional innovations, and potentially as a way to keep students.

Although there may be some mistrust and suspicion surrounding the relationship between charters and districts (Andrews & Rothman, 2002; Finkel, 2011; RPP, 2001), and there is evidence that some district schools’ facilities were shuttered due to the influx of charters in a
district (RPP, 2001), there has also been evidence of district schools and charter schools sharing resources to enhance students learning (Ellison, 2009). As explained in a 2001 U.S. Department of Education study, “Districts that viewed charter schools as an opportunity and made changes in education tended to describe charter schools as a catalyst for change-some were collaborating with charter school staff and others viewed charter schools as an opportunity to learn” (RPP, 2001, p. 37). Finkel, in his 2011 article entitled District-Charter Collaborations on the Rise, cites Jim Hill, senior policy analyst for the National School Board Association’s Center for Public Education. Hill “says collaborations thus far have been more likely to be around administrative services, such as shared facilities and food service contracting” (p. 64). In some instances, however, district schools respond to charters by launching initiatives that encourage collaboration, often with a specific focus on teaching and learning (Andrews & Rothman, 2002; Rofes, 1998) As Lee (2009), mentions in his analysis of whether the presence of charters encourage efficiency in district schools,

The simple market theory may not be empirically supported, which presumes that the existence of charter schools will yield a more competitive environment in the public school system. Districts may respond to competition in various ways. For instance, regular public schools may wish to cooperate with charter schools if charter schools are taking disadvantaged students from the regular public schools (p. 54).

Numerous charter advocates envisioned this transformation of district collaborative programs and policies at the genesis of the charter school discussion almost 20 years ago (Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Osborne, 1999).
Massachusetts in particular has a number of district innovations targeting teaching and learning that came about primarily through collaboration with a charter school. As Ed Finkel (2011) explains,

Recent collaboration examples include the Match School in Boston, which houses AmeriCorps-affiliated teachers on its top floor who work in several Boston public schools in addition to the charter school....He [Dominic Slowey, spokesman for the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association] also mentions a project among Prospect Hill Academy and public schools in Somerville, Mass., who have shared teachers to spread best teaching practices in the classroom (p. 66).

Ellison (2009) speculates that the reason behind teacher driven collaboration in district schools is due to the fact that the market may not encourage risk taking within the district school setting, for if a district innovation is considered a failure, students may decide to leave. It is important to recognize, however, that the market forces at work do not solely impact the district school. Charter schools can also gain through the relationship. As explained by Andrews & Rothman (2002), “Charter schools can clearly benefit from interacting with district schools, which often bring their own innovative ideas as well as the wisdom of experience” (p. 510).

There is evidence that some district leaders have not altered their academic programs or launched other innovations in the face of market competition from charter schools. According to Rofes (1998), “few superintendents, principals, and teachers in district schools were thinking of charter schools as educational laboratories or attempting to transfer pedagogical innovations from charters to the district schools” (p.13). Other district schools actively compete and may shift resources to target specific students within the district school population that are not attracted to charters (Imberman, 2011). There are reports, however, that indicate some
superintendents recognize the opportunity for district school innovation as a result of charters. “In some districts, district leaders reported that charter schools created additional choice options for students and parents, and that the leaders supported choice” (RPP, 2001, p. 32). Other reports indicate that some superintendents believe the charter schools duplicate curricular practices covered in district schools, that charter schools are not particularly innovative and cannot be considered the learning lab they were designed to be as part of the initial legislation (Lubienski, 2006; Maranto, Hess, & Milliman, 2001; Plank & Sykes, 1999; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2011; Teske et al., 2000; Welch, 2010). Until the results of charter school success are conclusive, many districts may be waiting to launch a new initiative.

Another area that distinguishes charter schools is that of school-level decision-making surrounding curriculum, as charter schools provide greater teacher autonomy around what is taught and how it is taught (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; Lubienski, 2003; RPP, 2001). There are numerous concepts of autonomy, but for the purposes of this review of the literature, we refer to how the concept is framed by Finnigan (2007). He states that, “the usefulness or value of autonomy does not lie in autonomy for its own sake but in the freedom it affords schools to do things that previously were not allowed or available” (p. 505). In regards to instructional innovation, the autonomy provided by the charters can transfer directly to curricular and pedagogical freedom that could impact student learning. According to Lubienski, “based on the evidence in the research on charter practices, charter schools appear to be using administrative autonomy to experiment with many structural and programmatic approaches” (2003, p. 412). Teachers in charter schools report greater influence over academic standards and curriculum compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools (Finnigan, 2007; Maranto 2006; Podgursky, 2008). Welch (2010) explains, “Charters were meant to allow for autonomy
in pursuit of performance. If autonomy and efficiency are available in several areas, even those less visible to lay observers, these factors are equally important to the potential use of alternative pedagogies like projects and collaborative groups” (p.61). Welch also indicates that curricular innovations are often hindered by traditional systems of accountability including state achievement tests. This increased autonomy may directly impact how programs are taught at the district level. There are reports that district schools did alter their curriculum due to the presence of charters (Maranto, Hess, & Milliman, 2001; RPP, 2001), but the results are inconclusive (Lubienski, 2003).

Maranto et al (2001) call for a more in-depth investigation into how districts may react to the presence of charters. “Our greatest hope for this work is that it may spur other researchers to begin scrutinizing more carefully the nature and causes of competitive response across a wide range of school districts” (p. 1123). Ellison (2009) believes that researchers should investigate “what is happening on the ground…how do educational actors (i.e. teachers, administrators, parents, students, etc.) view innovation? Do they see innovation emerging in their schools?” (p. 46). By interviewing district superintendents, to understand their perception of charters and to see if this has led to any innovations in their school in response to this competitive educational marketplace, our study will hopefully contribute to the current gap in the literature.

**Charter Schools in Massachusetts**

Consistent with the charter school laws across the nation, the charter school law in Massachusetts identified innovation and influence on the improvement of traditional public schools as primary to the purpose and vision for the charter system. The charter school law in Massachusetts was authorized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ Education Reform Act
(1993), through the passage of Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, §89 which asserts the purpose and intent of the statute (emphasis added):

(b) The purposes of establishing charter schools are: (i) to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education; (ii) to provide opportunities for innovative learning and assessments; (iii) to provide parents and students with greater options in selecting schools within and outside their school districts; (iv) to provide teachers with a vehicle for establishing schools with alternative, innovative methods of educational instruction and school structure and management; (v) to encourage performance-based educational programs; (vi) to hold teachers and school administrators accountable for students' educational outcomes; and (vii) to provide models for replication in other public schools.

As Andrews and Rothman (2002) describe, innovation and experimentation within the charter schools themselves was one step in the larger push to influence reforms within the larger public system as a whole.

One of the fundamental reasons for the creation of charter schools was to enable these schools to serve as small laboratories in which innovations could be tried and outcomes brought back to the larger public school system. In Massachusetts, the legislation that created the charter schools is explicit about the need for charter schools to influence other public schools, and replication and innovation are cited among the central purposes for the existence of charter schools” (p. 510).
According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) (2013):

A charter school is a public school that is managed by a board of trustees and operates independently of any school committee under a five-year charter granted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. It has the freedom to organize around a core mission, curriculum, theme, and/or teaching method and to control its own budget and hire (and fire) teachers and staff. In return for this freedom, a charter must attract students and produce positive results within five years of its charter or its charter will not be renewed. The first Massachusetts charter schools opened in 1995 (p. 1).

In Massachusetts there are two basic categories of authorized charter schools - Commonwealth Charter Schools and Horace Mann Charter Schools. Commonwealth Charter Schools are public institutions that are independent from traditional public districts; Horace Mann Charter Schools operate with a memorandum of agreement with public districts. In 2010, coinciding with Massachusetts’ attempt to secure Race to the Top (RTTT) funds, Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, §89 was amended to specify distinctions in the types of relationships between districts (particularly those in corrective action with the state as a result of achievement results on standardized assessments) and three types of Horace Mann Charter Schools (MA DESE, 2013).

Charter schools were envisioned, as indicated in the Massachusetts legislative intent, as institutions designed to test innovations, refine and then share best practices with public districts so that public districts could replicate those practices and more efficiently undertake improvement and reform activities. Although the word “laboratory” is not used explicitly in the
legislation, the development of innovations and call for charter schools to develop models for replication conjure a public image that charter schools will act as laboratories – experimenting with innovation that districts will then be able to replicate. This notion of piloting, sharing and replicating did not fully account for the notion of competition that was at the heart of the charter school movement and in fact, implies collaboration or sharing of information in ways not addressed fully in the literature, which focuses more on the notion that competition for students would translate into competition for funds. In Massachusetts, the funding methodology enacted by the charter school law sparked a heated debate that still lingers in the Massachusetts public education arena. As charter school proliferation increases with more charter schools in existence, more students enrolling in charter schools, and more students on waiting lists-this debate continues to evolve in Massachusetts.

In 1995, 15 charter schools opened serving 2,613 students in the first year. According to the MA DESE (2013) pre-enrollment report, it was anticipated that 35,353 students would enroll in 81 charter schools in the 2013-2014 school year. In less than 20 years, there are now more than four times as many charter schools as in 1995 and charter schools enroll more than 12 times as many students as they did in 1995. Figures 2-1 and Figure 2-2 display the growth of charter schools and enrollment between 1995 and 2014.
**Figure 2-1**

*Growth of Charter Schools in Massachusetts 1995-2014*

**Figure 2-2**

*Charter School Enrollment in Massachusetts 1995-2014*
The MA DESE began collecting and reporting data about the number of students on waiting lists for charter schools in 2002. The number of students seeking enrollment but placed on waiting lists has grown significantly during the last decade; in 2011-2012 the number of students on waiting lists surpassed the actual enrollment of students. While this trend has been increasing, the total enrollment of public education students in Massachusetts has declined during the last decade (Table 2-1).

According to MA DESE statistics (2013), the demand for a charter school placement in Massachusetts has far exceeded the supply since the Department started collecting enrollment and waitlist data in 2002. In the 2013-2014 school year, 31,830 students are enrolled in public charter schools-representing an estimated 3.3% of Massachusetts’ public school students. An additional 45,176 students were on waiting lists for enrollment in charter schools-representing an additional estimated 4.8% of Massachusetts public students. Combined, this means that 82,389, or an estimated 8.6% of Massachusetts public students, sought enrollment in charter public schools for the 2013-2014 school year (Table 2-1 and Figure 2-3).
Table 2-1

*Charter School Enrollment, Waitlist and Percentage of Market Share in Massachusetts 2002-2014 (MA DESE, 2013a).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All public students in Massachusetts</th>
<th>Total Enrollment in Charter Schools</th>
<th>% of all MA students enrolled in Charters</th>
<th>Students on Waitlist for Charter Schools</th>
<th>Enrolled + Waitlist Combined</th>
<th>% of Charter School Choosers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>983,313</td>
<td>15,805</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>12,959</td>
<td>28,764</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>980,818</td>
<td>17,869</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>13,153</td>
<td>31,022</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>975,911</td>
<td>20,259</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>14,709</td>
<td>34,968</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>972,371</td>
<td>21,866</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>15,823</td>
<td>37,689</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>968,661</td>
<td>23,500</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>16,004</td>
<td>39,504</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>962,806</td>
<td>25,034</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>18,989</td>
<td>44,023</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>958,910</td>
<td>26,384</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>21,312</td>
<td>47,696</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>957,053</td>
<td>27,393</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>24,066</td>
<td>51,459</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>955,563</td>
<td>28,422</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>26,708</td>
<td>55,130</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>953,369</td>
<td>30,595</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>35,942</td>
<td>66,537</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>954,773</td>
<td>31,830</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>45,176</td>
<td>77,006</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>955,739</td>
<td>31,997</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>50,392</td>
<td>82,389</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charter School Caps and Limitations

In Massachusetts, the charter school law limits the number of charters by type and location that the Board can grant, with intent to ensure that charter schools are predominantly addressing unmet needs in the public education system-largely promoting charter schools that serve urban or high need areas. In 2013-2014, 62 out of 81 (77%) operating Commonwealth charter schools are located in urban districts; 27 (33%) of these operate in Boston. The legislation prioritizes urban and underperforming districts for the development of new Commonwealth charter schools. According to MGL Ch. 71, Section 89 (2010):

In any one year, the Board may approve only one regional Commonwealth charter school application to be located in a district where overall student performance on the MCAS was in the top 10% in the preceding year…. The Board may not approve a charter in any community with a population of less than 30,000 as determined by the most recent US Census estimate, unless it is a regional charter
...At least 2 charters approved in any year must be granted for charter schools located in districts where overall student performance on the MCAS is in the lowest 10% statewide in the two years prior to the applications.

In 2010, Governor Deval Patrick signed into law the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap—which launched several education reform initiatives—including revisions to the Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, § 89, the Charter School Law. The passage of this Act ushered in a host of initiatives in public schools in Massachusetts but also effectively served to increase the number of charter schools and charter students in high needs areas, and to increase accountability within charter schools to serve previously underserved populations. In response to the enrollment trends showing the under-representation of English Language Learners (ELLs) and Special Education students in charter schools and reports of returning students to traditional public schools, when the charter school enabling statute was revised as part of the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap (2010), charter schools were required to demonstrate outreach to high needs families and efforts to recruit and sustain enrollment of a more diverse student body, more representative of the demographics of the sending communities. Important components of the revisions to the Charter School Law (2010) include the requirement that the “charter” of the school addresses “the school’s capacity to address the particular needs of limited English-proficient students…including the employment of staff;” includes a “statement of equal educational opportunity which shall state that charter schools shall be open to all students, on a space available basis, and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or academic achievement,” develops a “student recruitment and retention plan” that includes “deliberate, specific strategies the school will use to ensure the provision of equal educational opportunity”
and that is designed “to attract, enroll and retain a student population that, when compared to
students in similar grades in schools from which the charter school is expected to enroll students,
contains a comparable academic and demographic profile” and that includes a “detailed
description of deliberate, specific strategies the school will use to maximize the number of
students who successfully complete all school requirements and prevent students from dropping
out.

Table 2-2 displays selected demographic data for charter schools in the aggregate
compared to state averages between 2006 and 2013-three years preceding the amendment of
Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, § 89 (2010) and three years following its passage. Following the
amendment of the charter school law in Massachusetts, it is evident that, in the aggregate, the
percentage of as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students (also referred to as English language
learners) and Special Education students enrolled in charter schools has increased. Between
2006 and 2011, the aggregate percentage of LEP students enrolled in charter schools ranged
from 1.5%-2.2% lower than the state average but in 2012-2013 the difference had been
decreased to 0.4%. In 2010, the year of the amendment of the charter school law, the percentage
of special education students in charter schools lagged behind the state average by 5.2%; in 2013
this had been decreased to 3.7%. It is important to note that Table 2-2 displays aggregate data;
individual charter school demographic data varies greatly.
Table 2-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>% Limited English Proficient</th>
<th>%Low Income</th>
<th>% Special Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Year of Charter School Law Amendment

**Funding for School Choice Options**

In Massachusetts, there are a variety of school choice options that impact the competitive environment for traditional public school students. There are complex nuances to the funding formulas applied in Massachusetts for the various school choice options. In addition to charter schools, other choices exist in various formats and depending upon local education options. Public school choice options in Massachusetts include voluntary desegregation through Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO), voluntary in-district school choice for districts large enough to have capacity to offer choices, voluntary out-of-district school choice for districts willing to open seats to students from other districts, and public regional vocational technical or vocational agricultural high schools. All of these public school choice options provide additional complexity in understanding the impact of the competitive marketplace resulting from charter school choice in Massachusetts. However, the funding for each of the school choice options in Massachusetts compared to the funding mechanism for charter school enrollment may have a significant impact on the perceptions of superintendents about charter schools and the competitive pressure they experience as a result of charter schools.
The charter school debate in Massachusetts has been largely centered on the funding mechanism established by the authorizing statute, Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, §89 (2010) and the implementation through the charter school authorizing department and the finance department of the MA DESE. In Massachusetts, the professional organization for superintendents - Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the professional organization for school committees-the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) have been vocal opponents of the implementation of the charter school law because of the funding and local input resulting from the implementation. MASS and MASC criticized the law for unfairly distributing local funds from districts to charter schools, and for unfairly omitting public input in the charter authorizing process (MASS, 2005). In a position statement presented by MASS (2005), the organization repetitively refers to the charter school movement as an ‘experiment’ and criticizes the DESE for unfair funding formulas, for inadequate involvement of local stakeholders in the charter application process, and for inadequate monitoring of the quality of charter schools (MASS, 2005).

According to DESE (2013), for each student enrolled in a Commonwealth Charter School the charter school receives a tuition amount from the state that is equal to the district’s per-pupil amount calculated by the Department’s School Finance Unit. The state then deducts that same amount from the sending districts’ state aid allocation. In FY12, the state average per pupil amount was $13,656.24 (DESE, 2012). Table 2-3 displays the Massachusetts average per pupil expenditures from 2004-2005 to 2011-2013 (DESE, 2012). In configuring the per-pupil expenditures, all in-district and out-of-district pupils and expenditures are included; this means that high cost special education expenditures and high need student expenditures are included in the average per-pupil expenditure rate. In addition to the per pupil rate to fund enrollment in charter schools, the Massachusetts statute requires the district to provide district-funded
transportation to students attending charter schools. This cost is in addition to the per-pupil cost, and has greater impact for districts with students attending regional charter schools that are not located within the same district. As noted in the statute:

All students who reside in the school district in which a charter school is located shall be provided transportation by the district, provided that either (i) transportation is provided to district students in the same grade, or (ii) transportation is required by the students individualized education program….

(Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, § 89).

Table 2-3

Massachusetts Per Pupil Expenditure Average 2006-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>MA per-pupil expenditure average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY06</td>
<td>$10,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY07</td>
<td>$11,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY08</td>
<td>$11,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY09</td>
<td>$12,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY10</td>
<td>$13,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY11</td>
<td>$13,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY12</td>
<td>$13,357</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In FY12, $254,844,899 was allocated to charter schools through diverting that same amount in local aid from public districts to charter schools based upon the enrollment of students from each district in a charter school (DESE, 2013a).

Chapter 46 of Massachusetts General Law (1997) provides some relief mechanisms to districts when they experience a significant increase in charter school tuitions (often as a result of the opening or initial proliferation of a charter school), which enables districts to receive aid that offsets, or reimburses a portion of the increase in the charter school tuition expense from one fiscal year to the next fiscal year through Chapter 46 aid. Additionally, there is a statutory limit on the amount of funds that can be transferred to charter schools from any one district for the
purpose of charter school tuition. A district’s total charter school tuition payment cannot exceed 9% of that districts’ net school spending (NSS), unless that district has performed in the lowest 10% statewide on the MCAS for the previous two years. If the district is in the lowest 10% the cap on NSS was raised to 13% in 2011 and is scheduled to increase by 1% each year until reaching the cap of 18%.

As noted earlier, Horace Mann Charter Schools represent a unique charter/district relationship that results from a memorandum of agreement with the district, with a total budget allocation approved by the public district’s school committee following a budget request from the charter school’s board of trustees. There are mechanisms in place to allow the charter board of trustees and the district school committee to negotiate budget allocation and to seek mediation if needed.

**Inter-District School Choice**

School choice between districts is another unique consideration when studying the public education marketplace in Massachusetts. During the 2013-2014 school year, 173 Massachusetts school districts opted to receive school choice students from other districts, resulting in 13,699 students participating in inter-district school choice (Table 2.4).
While there is likely a competitive impact for districts, particularly for districts with lower student achievement that are adjacent to higher performing districts that have opened school choice enrollment, the funding mechanisms in place to support out of district school choice are significantly divergent from the funding for charter school enrollment. School choice tuition charges are based on the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students multiplied by the per-pupil tuition rate, minus 75% of the per-pupil cost, up to a limit of $5,000 (DESE, 2012). At most, sending districts will lose $5,000 in state aid for typical students enrolling in other districts through school choice. In addition, transportation is not provided by local districts for students choosing to enroll in another district via school choice. For students with IEPs, the state has assigned special education increment funding adjustments that augment the school choice tuition to support the receiving district in meeting the needs of students with special education entitlements (DESE, 2004).
The distance between the per pupil funding for students enrolling in out of district public school choice ($5,000) and those enrolling in commonwealth charter schools (average of $13,656 in FY12) with the addition of costs associated with transportation for students attending commonwealth charter schools is important to note in the study of the competitive marketplace impacted by charter schools. In addition, it is important to note that the enrollment of special education students (associated with per pupil higher costs) in charter schools is below the state average for percentages of students.

In 2011, the DESE commissioned a study (Cohodes et al, 2011) to promote the best practices taking place in some charter schools in Massachusetts. In the introductory letter, the DESE Commissioner, Mitchell Chester, noted that the findings were “provocative” and lauded the innovations taking place in charter schools stating that “Longer school days, more instructional time on core content, a ‘no excuses’ philosophy, and other structural elements of school organization appear to contribute to the positive results from these schools. Perhaps most importantly, many of these elements could be implemented in traditional public schools, providing us with potential models for improvement across the Commonwealth.”

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

Our study employed mixed methods (MM) design because we sought to draw upon the strengths of both qualitative (QUAL) and quantitative (QUAN) data (Creswell, 2012). We collected QUAN data through the distribution of a state-wide survey of Massachusetts superintendents to identify trends in superintendents’ perceptions about the impact of charter school competition on their decisions and actions. During our pilot test of the survey, pilot testers suggested that we add more open response items to the survey, which resulted in QUAL data within the survey tool. We used the survey data to inform the refinement of a semi-
structured interview protocol that was used to collect additional QUAL data that deepened our understanding by providing contextual details that support, explain, or diverge from trends that emerged in the QUAN data. The QUAN source (survey) enabled us to reach a larger audience to facilitate generalization of results, while the QUAL source (open response survey items and interviews) added narrative, details and context to assist us in answering our research questions.

We used different kinds of data to investigate the same phenomena – also known as triangulation (Jick, 1979). We collected our QUAN and QUAL data in two phases so that our sources of data complement and strengthen each other (Creswell, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). We viewed both data types as primary to our investigation, though collected the QUAN data first (through distribution of the survey); analysis of the QUAN data then resulted in initial themes and findings which influenced our protocol for the QUAL portion of the study (semi-structured interviews). Using Morse’s (1991; as cited in Creswell, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006) MM notation system, our survey design is notated as below indicating that we executed a sequential, two-phase study starting with QUAN methods, followed by QUAL methods with both sources sharing equal importance to our design: QUAN \rightarrow QUAL.

We analyzed all sources of data separately, but we also combined or “mixed” the data to finalize our findings through triangulation of data sources on the same phenomena. In addition, we used data from both sources to respond to each of our research questions and sub-questions.

The research design described above can be classified as explanatory sequential mixed method design (often referred to as a two-phase model) because it consists of two distinct phases that occur chronologically: starting with QUAN data collection and followed by QUAL data collection which is used to refine the results from the QUAN phase (Creswell, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). Typically, the explanatory sequential mixed method is used when a researcher needs QUAL data to explain or expand on QUAN results (Creswell, 2006; Creswell,
In this model, the researcher identifies specific QUAN findings that need an explanation, such as statistical differences among groups or unexpected results, and collects QUAL data from participants who can best help explain these findings. The rationale for this approach is that the QUAN data and analysis provide a broad picture of the research problem, while the QUAL data and analysis refine and explain statistical results by exploring participants’ views in more depth (Creswell, 2012).

**Stages and timeline.** Our study included the following elements and timeline. Figure 3-1 displays the stages of our research design.

1. Survey design (conceptualization)
2. Pilot test & refine survey tool using Qualtrics (August 2013)
3. Distribute survey (via Qualtrics) to all superintendents through MASS (September 2013)
5. Use survey to select sample of superintendents for interviews (November 2013)
6. Identify key findings/themes from survey (September/October 2013)
7. Refine interview protocol and a priori code list (located in Domain Map) based on survey themes (October 2013)
8. Pilot test & refine interview protocol (October 2013)
9. Conduct 9 audio-recorded interviews with superintendents (October-December 2013)
10. Transcribe, code, and analyze data - using Dedoose (December 2103)
11. Triangulate data between quantitative questions on survey, qualitative questions on survey, and qualitative data from interviews (December 2013)
12. Findings and recommendations to MASS (January 2014)
Figure 3-1

Stages of Research

1. Pilot Test & Refine Survey Tool using Qualtrics
2. Distribute Survey (via Qualtrics) to all Superintendents through MASS
3. Code Responses & Analyze Data (QUAN Inferential Stage)
4. Conduct 9-12 audio-recorded Interviews with superintendents
5. Pilot Test & Refine Interview Protocol
6. Identify key findings/themes from Survey & Refine Interview protocol based on survey data
7. Transcribe, Code, and Analyze QUAL data - using Dedoose (QUAL Inferential Stage)
8. Conduct Meta-Inference of combined QUAN and QUAL data
9. Findings & Recommendations to MASS
Survey Design. To design our survey, we first needed to identify our population, our sampling frame, and our sample (Creswell, 2012; Groves et al, 2009). Our population was superintendents in traditional public school districts, our target population or sampling frame was superintendents in Massachusetts, and our sample was superintendents in Massachusetts who lead districts in which students are eligible to enroll in one or more charter schools (Creswell, 2012). To reach our target population, we distributed our survey to all superintendents in Massachusetts, leveraging our partnership with the state superintendents’ association. To derive our sample, we asked superintendents to identify if there is a charter school option available to the students in their district. We then filtered out superintendents who respond “no” to that question, leaving our sample as those who answered “yes” to that question, who were then prompted to complete the rest of the survey as “respondents” (Grove et al, 2004, p. 45).

The survey used was a web-based questionnaire using survey software (Qualtrics). We selected this survey method because it could be deployed efficiently, was convenient for potential respondents, and because the survey data could be gathered quickly (Creswell, 2012). Our survey instrument included “clear, unambiguous questions” (Creswell, 2012; p. 382) that alternate between question types - personal, attitudinal and behavioral questions and closed- and open-ended questions. Our survey was designed to identify superintendents’ perceptions of charter schools and charter school competition, the nature and types of competitive pressure experienced by superintendents in relation to charter school competition, and a review of district-level innovative responses to charter school competition as reported by superintendents. The questions are based upon our review of the literature.

In designing our survey tool, in the conceptual phase of developing our methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), we used a cross-sectional survey design; our protocol is located in
Appendix A. This cross-sectional survey design “has the advantage of measuring current attitudes and practices” (Creswell, 2012, p. 377). We designed our survey to collect perceptual data about the views, attitudes, and self-reported actions of superintendents in Massachusetts in response to competition from charter schools. The construct we sought to measure through the survey includes the perceived impact of charter school competition on superintendents’ decision-making and action. According to Groves et al (2009), “Constructs are the elements of information that are sought by the researcher” (p. 41). The design of our survey is critical as Groves et al (2009) note “without a good design, good survey statistics rarely result” (p. 41).

To measure our construct, we developed questions that yield measurements. To this end, we asked superintendents to report their perceptions of the impact of charter schools on the district, with a matrix of drop down menus that categorized potential impacts and asked superintendents to rate their perception of the impact using a rating scale of No Impact, Low Impact, Moderate Impact, and High Impact. We asked this question to identify if superintendents perceive a competitive effect as a result of the presence of charter schools. Low impact ratings indicated a perception that charter schools are not resulting in a feeling of competitiveness from superintendents, while high impact ratings indicated a strong competitive effect.

We also asked superintendents to report their perception about the likelihood of specific categories of students to enroll in charter schools (with categories of students using MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education sub groups and achievement categories) and a ratings scale ranging from Minimally Likely to Highly Likely. We sought answers to this question to identify if superintendents perceive that charter schools are attracting specific groups of students more than others, and how this may vary throughout the state. In addition, we asked
superintendents about their perception of the reasons parents choose to seek enrollment in charter schools using a drop down menu of options that are based upon our review of the literature about why parents seek choices. Answers to this question assisted us in understanding the superintendents’ perceptions about why they believe parents are seeking charter school enrollment. Lastly, we asked superintendents to report what, if any, actions or initiatives they have prioritized in their district partly in response to competition from charter schools, using a drop down menu of categories of responses. The drop down menu included categories based upon our review of the literature which described a variety of responses including but not limited to no action, undertaking anti-charter advocacy, developing new programs, adopting new curriculum, and launching strategic communications.

In the survey, we asked superintendents to voluntarily identify their districts so that we could explore statewide data patterns as being from urban, suburban, and rural districts, and to also associate them with a regional Superintendents’ Roundtable Association. We did not identify districts by name in the study. We also used the survey to capture other information about the superintendents’ districts, including size of district, type of community (suburban, urban, rural), estimated percentage of students attending charter schools, and regional geography in Massachusetts. When analyzing our data, research team members applied pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of our participants.

To ensure that our questions were clear and measured what we sought to measure, we pilot tested our instrument with a small group of colleagues who functioned in the role of or a similar role to a superintendent. We revised the survey based upon their feedback.

**Pilot Test of Survey.** In August, our research team conducted a pilot test of our survey tool with eight Massachusetts superintendents. Pilot testing is important to ensure that questions
can be interpreted by survey takers asking what we intended to ask to ensure that we were able to gather meaningful data in pursuit of our research questions. We relied on our professional networks and relationships with practicing superintendents to recruit participants for our pilot test. Pilot test participants were asked to trial the survey by submitting a survey response online and to then provide us feedback about the content of the survey questions and prompts. We asked participants to alert us to any misleading or ambiguous questions, questions that included emotionally loaded or vaguely defined words, any questions that participants feel would not yield truthful responses, and if there were questions that might leave respondents feeling vulnerable about a negative consequence for answering a question in a particular manner. We also asked our pilot test participants to provide input about the content of our questions particularly in light of our research questions. We requested feedback about the response choices we provided to ensure that the terminology we used was transparent and widely accepted as well as comprehensive enough to allow for a range of responses that would strengthen the reliability and validity of our data (Walonick, 2004). As a result of our pilot test and suggestions from our pilot testers, we revised the wording of several questions, added options to drop down menus, and provided more opportunities for open responses.

Our survey tool included questions that we designed to be sensitive to demographic differences among respondents such as urban/rural and affluent/poor variance; we sought feedback from our pilot testers to confirm that we achieved this goal. We asked pilot testers to confirm that the questions flowed in a logical order. We designed our tool to include less than 20 questions because we were cognizant of the time limitations of district superintendents; we solicited feedback from the pilot testers about the amount of time it took to complete the survey and learned that it took them less than 20 minutes, averaging approximately 10 minutes
depending on how much information they provided in open response questions. We asked our pilot testers if asking the superintendent to name his/her district could cause respondents not to be candid about their responses, and pilot testers expressed that making this item optional would remove that barrier, though they generally did not think that this would be a concern for survey takers.

**Distribution of Survey.** To avoid some of the potential methodological issues that can arise by using web-based surveys, we coordinated our efforts to get the survey out to all superintendents in Massachusetts by working in partnership with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS). The MASS Executive Director agreed to send the survey link out to the membership of Massachusetts and to encourage superintendents to respond to the survey. The method for sending out the survey and the message that accompanied it was not executed the way we had designed it, however; this is noted in our limitations section. This method of delivery to superintendents ensured that email addresses were current, lent credibility to our study, and promoted participation by members of our sample in order to maximize our response rate and thus validity of data (Creswell, 2012).

**Analysis of Survey Data.** After survey collection was complete, we calculated response rate and generated “descriptive report[s] [of] aggregate responses to each item on the questionnaire” (Creswell, 2012, p. 398) in order to locate general patterns and themes. After data collection, we edited and coded our data and placed it into a form “suitable for analysis” (Groves et al, 2009, p. 48). Given our sample size (61) we determined to analyze the data applying descriptive statistical analysis. Using filters, reports and cross tabulations functions in Qualtrics, we exported data to Excel to sort, analyze and create charts and tables. These analyses addressed all of our individual research questions and also assisted us in further narrowing our
focus for our subsequent individual interviews. This stage of our sequential mixed design was
the first of three Inferential Stages (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), because we drew conclusions
from the first set of data, QUANT, to influence the conceptual stage of our QUAL study. See
Figure 3 at the conclusion of this methods section for a graphic display of our design.

When we conducted our first inferential stage, we were interested in patterns between
survey items. We noted patterns in the categories of students reported by superintendents as
most likely to enroll in charter schools and the degree of impact reported by superintendents.
We noted patterns in the reasons superintendents reported parents were choosing to seek charter
school enrollment and the types of actions superintendents reported to undertake at least partly in
response to charter school competition. We looked for patterns in responses between districts in
the urban superintendents’ networks and those not classified as urban, as well as in responses
from superintendents representing varying sizes of districts and reporting varying charter school
enrollment. As we analyzed data and sort and filter survey responses, themes emerged that
influenced refinement of the QUAL component of our study that is described below.

As we moved into the second phase of sequential mixed design, we selected participants
for inclusion in the QUAL phase. We used the survey as a vehicle to select our QUAL sample;
through one of the survey items, superintendents were asked to volunteer for further participation
in the study through participation in semi-structured interviews. This will be discussed in more
detail in the description of our interview design.

**Selection of Sample for QUAL phase.** In the subsequent QUAL phase of our MM
design, we conducted in-depth structured interviews with nine (9) Superintendents in districts in
which students are eligible to attend one or more charter schools. We sought volunteers through
our survey, which provided us with a group of willing participants who were practicing
superintendents with a charter school option available for the students in their districts. While a larger sample size might have yielded greater opportunities to generate generalizable results, the size of our research team (three researchers) and our timeline required us to limit our interviews to a manageable amount. We were cognizant of the fact that we had only two months to collect our data. As a group with only three members we needed to assess our limitations while ensuring that we created a large enough sample that would allow us to point to meaningful findings. Hill, Thompson & Williams (1997), “recommend including at least 8 to 15 participants to have a large enough sample so that researchers can determine whether findings apply to several people or are just representative of one or two people” (p. 532). Because our interviews followed the collection of QUANT data through the survey, and we determined that 61 survey responses provided meaningful data, our reliance on the interviews to produce a meaningful sample size was reduced.

We received 21 volunteers to participate in an interview for our study, although some who indicated interest did not accept the invitation to be interviewed. To select nine volunteers we utilized demographic data from the survey to select representatives from multiple regions (identified in the survey through the geographic superintendents’ round tables). Because of a limited survey response (5) from districts designated as “urban” we sought to prioritize interviews with superintendents representing districts in the urban superintendent’s network to add depth to our data from districts in that category. Through this method and following up with superintendents who expressed an interest in participating in interviews, we found seven superintendents for our interviews; we found that two geographic regions in particular yielded a higher volume of volunteers and yet two geographic regions were not represented. We also found that we had a higher volume of volunteers from districts that were not categorized as
We utilized our professional networks to invite two additional superintendents (our 8th and 9th) to participate; to focus our outreach we prioritized locating superintendents representing urban districts located in the remaining two geographic regions.

**Semi-structured Interview Design.** When considering which type of interview to conduct, Creswell encourages researchers to “choose the one that will allow you to best learn the participants’ views and answer each research question” (p. 221). We conducted semi-structured in-person interviews following the protocol established by Creswell (2012), Johnson & Christensen (2008), and Miles & Huberman (1994). We developed a semi-structured interview protocol that was designed to align with the prompts in our survey that was conducted in the QUANT sequence of our MM study. We aligned questions with our overarching research questions and individual sub-questions. As noted above, following a review of our QUANT phase, we revised and refined the questions in our interview protocol.

We designed an interview protocol that included a series of questions and potential probes. To ensure consistency in our interview execution and to support our collective analysis of QUAL data, we conducted interviews in teams. All three members of the research team participated in the initial interview; subsequent interviews were conducted in pairs. We determined to conduct interviews in pairs to ensure that we created consistent interview conditions across three researchers.

The questions in our interview protocol were designed to deepen our understanding about our phenomena by providing greater detail and context that explains superintendent perceptions about charter school competition and its impact on district decision-making. We developed three clusters of questions and probes in our interview questions. We designed the first cluster of questions to explore the perceptions, attitudes, opinions and beliefs of superintendents about
charter schools in general, and the ways or degree to which charter school competition exists.

While the QUANT tool (the survey) already asked superintendents to rate their perception of the impact of charter schools on their districts, our interviews asked participants to describe impacts, provide examples, and narrate experiences over time.

We designed the second cluster of questions on the interview protocol to provide the context and details about the nature of the competitive pressure created by charter schools. Questions in this cluster asked participants how their districts are impacted by charter school competition, the types of students most or least likely to leave a district to enroll in charter schools, the reasons parents choose charter schools, and how the superintendent perceives the public perception of charter schools in his/her community. There were parallel questions in the QUANT tool, which provided ratings scales and perceptions of many (61) superintendents, while our QUAL exploration provided us with context, detail, and explanation.

We designed the third cluster in the interview protocol to explore the superintendents’ perceptions of the districts’ responses to charter school competition. This cluster provided an opportunity for superintendents to describe innovations or reforms they have undertaken and to describe if those have been in response to charter school competition or other reasons/influences. In this section we also asked superintendents to describe actions unrelated to instructional service delivery – such as anti-charter school advocacy, marketing of district programs, parent outreach, or organizational changes. We designed corresponding questions related to these themes in the survey, which provided QUANT data that reflect superintendents’ self-reported actions; the interview questions in this cluster allowed us to identify if there have been innovations or reform efforts in the participants’ districts that are not perceived to be related to charter school competition as well as provided context and details about when actions are taken that are in
response to charter schools. Prior to executing our interviews, we pilot tested our protocols as described below.

**Pilot Test of Interview Questions.** The pilot testing of interview questions assisted us in determining if there were flaws or other weaknesses in the interview questions and in the overall interview process, allowing us to make revisions prior to the implementation of the study (Kvale, 2007). We piloted our interview questions with three superintendents during the month of October 2013 to assess the wording and neutrality of questions, their flow and logical consistency, and our ability to communicate questions in a clear, audible, and consistent manner. We sought feedback from our pilot participants and revised our original interview protocol based on their feedback as well as based on our experience with the protocol. We revised the wording, added probes, and removed or added entire questions based on our pilot test.

**Conducting Interviews.** We conducted nine in-person interviews. With participant consent, we used electronic devices to audio record each interview using Notability.

While our tool was designed with open-ended questions, we also used a set of follow up probes that we consistently employed as needed to deepen our dialogue with participants. We used probes “to clarify points or to have the interviewee expand on ideas. These probes varied from “exploring the content in more depth (elaborating) to asking the interviewee to explain the answer in more detail (clarifying)” (Creswell, 2012, p. 221). While we had a protocol, we also followed the lead of our participants as they responded to open-ended questions to ensure that they had the opportunity to say what they wanted to say about our topic and to avoid leading responses in a particular direction. We found that in many interviews, participants produced long responses to our initial open-ended questions that included points and statements that addressed multiple interview items.
Given our work with many districts, there were volunteers for interviews who had acquaintances or professional connections with members of our research team. When possible, we ensured that other team members conducted interviews with participants with whom one of us had a personal or professional connection, particularly when we identified that the connection may influence or hinder the responses from the participant. One of our researchers is the principal of a charter school; when a superintendent from that region was interviewed we purposefully did not include that research team member in the interview, but did disclose to the participant that this individual was part of our research team. Another member of our team is the executive director of an education service agency that is governed by a board of directors comprised of superintendents. One of the participant volunteers is a member of that board of directors; in this case, the scheduling and geography logistics required the participant with the professional connection to be a part of the interview pair as the other option would have been to have only one research team member conduct the interview alone. We decided that having a pair was more important to the integrity of the data collection, so the executive director did join the interview, but participated more as an observer and the other team member took the lead in this interview. In another case, a participant was the superintendent of the district in which one research member resides and to which that member’s children attend. Again, we determined that having a pair present for the interview was most important and that the connection to the district did not prevent the superintendent from responding thoroughly and openly to the interview questions.

We followed the ethical guidelines put forth by Creswell, with a particular focus on how the interviewees answered the open-ended questions. Considering the potential political nature of our conversations regarding the impact of charter schools on districts, we kept in mind the
advice of Creswell (2012), “participants give a great deal when they choose to participate in qualitative research topics....Participants may disclose sensitive and potentially distressing information in the course of the interview” (p. 232). We provided our participants assurance of our commitment to maintain strict confidentiality of the interviewees.

**Transcription and Coding of Interview Data.** All interviews were transcribed and then coded using Dedoose web-based software. We developed a set of codes to use in both the QUANT and QUAL portions of our study. Codes were initially designed as a start list, or a priori list, so that we could begin to categorize data from the very beginning and as a way to organize and design our data collection tools. As we implemented our study, codes were revised through each inferential stage to ensure that we had categories to capture unanticipated themes, trends, and findings. See the domain map in Appendix C for our codes.

**Analysis of Interview Data.** We used Dedoose web-based software to store, sort, organize, and analyze our QUAL data, and to assist us in developing themes, findings and conclusions. This was the second inferential stage of our sequential mixed study. As in the QUANT inferential phase, these analyses addressed all of our individual research questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). See Figure 3 at the conclusion of this methods section for a graphic display of our design.

As we conducted our QUAL inferential stage, we were interested in patterns or themes that emerged between interviews, participants, and across interview questions. The three clusters of interview questions were designed to correlate with specific research questions and align with survey questions as well. As in our QUAN inferential stage, we looked for themes and connections between items. For example, we looked for connections between the number and type of students leaving the district and the level of competitive pressure reported by the
superintendent; for connections between the reasons superintendents believe parents are likely to seek charter enrollment and the types of initiatives they undertake in the district for connections between the types of students leaving and the types of initiatives undertaken; for connections between the type or niche of a particular charter school, and the superintendent’s perception of that charter school.

Conduct Meta-Inference of Combined QUAN and QUAL Data. After we concluded our analysis of the interview data, we embarked on our third and final inferential stage, which brought the QUAN and QUAL analysis together through meta-inference (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). This was an opportunity to compare our findings and themes, identify if the results from the QUAL phase supported or explained the results in the QUAN stage, or if there were divergent findings. We triangulated findings where results in both stages confirmed or correlated with each other, and identified differences in findings where they occurred (Figure 3-2).
Figure 3-2.

Graphic Presentation of Sequential Mixed Design (adapted from Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006)
Quantitative Sample (Tables 3-1 to 3-3)

SURVEY: 69 responses – 61 with a charter school option
Sample size (n) = 61
5 out of 51 = Urban (defined by assigned to Urban Superintendents’ Network

Table 3-1

*Survey Respondents by Geographic Round Tables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Berkshire County</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut Valley</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Shore</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Colony</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Shore</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TriCounty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester County</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrimack Valley</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Response total = 61

Table 3-2

*Survey Respondents Student Enrollment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment of District</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 1,500 students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500-2,500 students</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,501-4,000 students</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,001-6,000 students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6,001-10,000 students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10,000 students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Response total = 61

Table 3-3

*Survey Respondents by Charter School Enrollment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Students in Charter School</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% to 2%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 6%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% to 8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% or more</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Response total = 61
Qualitative Sample (Tables 3-4 to 3-6)

38 superintendents provided qualitative data
   9 superintendents provided written responses to survey and participated in interviews
   29 superintendents provided written responses to open-ended sections of the survey (62% of survey respondents)

Table 3-4
Interview Participants by Geographic Round Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berkshire County</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut Valley</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Shore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Colony</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Shore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TriCounty</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester County</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrimack Valley</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total = 9

Table 3-5
Interview Participants by Student Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment of District</th>
<th>N</th>
<th># in Urban Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 1,500 students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500-2,500 students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,501-4,000 students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,001-6,000 students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6,001-10,000 students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10,000 students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total = 9; Total in Urban Network = 4

Table 3-6
Interview Participants by Charter School Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Enrolled in Charter(s)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% to 2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 6%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% to 8%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% or more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total = 9
Chapter 4
Statement of the Problem

In Ricciardelli (2014), my colleague described the perceptions of superintendents about the educational marketplace by exploring superintendents’ reports about enrollment patterns, types of school choice options available within a district, and opinions about funding formulas and state policies. As noted by Ricciardelli, many participants in our study expressed concerns that the educational marketplace in Massachusetts was unfair, that the legislative intent was not being realized, that parent choice options dilute the pluralism and democratic principles at the foundation of public education, and that the funding that follows students to charter schools is less than it costs to educate them. Building on Ricciardelli (2014), this chapter will focus specifically on superintendents’ perceptions of the types of students they perceive are most and least likely to enroll in charter schools and the reasons they believe parents are using when choosing to enroll in a charter school. I studied these areas to better understand if, as Maranto, Hess & Milliman (2001) found, “Some student losses are more influential than others” (p. 1110). The research reviewed in Chapter 2 suggested that districts may encounter more competitive pressure when high performing students exit to attend charter schools and, conversely, feel less competitive pressure when low performing students, or students requiring more support, exit to attend charter schools.

Within the charter school conversation there is great debate about the characteristics of students and parents choosing to enroll or remaining enrolled in charter schools and the impact of those characteristics on charter schools’ achievement results and the fairness of the funding mechanisms. Charter school opponents often reference social justice and equity issues, noting that charter schools have increased segregation, have drained districts of highly engaged parents,
have “cream-skimmed” higher achieving students, and have under-served (or “cropped”) high needs students, particularly those with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs). Opponents claim that charter schools often filter their parent and student population by creating conditions in which certain kinds of students or parents will be unaware of the choice option, or will be dissuaded from seeking enrollment, or, once enrolled, if they are unable to perform or require additional resources to serve, will be counseled to return to the traditional district (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Blackwell, 2012; Buckley & Sattin-Bajaj, 2011; Drame, 2010; Garcia, 2008; Garcia, McIlroy & Barber, 2008; Garcy, 2011; Lacireno-Paquet et al, 2012; Jessen, 2012; Wolf, 2011).

Proponents of charter schools argue that these criticisms are unfounded by empirical study, present yet another example of the traditional system creating excuses or justifying lower achievement results, and that the implementation of marketplace competition through charter schools is justified to rectify the reform-resistant bureaucracy, mediocrity, and complacency of the traditional public school system (Linik & Lubienski, 2013; Shealey, Thomas & Sparks, 2012; Zimmer & Guarino, 2013). Proponents argue that charter school choice, as in other marketplaces, will become more routine, more accessible and more consistent as the charter school movement proliferates and truly impacts public education reform (Hill & Lake, 2010). Although charter school supporters do not consistently dispute the lower enrollment of some groups of students—particularly ELLs and students with disabilities—these enrollment trends are described as being the result of faulty funding formulas more often than as a result of selective recruiting or admission policies of charter schools themselves. Some proponents claim that funding formulas in many states are insufficient to support high needs students and advocate for increased funding for these students (Hill & Lake, 2010; Stein, 2009; Zimmer et al, 2011).
As described in Chapter 2, the enrollment patterns at charter schools in Massachusetts have become a priority of policy and lawmakers in Massachusetts, as evidenced by the inclusion of a revision to charter school legislation in the passage of the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap in 2010, which included revisions to the Charter School Law-Chapter 79, Section 89 (2010). Particular revisions to the Massachusetts charter school law were designed to increase accountability within charter schools to serve previously underserved populations in response to the enrollment trends showing the under-representation of ELL and special education students in charter schools and reports of returning students to traditional public schools. As a result of the new law, charter schools were required to demonstrate outreach to high needs families and efforts to recruit and sustain enrollment of a more diverse student body, more representative of the demographics of the sending communities.

Now that charter schools have been in existence in Massachusetts for two decades, and four years after revisions to the charter school law indicate efforts to diversify the charter school population, the question remains: Are charter schools exerting competitive pressure on traditional public schools in ways that spur competition for all students or just some of them?

**Research Question**

Our overarching research question asked, *How does a superintendent’s perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school in her/his district impact the development of district innovation?* To answer to our research question, we needed to better understand the characteristics of competitive pressure facing superintendents when students leave their districts to enroll in charter schools by asking: *How do superintendents describe the characteristics of students and parents within the competitive marketplace?* There is little in the literature that explores the perceptions of superintendents about the kinds of
students or parents leaving (or not leaving) and the influence of those perceived patterns on the competitive pressure they report, in turn influencing how they report responding or interacting with charter schools in general or within their community. My research contributes to this literature.

**Individual Inquiry Question**

My individual research centers on the following question: *What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in Massachusetts?* To answer my research question, the following sub-questions were explored:

- What kinds of students exiting create more or less perceived pressure?
- What are the conditions in districts or characteristics of charter schools that increase or decrease competitive pressure and influence efforts to collaborate or compete?
- What are the patterns in the types of student superintendents perceive to be leaving or not leaving, or leaving and returning?
- What are the patterns in the types of parents superintendents perceive to be seeking choice options and/or the reasons superintendents perceive parents are using when making those choices?
- How do these patterns influence superintendents’ perceptions of pressure and the degree to which superintendents report feeling the need to compete?

My contribution to this study focused on the superintendents’ perceptions of the characteristics of students, parents, school conditions, and specialization (or niche) of charter schools. My portion of the study explored relationships between percentage of students enrolling in charter schools, superintendents’ perceptions about the characteristics of students enrolling (or not enrolling) in charter schools, the reasons superintendents believe parents are
likely to use when making the choice to enroll children in charter schools, the perceptions of superintendents about the characteristics of parents who are more likely to explore choice options, and the perceived pressure reported by superintendents. I also explored superintendents’ self-reporting on the conditions in districts and characteristics of charter schools that increase or decrease pressure or increase or decrease collaboration between the traditional district and a charter school. Lastly, I explored patterns in the types of students reported to be leaving and those reported to be leaving but then returning to the district, also known as “churn,” and the connection of that dynamic to the perceptions of charter school competition.

**Literature Review**

A full literature review can be found in Chapter 2 of this study. Research about the enrollment patterns in charter schools comparative to traditional public schools is mixed and complex—consistent with the research on charter schools in other domains of study. Studies range from concluding that charter schools disproportionately serve high performing and/or more advantaged students, to concluding that charter schools disproportionately serve high needs or racially and/or socio-economically homogenous populations, to concluding that aggregate studies mask individual discrepancies that are more influenced by the type and behavior of charter schools than by the tenets of school choice at the heart of the charter school movement. Further, while it is consistently noted throughout the research that charter schools generally serve proportionately fewer students with disabilities and that those students with disabilities they do serve are less severe than those enrolled in traditional public schools, the reasons, rationale, and implications for these enrollment trends vary greatly in the research (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Garcia, 2008; Garcia, McLlroy, & Barber, 2008; Miron & Nelson, 2002; Zimmer et al., 2011).
Hill & Lake (2010) argue that charter schools are unfairly criticized for serving either too many or too few high needs students—either too high a proportion of minority students failing to achieve racially mixed schools or creating self-selection dynamics as they are accessed by families of privilege who are more likely to take advantage of choice. These authors argue that more time is needed for charter schools to perfect their craft and that through the market a good product will attract and better serve all students. Disparities and segregation are important social justice problems to solve, but not ones that charter schools can solve on their own—as these conditions exist in the traditional system as well. The authors contend that funding formulas and policies in many states further exacerbate the underrepresentation of high needs students.

If schools of choice (e.g. charters) are allowed to handpick advantaged students, or if they get so much less money than other public schools that they can’t afford to take hard-to-educate children, choice can increase segregation. But, if schools are required to practice fair admissions and are equitably funded, and if local governments make sure poor parents know about available choices and locate schools where low-income families can reach them, segregation is much less likely (Hill & Lake, 2010, p. 234).

Buckley & Sattin-Bajaj (2011) studied enrollment trends between 2006-2008 in New York City and concluded that ELL students were consistently underrepresented in charter schools, while some low income students (reduced-priced lunch) were overrepresented but more intensely low-income students (free lunch) were disproportionally represented. The authors propose three possible factors that may contribute to the underrepresentation of ELL students: 1) location may have some impact, though other considerations complicate this; 2) parent awareness of choice options was influenced by a complex set of cultural and linguistic barriers to information about school choice; and 3) the lottery system creates a false sense of equal access;
charter schools are not intentionally excluding special populations, but silence and lack of outreach are likely intentional because these students are more expensive and harder to educate.

Lacireno-Paquet, et al (2002) contend that viewing enrollment trends in the aggregate has masked patterns that yield more conclusive implications for charter school policy. The authors note that because some charter schools “cream-skim” (catering to higher achieving students and/or more privileged families) and “crop” (discourage high needs students from enrolling or return underperforming students to their traditional school district) while others target high needs populations-the aggregate enrollment trends “wash out” (p.155). Their study sought to unravel the nuances in the enrollment trends of various charter schools in Washington D.C. by studying the characteristics of the charter schools themselves-classifying them as either “market-driven” or “nonmarket-driven” and then comparing the enrollment trends in the two groups of charter schools. Lacireno-Paquet, et al identify “market-oriented” charter schools as exhibiting organizational behaviors that include entrepreneurship, profit, or goals to expand, and are more likely to be sponsored by entities external to a local community. They identify “nonmarket-oriented charter schools” as exhibiting organizational behaviors that are grounded in more mission-driven goals designed to fill a local need, that are community-based, and that are more likely to be sponsored by entities that originate from within the community to be served. The authors found that “market-driven” charter schools are more likely to behave in ways that “cream-skim” high performing students who are least burdened by disadvantages and “crop” high needs students, while “nonmarket-oriented” charter schools are more likely to serve a disproportionate rate of high needs students. The authors conclude that “cropping” was more prevalent than “cream-skimming” in market-oriented charter schools, “If market-oriented schools are differentially pursuing relatively less-disadvantaged populations, it is …by cropping
off service to students whose language or special education needs make them more costly to educate” (p. 155).

Linick & Lubienski (2013) also describe distinctions between varying types of charter schools categorizing three types: 1) conversion schools (similar to Horace Mann Charter Schools in Massachusetts that are created through a contract with the local school committee and a charter school organizer, more fully described in Chapter 2), 2) market-driven (often operated by for-profit entities or non-profit charter enterprises that operate in multiple locations), and 3) mission-driven charter schools (serving a unique purpose or niche). Linick and Lubienski (2013) conclude that the three types of charter schools exert varying pressure on traditional public schools noting that “conversion” schools exert less pressure while mission-driven and market-driven charter schools generate more pressure. They also note that smaller districts are more vulnerable to competitive pressure because each individual student leaving to enroll in a charter school has a greater proportional financial impact.

The “cropping” dynamic noted by Lacireno-Paquet, et al (2002) describes both the behaviors at a charter school that discourage high needs students from enrolling in the first place and the return of high needs or underperforming students to their respective traditional public school district-otherwise known as “churn” or “push-out.” Zimmer & Guarino (2013) found no empirical evidence that charter schools in a large urban district were “pushing out” low-performing students. While descriptive statistics indicate that students exiting charters have “slightly lower achievement results than their former peers, the same holds true for [traditional public schools]” (p. 475). These authors “find little evidence that low-performing students are more likely to transfer out of charters than [traditional public schools]” (p. 475).
The “cream-skimming” dynamic described by Lacireno-Paquet, et al (2002) indicates that some charter schools catered to more advantaged parents (or less disadvantaged) thus impacting the types of students likely to enroll in charter schools. Butler et al., (2013) examined the role that parental socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity play in the school enrollment decision-making of parents in Chicago. The authors found that choices were, overall, race and ethnicity neutral, but that charter schools attract families with higher socioeconomic status than those that traditional public schools attract. They also found other similarities that were consistent with factors associated with private school choice. The authors identified implications for policy-makers to focus on broader socioeconomic diversity through charter authorization, access to transportation, and outreach to socioeconomically diverse parents.

Garcy (2011) found that students with disabilities who were enrolled in charter schools in Arizona were those with less intensive and less costly needs. Students with more severe, more costly needs were unrepresented in Arizona charter schools. Jessen (2012) found that special needs students had limited options and choices despite the proliferation of school choice options in New York City. The author found that smaller school choice options often lacked the resources and expertise precluding them from being a viable option for specialized populations and that schools of choice “engage in practices that deter higher needs students from applying (p.458).” Jessen argues that because schools of choice are often smaller schools that are not designed to support a range of students, special education students remain concentrated in only the largest institutions-leaving them no choice in their school options at all.

Blackwell (2012) studied the representation and education of students with disabilities in charter schools between 2005 and 2010 in Massachusetts and found that “Massachusetts’ charter schools enroll a notably lower percentage of students receiving special education services than
the public school districts in their host communities” (p. 81). Blackwell also found “discrepancies between charter schools and school districts in the types of disabilities present in their respective student populations” (p. 82). Drame (2010) found that charter schools in Wisconsin experienced significant challenges in addressing the needs of special education students both in the design and implementation of their schools. Wolf (2011) found that New Orleans charter schools enrolled significantly fewer students (6%) with disabilities than the traditional school district (10%), and concluded that the discrepancy was “likely caused by instances of students with disabilities being dissuaded from enrolling in charter schools” (p. 389) through either overt or discrete counseling out, and that when charter schools did enroll students with disabilities, they were less equipped to appropriately evaluate and support those students.

Angrist, et al. (2012) studied the enrollment patterns at KIPP Lynn compared to the traditional district of Lynn, Massachusetts. According to the authors, 20% of Lynn’s students are categorized as Limited English Proficient (LEP) or Special Education (SPED) and note that the enrollment percentages at KIPP Lynn are consistent with those of the traditional public school district. The authors also studied achievement gains of all students and subgroups and concluded that LEP and Special Education students showed the most growth within the student body at this charter school. Buckley & Sattin-Bajaj (2011) found that “more and more charter schools are being established with an immigrant and ELL student population in mind.”

Shealey, Thomas & Sparks (2012) conclude that, similar to other overarching reform efforts, the service to students with disabilities in charter schools is an evolving field, with hope that through more collaborative inquiry, enrollment, and support to students with disabilities, charters schools will improve. “Charter schools, a fairly new and growing phenomenon in public education, offer the promise of an alternative to the status quo. Like other general education
reform movements, the implications for learners with disabilities and their families is addressed after policies and procedures have been developed that fail to take into account the complexities of special education” (p. 22).

Overall, research continues to be mixed and highlights the complexity of studying enrollment trends in charter schools. Aggregate studies can yield some overarching conclusions but may mask specific trends in states and local communities or between types of charter schools. Studies that are more narrowly focused on a particular type of school or local community, or a particular type of student or parent, sometimes are too narrowly focused to impact generalizable conclusions. Consistently, however, it appears within the research that the debate about whether or not charter schools disproportionately serve high achieving or high needs students is centered on the principle that certain kinds of students are easier and less costly to educate than other kinds of students. Within the educational marketplace, these students (all of them) are at the heart of the competition for resources because the funds that flow to both charter schools and traditional public schools are a direct result of how many and what kind of students are enrolled in them.

Methods

A full discussion of the methods employed during our study can be found in Chapter 3. Unique to Chapter 4, I analyzed both quantitative data (from our survey) and qualitative data (from open-response survey questions and from structured interviews) to support my conclusions.

Quantitative data for my study were generated from our survey of Massachusetts superintendents with a narrowed focus on two survey questions, in particular. The first question asked superintendents to identify their perception of the likelihood of groups of students (ELL
students, Students with Advanced MCAS Scores, Special Education Students, and Students qualifying for Free or Reduced Lunch) to enroll in charter schools—using a four-point weighted rating scale of “Not Likely At All” (weight = 1) to “Extremely Likely” (weight = 4). The second survey question asked superintendents to identify their perception about the frequency with which parents use particular reasons when making the choice to enroll a child in a charter school—using a four-point weighted rating scale of “Rarely” (weight = 1) to “Most of the Time” (weight = 4). The results from these two survey items were cross tabulated with other survey items—including two survey items that gathered descriptive data related to size of district and the percentage of students from the district who are enrolled in charter schools.

Qualitative data for my study were generated from open responses on our survey and responses to our semi-structured interviews. Open-response survey items and interview transcriptions were coded for use in all three of our studies. Specific to my study, I conducted analysis of qualitative data coded in categories that related to types of students, reasons for choice and characteristics of charter schools and districts. I examined excerpts from qualitative data that had been coded for type of student, type of parent, choice reasons, niche or specialization of charter school, duplicating services or filling a gap, churn or cropping, cream-skimming, and equity or diversity to support my contribution to our study.

Quantitative Results

Perceptions of the Likelihood of Certain Types of Students to Enroll in Charter Schools

Overall, using a weighted average of the four-point rating scale (Not Likely at All to Extremely Likely), results from the survey indicate that superintendents perceive students with advanced MCAS scores to be more than twice as likely as ELL students and nearly twice as likely as Special Education Students and Students Qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch to
enroll in charter schools (Table 4b-1). A review of data isolating for lowest likelihood rating, “Not Likely at All,” indicates that 54%-70% of respondents perceived ELL students, Special Education Students, and Students Qualifying for Free or Reduced Lunch were “Not Likely at All” to enroll in charter schools. Isolating data for the highest likelihood rating, “Extremely Likely,” reveals similar patterns: 0%-2% of respondents perceived that ELL Students, Special Education Students, and Students Qualifying for Free or Reduced Lunch were “Extremely Likely” to enroll in charter schools, while 37% of respondents perceived that Students with Advanced MCAS Scores were “Extremely Likely” to enroll in charter schools.
Table 4b-1

Superintendents’ Responses about the Likelihood of Types of Students to Enroll in Charter Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of students</th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Minimally likely</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Extremely likely</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Meals</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced MCAS Scorers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Survey text: “Please rate your perception of the likelihood of the following groups of students to enroll in charter schools.”

\(^a\)Mean calculated using weighted scores: Not likely at all =1; Minimally likely=2; Moderately likely=3; Extremely likely=4.
To explore if there were any differences in perceptions based on size of district or percentage of students leaving, responses to the survey question about the likelihood of students to enroll in a charter school were cross-tabulated with size of district and charter school enrollment percentages (Tables 4b-2 and 4b-3). Results indicate that, overall, there is little variability in the reported perceptions of superintendents based on size of district or percentage of students enrolling in charter schools. It is interesting to note that as the size of the district increased, superintendents reported an increased “likelihood” response for all four types of students, and superintendents from the largest four districts in the study reported feeling that special education students and students qualifying for free or reduced lunch were more likely (though still minimally to moderately likely) to enroll in charter schools compared to respondents from smaller districts. Results indicate that, overall, there is more variability in the reported perceptions of superintendents based on percentage of students enrolling in charter schools—particularly with regard to the perception of the likelihood of students with advanced MCAS scores to enroll in charter schools. Superintendents reporting less than 1% of students enrolling in charter schools reported that advanced students were minimally likely to enroll in charter schools. Superintendents reporting 1-2% of students enrolling in charter schools reported that advanced students were “moderately likely” to enroll in charter schools. Superintendents reporting 3% or more of their students enrolling in charter schools reported that advanced students were “moderately” to “extremely” likely to enroll in charter schools. These results indicate that as the percentage of students leaving a district to enroll in charter schools increases, superintendents also report an increased perception that advanced students are extremely likely to be the students whose parents have made that choice.
### Table 4b-2

**Mean\(^a\) Responses about Likelihood of Types of Students to Enroll in Charter Schools by Enrollment of District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Size of District</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>ELL</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Free/Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Advanced MCAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1,500 students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500-2,500 students</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,501-4,000 students</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,001-6,000 students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 6,000 students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Respondents</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Survey text: “Please rate your perception of the likelihood of the following groups of students to enroll in charter schools” cross-tabulated with enrollment size of district.

\(^a\)Mean calculated using weighted scores: Not likely at all =1; Minimally likely=2; Moderately likely=3; Extremely likely=4.

### Table 4b-3

**Mean\(^a\) Responses about Likelihood of Types of Students to Enroll by Percentage of Students Enrolled in Charter Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Students in Charter Schools</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>ELL</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Free/Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Advanced MCAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%-2%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%-4%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Respondents</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Survey text: “Please rate your perception of the likelihood of the following groups of students to enroll in charter schools” cross-tabulated with percentage of district students enrolled in charter schools.

\(^a\)Mean calculated using weighted scores: Not likely at all =1; Minimally likely=2; Moderately likely=3; Extremely likely=4.
Perceptions of parent reasons for choice

As discussed in Chapter 2, although students are the “consumer” of public education services, they are not typically the “chooser” in the competitive marketplace. Parents exercise charter school choice for a variety of reasons. In our survey, we asked superintendents to report their perceptions about the frequency with which parents used a variety of reasons in making the decision to choose a charter school over their school district—using a weighted average of the four-point rating scale (Rarely = 1 to Mostly of the Time = 4). The results to this survey prompt are displayed in Table 4b-4. Using the weighted average of the responses to this survey prompt, the respondents rated parent perception that the charter school was a more “elite” option as being used with greatest frequency by parents seeking enrollment in a charter school, followed by a particular philosophy or approach to education, having a choice or alternative, and the availability of a specialized program at the charter school, respectively. Although charter schools were designed to offer parents the opportunity to “vote with their feet” when achievement results in a traditional district were unsatisfactory, the respondents to this prompt rated district achievement results as being the third least frequently used reason by parents seeking enrollment in a charter school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>&quot;aMean&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geography or distance from home</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning time</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement results in your district</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Size</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement results in charter school</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized program</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a choice or alternative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy or approach to education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent perception that charter is more &quot;elite&quot;</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Survey text: “Please rate your perception of the frequency with which parents use the following reasons when choosing to enroll their son or daughter in a charter school.”

"aMean calculated using weighted scores: Rarely =1; Sometimes=2; Often=3; Most of the Time=4.
To explore if there were any differences in perceptions of parent reasons based on the percentage of students leaving, responses to the survey question about the perception of frequency parents use the higher ranking four reasons (noted above) when choosing a charter school were cross-tabulated with charter school enrollment percentages (Tables 4b-5). Results indicate that overall, there is little variability in the perceptions of superintendents about parent reasons based on percentage of students enrolling in charter schools with two exceptions. Superintendents from districts with more than 1% of students enrolling in charter schools report a much stronger perception that parents “often” to “most of the time” choose a charter school because they perceive it to be a more elite option—with a particularly high frequency rating on this prompt from superintendents of districts losing 3%-4% of their students to charter schools. Superintendents from districts losing 5% or more of their students to charter schools also reported a stronger perception that parents “often” or “most of the time” make a choice to enroll in a charter school simply because they have a choice.
Table 4b-5

*aMean of Superintendents’ Top Ranking Parent Reasons by Percentage of Students in Charter Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% in charters</th>
<th>Specialized Program</th>
<th>Philosophy/Approach</th>
<th>Having an Alternative</th>
<th>Charter is More Elite</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% to 2%</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5%</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Survey text: “Please rate your perception of the frequency with which parents use the following reasons when choosing to enroll their son or daughter in a charter school.”

*aMean calculated using weighted scores: Rarely =1; Sometimes=2; Often=3; Most of the Time=4.*
Consistent with the review of the literature in Chapter 2 and Cummins (2014), superintendents in Massachusetts responding to this survey perceive that advanced students are far more likely to enroll in a charter school than ELL, Special Education or Low Income students. Consistent with this notion of the types of students exiting, superintendents responding to the survey perceive that parents “often” choose to enroll a son or daughter in a charter school because they believe the charter school is a more elite option over the traditional public school district. The quantitative data collected through the survey provide a broad glimpse at superintendent perceptions in Massachusetts. These themes were further explored through analysis of the open response items in our survey and through conducting nine semi-structured interviews with superintendents-discussed in the next section. Through interviews and open response survey items, the qualitative data add more specific details to describe or contextualize some of the themes uncovered in the survey and also provide room for differing perspectives and narrative to shine through to strengthen our understanding of the topic.

**Qualitative Results**

**Perceptions that Charter Schools “Cream-Skim” High Achieving Students**

William, from Northtown—an urban district losing 1%-2% of students to charter schools—described a phenomenon he sometimes referred to as “draining the brain trust” and sometimes referred to as “creaming” in which several charter schools (with one notable exception discussed below) behaved in ways that attracted high performing students and/or parents who were more engaged. He described this “creaming” as largely occurring through attracting certain kinds of parents (noted below) but as having an impact on the types of students left in the public system. William framed this concern as an equity issue stating, “I honestly believe that charter schools contribute greatly to further widening the achievement gap.”
Mark in Stowville—a large suburban district losing 3%-4% of students to charter school enrollment—described the drain of high performing students from his district as being a result of the niche of the local charter school being particularly named Advanced Academy of Engineering. “It’s an advanced … academy. … Therefore the assumption is they only have students who are advanced. This becomes somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Mark went on to describe his opinion that public charter schools should not, as publicly funded institutions, be allowed to target a particular segment of the population as he believes is done by this advanced academy.

A survey respondent who did not identify his or her district wrote, “Charter schools lobby for the elite crop of students and make many promises, most of which they are not able to deliver.” Another survey respondent from a district losing 3-4% of students to a charter school wrote, “Annually we are losing over 2 million dollars to charter schools. The students leaving are typically already proficient or advanced as measured by MCAS.”

Eric, from Wincler—a suburban district losing 7%-8% of students to a charter school—described his response to a newspaper reporter who once asked him if he thought their local charter school, Regis, was “cherry picking through their lottery.” He stated that he couldn’t comment on Regis’ lottery protocol but there is a well-established public perception that may influence only parents of higher performing students to apply for the lottery. “The impression is that you have to be a top performing student to really function there. Not to get in; they can’t discriminate. But if you’re going to succeed there, you better be prepared to do a lot of homework – a lot of it – so the bell shaped curve is really skewed to the higher end.” He went on to state that this self-selection of higher performing students contributed to the charter school’s academic achievement results that further fuels the school’s reputation as elite. “You’re saying that ‘oh, we’re number one [in the region] when it came to MCAS results’ and ‘you’re
telling me that you’ve discovered the secret to high quality teaching?’ No, the reality is you have students coming into 9th grade …skewed to that upper end …[who are] already at goal or advanced. That’s my belief.”

**Perceptions that Charter Schools “Crop” High Needs Student**

A survey respondent from a district losing 3%-4% of students to a charter school described his frustration with the local charter option for his community-Regis. “By not providing transportation, poorer students are not able to attend. Low achieving students are forced back to their sending district, thus truly creating an elitist school in an area of excellent schools. [Our region] is not the place for public charter schools. All Regis does is weaken the pool of high performing students.” Another survey respondent from the same region wrote, “Our highest achieving students elect to attend Regis while ZERO of our low-income/Sp.Ed [sic] students elect to attend Regis.” Yet another survey respondent from the same region wrote, “Compare the percentage of their enrollment to local districts they draw from that are high needs–low income, ELL, special education.”

William in Northtown expressed concern that in some cases, he witnessed that charter schools were practicing both cream-skimming (recruiting/attracting high achieving students) and cropping (counseling out low-performing students—which he referred to as “rascals”). He said he recognized these organizational behaviors that he believes two of the three charter schools in his region display because he had been the director of a private school and had, in the role, exercised some of the same strategies. “I know about how we recruited some students. I know how I kept my population sterile. I knew how to move rascals on, without having it look like we moved a rascal on.”

William described that, like he did when he ran a competitive private school, these charter schools would deny having gotten “rid of them” because they could show that the parents
voluntarily “withdrew.” William’s description raised the distinction between “dropouts” (voluntarily leaving) versus “push-outs” (influence exerted by the charter school to convince a parent to withdraw). He went on to describe his intimate knowledge with these “push-out” tactics,

The withdraw tactics are often what I used in private education. They say, “Listen… the best thing for you is to go to public school because if you don’t you are going to be retained,” or “You will have a very difficult time for the rest of this year; why don’t you just get a new life for yourself by going back to the district?” And back they come. … So … they now have filtered their [student body] after they get them using tactics that are very similar to elite private schools.

William also described his opinion about the cycle created when charter schools are able to demonstrate high achievement scores that he describes as being a result of the charter’s “ability to front end a certain parent and then purge a certain student.” He went on to say, “I can’t do that. I can’t pick and choose. They say they are not picking and choosing but I’ve been in the business. I know what they do.”

When asked about special education students, William reported “Charter schools don’t take any of those kids. They might take a kid with an IEP that is easily accommodated, but they’re not taking an IEP … kid that needs a full-day nurse with them, or a kid who needs a full-day scribe. They just won’t take those kids.” When asked to clarify who it was that was being ‘returned’ to the district then, William stated that it is not the students with significant IEPs, because they are not enrolling there at all. He described his perception of students who were returning, “I don’t get the top of the class returning. I don’t get the middlers [sic] returning. We see the ones with discipline records and [poor] academic records returning. [Is it because] they don’t want to service the kids? They don’t want the problem in their building?” William
described his belief that the churn happening at the charter schools of low achieving students is happening deliberately so that the charter can maintain the public perception that they serve only elite students:

They can preserve their public image… by telling the rest of the parents, “See how clean our environment is? We got rid of William because William is a rascal. He is gone now, parents, so you don’t have to worry. He took a joint to school, or he stole a car on Friday, but you don’t have to worry… your kids won’t be near him anymore because his parents decided to pull him out of the school.”

An anonymous survey respondent also noted a perception that charter schools under-serve special education students, but also noted that he or she perceived that, when the charter did enroll students with higher level needs, they often needed support from the traditional school district to meet those needs. “[Our local] charter school deals only with students having minor special education needs and recruits the academically high performing students from the public schools. The charters also take a large portion of funding from the local district, yet look to us for support in many instructional and professional development areas of operation.”

Harrison, from Stoddard—an urban district reporting more than 9% of its students enrolling in charter schools—also described a perception that charter schools returned under-performing students to the school district. He stated,

Traditionally students return to public schools in the spring of their 12th grade year when they realize they will not be graduating from the high standards established by charter schools. Special education students and English language learners traditionally return to public school at a higher rate than others because they were told at the charter schools that they cannot be provided with “an appropriate program.” Students who have attendance or behavior issues return to the public schools vastly more often.
Harrison stated that he felt that choice options (both charters and vocational schools) had the ability to select their student population by virtue of being “unable” to program for them. He stated that one way to improve results was to have strong instruction; he described another way as being able to “to select, not educate” going on to say that “charter schools are just one more way we select out the intelligent ones.” Later, Harrison described that charter schools may be able to show that they enroll some students with special needs - including special education and ELL students, but stated “All English language learners … and all special education students are not the same. … There are almost no charters that enroll a lot of ELLs, but even if they do have a high percentage of SPED kids they are in the low tier of services. Very low tier.”

Jonathan in Hillbury—a small suburban/rural district enrolling less than 1% of students in charter schools—reported what he called a “fatal flaw” in the implementation of charter schools. He described his perception that the charter school returned underperforming students to the district after October 1 enrollments (used to calculate funding) were counted. He said,

I don’t know how it happens, but I have firsthand watched the return of special needs students from the local charter school back into the local public school system and … surprise, surprise! It always happens in early October but not the end of September. … After the headcount is done … and then, “Oh, sorry… we can’t serve this kid.” And they essentially dump him or her back in my lap.”

Later, when asked to describe the kinds of parents who might make the choice to enroll their child in this charter school, he stated that the experiential learning philosophy of the charter was a model that could likely benefit students who needed a different setting and, in particular, some students with special needs. However, “once they find out that [the students] need a paraprofessional or they need some kinds of specialized support… then all of a sudden there’s a problem.”
Keith, from Nottingham—a suburban district reporting fewer than 1% of students enrolling in a charter school, generally did not have current first-hand experience with competition from charter schools or impact on student types or demographics. Despite a lack of current pressure faced by his district as a result of a charter school, he echoed the perception of his colleagues, stating that there are “some bad examples … where charter schools don’t … take the same number of special education students.”

Matthew, from Highton, reported both in the open response survey prompt and in an interview that he is quite concerned that students are returned to the district from the charter school. In the survey, he wrote, “There does exist a pattern of taking students and sending them back if it does not work out – deal-making along the lines of ‘you can stay here and repeat ninth grade, or you can return to your home district as a tenth grader.’” In our interview, Matthew stated, “There seems to be no question that they send kids back. And I don’t mean ‘kids come back’ which is very natural occurrence. I mean they de facto send kids back.”

Mark, from Stowville, reported that he does not see the same pattern of students being returned to the district from the advanced charter school. He explained that he felt the self-selection of parents prevented parents of students with disabilities or other learning challenges from applying for admission in the first place. “As a parent you’re going to say, ‘well that school is not right for my child because that’s an advanced school.’”

Eric, from Wincler, offered a slightly different perspective on the enrollment of very severely disabled students at charter schools. He said,

“…If you look at a district that receives a lot of circuit breaker funding—that’s an indication that they have a lot of kids that are very high cost and with a lot of severe needs. You’re not going to see that at a charter school. And I’m not saying that you should because I’m not sure they have all the resources. When I was [at private school], I
had some wonderful families coming saying “can you help me?” and I’d say “I’d love to, but the needs that your child has, we’re just not geared up to deal with … I can’t offer you the same resources that the public schools can.” That was just being honest with them.

**Perceptions that Charter Schools Appeal to Certain Kinds of Parents**

Frank, from Paulberg, indicated that the reasons parents put their child in a charter school vary greatly-ranging from protecting a child who had been bullied, to having a bad experience with a particular teacher, to wanting to send their child to a school with less diversity – referring to this last option as “white flight.”

Harrison, from Stoddard, described parents likely to choose charter schools as being more “involved.” He elaborated,

Any voluntary school that has an affirmative process to sign up for attracts parents who are more involved in education … simply because they have to take steps to find out about it, [including] go to meetings. Charter schools have parent requirements that that are illegal for me… [such as] you have to go a meeting once a month, you have to be in school three hours a month to volunteer. I can’t do that.

Northtown’s William stated,

Charter schools have a cream population. Not necessarily the brightest student, but what they cream is the parent who has the knowledge to know and understand and believe that a choice option to a school or charter is a better thing to do. The mere fact that that parent is cognizant enough to do that tells you something about the family’s appreciation of education. So if… all these folks … are sold to the fact that a charter school is doing more and actually go… if we iterated that… public schools will be left with all the
dysfunctional families and all the kids whose parents don’t have the wherewithal to
[make those kinds of choices.]

William went on to say, “Charter school parents, many of them, are parents who had their
kid on their lap and were reading to them. The ones who are left behind are the ones who
didn’t have a book in the house.” He described that two charter schools in particular are
appealing to a particular kind of parent without offering any real difference in services.
“Moving a kid to Milltown Academy or Achieve … offers them nothing more [than the
district] other than being around parents who have been creamed in the same way as they
[have been].”

An anonymous respondent to our survey, who stated that he is now leading a rural district
with limited exposure to charter school competition, wrote of his experience in a previous urban
district:

The Commonwealth Charter Schools [sic] in that case were benefitting mainly middle
class parents who did not want their children attending “bad” (read: many poor children
as students) public schools where the population was “not like” the persons sending their
children to a charter school. If I may use a baseball metaphor: …Charter schools start
with a 3-0 count for their student achievement goals: they have strong and persistent
parental buy-in, and they do not have serious behavior issues, whether related to
disabilities or otherwise. The challenge of educating a child with the advantage of
engaged parents, no matter how demographically “disadvantaged” the child is, is simply
not as great as it is for regular public schools.

Eric, from Wincler, described his experience that community members view Regis
Charter as an elite option and that because there are so many more applicants for admission than
the charter school has seats, applicants will line up on the day of the lottery eagerly awaiting the
results. He described elation from parents if their child’s name is drawn, and tears and sorrow if a child’s name is not drawn. “Parents seem to believe that if you get into Regis … you are all set for whatever college you want to go to.” He described running into a parent in the community who recognized him and told him her daughter had had a wonderful 9th grade year at Wincler the previous year. He asked her how she was doing in 10th grade, and the mother informed him that she was at Regis now and went on to describe that she had been waitlisted in 9th grade, so when she got in as 10th grader she enrolled in the charter. Eric described this as one of the failed notions of the charter option: here was an example of a well-performing student who was satisfied with her local public school, but because of the perception that the charter school was more elite and increased her chances of success later, she still left the district.

Jonathon, from Hillbury, reported a different perspective about the local charter option available for his district, which he described as having minimal impact on the district. He stated that the charter school did not have much credibility in his community and was certainly not perceived as an elite option. He reported that, instead, the kind of parent drawn to pursue enrollment at the charter school—an experiential learning themed middle school—was more likely to be those parents who were attracted to an outward bound, alternative education concept. Jonathan searched for a way to describe these parents, and he said it wasn’t the best category but a descriptor that came to mind was “earthy, crunchy.”

Gloria, from Wheatfield, a suburban community with less than 1% of students enrolling in charter schools, reported a perception that there was an unfair market for her colleagues with more direct competition from charter schools. “[Special education] is a real challenge for districts—urban… suburban… overall—to serve the needs of all kids appropriately. When charter schools—although I know it is denied—have the ability in one way or another to restrict access to their schools and then you’re [using] testing data to [compare results. That’s fair (sarcasm).]”
Perceptions of Segregation and Homogeneity

Many superintendents expressed concerns that charter school enrollments are serving to divide student populations. Some superintendents referenced segregation and framed this in term of concerns about equity, while other superintendents framed this in terms of parents making choices because of a desire to send their students to a “homogeneous” setting. Homogeneity sometimes referred to “ability level,” as in the examples used by Mark from Stowville when referencing the appeal of the “advanced” charter school in his region and by Eric when referencing the appeal of Regis as an elite, college preparatory high school. In other cases, participants used “homogeneity” to refer to specific ethnic groups or cultural values.

An anonymous survey respondent stated that because the charter school enrolls “students who are typically proficient or advanced” and that this superintendent believes “this is leading to further segregation in our public schools.” Keith, from Nottingham, a suburban district with very few students who leave for charter schools, described his perception that, in other locations, parents are choosing charter options as a way to send their child to a more homogeneous school. “I think it’s a comfort…. ‘These are the peers I want my child to be surrounded by.’ … They’re looking for a different group of peers and a different setting. It would be the same to me as why you might choose a private school, or a Montessori school…. It may have the look of a private school without the cost.”

Mark, from suburban Stowville, described his support for parents making any kind of choice that represented a consideration of what they, as parents, believed was best for their child—including the regional technical high school, competitive private schools, and the local charter options. He described being concerned if parents were choosing a charter school because of a perception that the educational quality was more rigorous or better than his district’s schools and indicated that this would be a warning to him, as a district leader, that he needed to tend to the
quality or at least better demonstrating that quality. He described that a flaw in the current implementation of the 6\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} grade charter school in his region was that the name and mission of the charter represented a connotation that this school was only for advanced students. Because the district does not differentiate between honors and other tracks until 8\textsuperscript{th} grade, Mark felt that some parents were drawn to the “Advanced” charter school in middle school because “they felt their children needed to be in a more homogeneous grouping system … because the students there, in their mind, were elite students because they were going to an ‘advanced’ academy.” Mark wrote in response to a prompt on our survey, “It has been said to me on more than one occasion that parents who choose this charter see it as ‘getting a private school education without having to pay,’ and see the ‘advanced’ school as providing a more homogenous population relative to academic ability that they philosophically prefer.”

William, from Northtown, also noted a different kind of segregation/sorting that he believes is starting to take place as more charter school founders are creating charter schools that are designed to serve a specific cultural group or values. “There were a group of Northern European parents who started a [charter] school with a strict code of ethics and a strong science program. Their audience is not as diverse as it should be. What they have become is a school drawing a large population of immigrants from the Baltic States.” He goes on to state that the charter school has evolved into a vehicle to perpetuate a particular culture with public funds when, according to William, American public education and funds were founded on the democratic principles of pluralism and integration-designed to “pull us together as one… to feed all minds.” The trend of specializing populations of charters concerns William: “If it proliferates, [this trend] could develop in all kinds of ethnicities having different pockets of schooling and create a great cultural divide.” Consistent with William’s observation that some charter schools appeal to specific cultural/ethnic groups of students, one respondent to our survey
from a suburban district reporting 1-2% of students attending a charter school wrote, “The majority of our students attending our local charter school are Indian. If these students were to stay within our system, this group would be significantly higher in terms of enrollment.”

**Notable Exceptions to Other Perceptions**

Matthew, from Highton—a small urban district reporting 2%-3% of students enrolling in charter schools, reported that when looking at enrollment data, the charter school’s student population was consistent with the demographic data from the district with regard to racial, socioeconomic and disability categories. In particular, he noted that the charter school’s enrollment of students receiving free and reduced lunches was 51% (similar to the district) and their enrollment of students on IEPs was 18% (a little higher than the district). Matthew reported that the charter school choice presents less of a threat to integration and equity than inter-district school choice options in his neighboring public school districts. “[School choice] lets anybody in an urban area go to a wealthier, better funded, less diverse, less poor surrounding suburb.”

Matthew went on to talk about the inability of a district to influence parents who were making school choice decisions based on a desire to send their students to schools with peers more ‘like’ their children. He described their “largest school choice loser” as being an elementary school that included neighborhoods with multi-family apartments, low income housing, and projects east toward downtown and yet had single family homes of increasing size going west toward the next town. Matthew described that parents displeased with the diversity, opted out of the district now. Describing his resignation to the loss of these parents, he stated, “If you want to choice out, choice out. … If you don’t want your kids to go to school with poor kids… there really isn’t anything I can do about that.” He stated,

You know what, if you’re not comfortable with your kids going to school with kids who are brown or who don’t speak English as perfectly as your kids, or kids who live in a
housing project as opposed to a subdivision… I’m not really that interested in putting too much time into working with you or trying to convince you of the ill-advisedness of your worldview. I don’t agree with it. I put my money where my mouth is – my kids are here. There isn’t enough PR in the world to battle some of those deep-seeded reasons why people school choice out of a small urban district.

Frank, from Paulburg, described great respect for the leadership of one of the charter options for his small urban district which he described as enrolling and supporting all students – including those high needs students-using the phrase “our kids.” When asked about the use of the term “our kids,” Frank elaborated, “Jayne [charter school leader] and I talk about that all the time…. I can use the term ‘our kids’ because I have full belief that there isn’t a student that Jayne would keep out of [her] school. If a parent came to her and wanted to come in, she would take them in, unlike a lot of charter schools.” He stated that the district has collaborated with this charter school to support them in better serving special education students. “Our Special Education department has interacted with them a lot. They will often call our [Special Education] Director for advice and our [special education staff] go over there. Our kids go back and forth. … Sometimes it works out that the best thing that could happen to them is to go over there. Other times, it’s the other way around.” Frank later described the collaboration he experienced with Jayne when a special education student needed a different setting. He stated that although the law (at that time) did not require it, Jayne invited the district to participate in problem-solving and supporting the placement decision-making about the student and that they together looked at resources within the district and within the charter school to consider the best option for the student – rather than just sending out a referral to an out-of-district placement for which the district would have just received a bill. When asked if there was a particular type of student who was more likely to enroll at the local charter – Jayne’s school – he replied, “No, I
can’t. Because they’ve got them all: blue hair, punctures, piercings, tattoos, straight laced – you name it.” When asked if there were any groups of students who were least likely to go to Jayne’s school, he stated, “No. It’s a real mix. [That charter school] pretty much represents our population.”

**Choices Only Warranted in Failing Districts**

Many superintendents interviewed in our study stated that when a particular charter school was not addressing an unmet need, the existence of the charter school duplicated efforts while increasing costs and draining resources-talent and funds-away from traditional districts. In several cases, superintendents from high performing districts (with Massachusetts accountability designations of Level 1 or Level 2) expressed frustration and sometimes anger with the presence of a charter option for their students because they did not feel that a choice was warranted or justified. As Eric, from Wincler stated, “There is not one single failing school district [in our region]. If you said, ‘wow, there are kids who want to be electricians and plumbers and boat makers and there’s nothing [in our region], let’s form a charter school and call it ‘[Region] Tech’-I’d be the first one to say ‘That has a mission. That has a purpose. That fills a need. Do it.’” Eric criticized the policy makers and government officials for oversimplifying the success of a handful of charter schools. “The governor can say, ‘Our investment [paid off] because we have the number one high school in America.’ Yeah, well… is it in the middle of Springfield? Worcester? Lowell? No, it’s [in our region]. Give me a break.”

Several suburban superintendents felt that charter schools (or choices) could and should serve a role in large urban centers or to address failing schools in general. Eric from Wincler stated, “Why shouldn’t they [disadvantaged students] have the same opportunities that my kids - in a community where you couldn’t find a home for less than a million dollars - have? Why should there be that gap?” Eric referenced his previous work in another state, Connecticut, in
which he believed the magnet school model was a better, more equitable and more justified model of school choice than the way choice is being implemented in Massachusetts. Eric described the magnet school model as providing high quality specialized options for students from urban communities and wealthy suburban communities while addressing the problem of racial isolation. Eric said,

To me that made sense…. it was to bring students that were part of what were, by state testing results, classified as failing schools [by providing] a mechanism that would move them into an environment where they could interact with [suburban peers]…. with a well-structured curriculum in a building that is well designed. …. If we were talking about magnet schools in Worcester or Lowell or Springfield or Boston – or other priority districts … I could support that.

Jonathan in Hillbury, a small rural/suburban district reporting fewer than 1% of students enrolling in charter schools, described his opinion that charter schools may serve as an important alternative in urban settings. “I see charter schools as an alternative for urban students.”

**Different Perspectives Offered by Urban Superintendents**

Frank, from Paulburg, offered a counter perspective from the lens of an urban superintendent working hard to counteract the loss of revenue and damage to reputation his district is facing as consequences of charter school and school choice competition. “When I look at some of my fellow superintendents… I’m not saying they don’t work hard; they do… but they are not having [sic] to fight perceptions. They are not having [sic] to fight the opening of a charter school. They are not having [sic] to do any of these things.” Frank described that in urban districts, like Paulburg, they often have to work harder to address the needs of all students and the achievement results are largely related to property taxes and resources and not necessarily because districts or teachers, in particular, are delivering high quality instruction. He
shared his own experience living in a wealthy, high achieving suburb. “My children went to [wealthy suburb] high school. Wonderful school system, but they had some lousy teachers. …If I talked about differentiat[ing] instruction, at that school it was ‘Get a tutor. I’m not changing what I do. I am teaching. You don’t get it? Too bad. Have your parent hire a tutor.”

Instances of Gap-Filling, Niche, Specialization and Impact on Sharing and Collaboration

Three superintendents of small urban districts described one particular charter school in their communities that did, in their opinions, strengthen their communities’ options—either because of success with a particular profile of student, or because of a mission to address particularly needy students, or because of a shared vision and philosophy that the charter and traditional district are partners together in serving the needs of all students.

William, from Northtown, described a local charter that he perceives to be filling a need and supporting the district (and other districts) in serving high needs students in ways that strengthen the community and the district. Unlike his experience with two other charter schools—described above—in which he reports “counseling out rascals” and “duplicating services” and “creaming,” William describes Asheville Academy as having a “a niche that is consistent with the original premise of charter schools.” He explained that Asheville “offers programs that are innovative and that districts can learn from” and that the school meets an unmet need in their community by serving students who would otherwise face imminent failure including drop-out. William stated, “That charter school is filling a niche that we, as a public district could not fill and as a result, I embrace its existence collaboratively and so do [the neighboring communities].” He described the target population as “highly troubled,” stating that the range of students supported by the charter school include high school students and young adults still enrolled in high school (ages 14-22), many of whom have their own children, many of whom have been incarcerated or “in trouble” in their sending school districts. When asked how the charter school
was able to support these students, he stated that they “find a way” and further described the innovations and flexible infrastructure they deployed to support these high needs students including offering daycare at the school, a dress code and otherwise very structured environment, and a longer school day with school open until 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. William stated, “They have taken an end: kids that would normally fall out of the system and likely be dropouts. … They … deal with a target population that public schools often forget.”

William described a different relationship with this charter school than with the other two charter schools available to students in his district. He stated, “I have an open, progressive association with them” and went on to describe that the charter school and sending districts jointly applied for grant funds. He also stated that the district employs some of the charter school staff as tutors within the district and that they have asked the charter school to provide professional development to staff in their district so that they can improve their practices with at-risk students. William stated that as a result of their collaboration with this charter school, the district had improved its own alternative education programs.

William stated that he views Asheville as one program within the continuum of public options and that administrators from the district willingly refer students for admission when they believe that the charter school can better meet their needs. He stated that the partnership with Asheville includes regular meetings with their senior staff that focus on how the districts’ students who are enrolled in the charter school are doing and to identify if any of those students are ready to return to Northtown. William stated that Asheville is a “public option that we willingly partner with . . . [because] they have a place and methods . . . that have helped us. … The public got something that we wanted and that we weren’t delivering – couldn’t deliver – in the traditional public school system.” When asked how the charter was able to do the things that Northtown and neighboring districts couldn’t do, William said, “Probably part of it is that they
live in a world that isn’t as union-bound…. I also think that when you hire into that system, you hire an individual who wants to work in that niche which is really mission-driven; such as helping kids … socially and emotionally as well as academically.”

When we asked William to connect a comment he had made earlier in the interview about charter schools reducing the “economy of scale” by “duplicating expenses” to his description of this particular charter school, William stated, “A charter like Asheville Academy is worth the replication of …heating and space bill[s] because you are getting a service that wasn’t provided in the public sector. [The two other charter schools available to Northtown] aren’t doing … more than we do…. Moving a kid to [two other charter schools], in my mind, offers them nothing more…”

When asked if William thought this relationship between Northtown and Asheville was unique or if there were other similar relationships in other communities, he stated, “I don’t think that it’s me. It’s Asheville…. All the superintendents from …five districts… have a complete respect for Asheville because of how we see them in the true mission of what a charter school is supposed to be. Be innovative. Come up with something we can’t do.”

Matthew from Highton – who was earlier described as viewing inter-district school choice to have a greater impact on his district than charter school choice-described the charter school available to students in his district as serving a particular group of students very well. He stated, “They do certain things very, very well. … [particularly] with students who might be on the Autism spectrum or have Asperger’s syndrome, or might simply be eccentric. [These students] were not finding a spot of fit in our schools or neighboring schools and I think [the charter] does extraordinarily well with those types of students.” When asked to elaborate on this specialization or niche, he stated, “Our school committee is pretty well convinced that Mountain Charter School’s success in taking away our kids is because they address bullying and this
district does not…. I don’t think it’s accidental that their niche is [educating] kids that many people would label as ‘eccentric’… a little more vulnerable [to bullying].’ Matthew went on to describe that he views the charter school as one option in a continuum and that when it seems that a student might have a better opportunity for success by attending “because they needed a new school and a new peer group” or because the charter school culture creates a safer environment for students vulnerable to bullying, his district willingly refers or recommends the charter school as an option. He also stated respect for the charter school’s executive director, calling him “brilliant.” When asked if they had learned anything from the charter school, Matthew stated, “I think we can learn from them on how they create this community that feels safe even for kids that have not felt safe or welcome in their school from day one of kindergarten…. They also have done an exemplary job in response to intervention … very methodical, well-planned out vision for how to measure and move forward. I think they are extraordinary at that. Those are two things that anybody could emulate.” When asked what he thought the most important issues to address in the next decade related to the relationship between districts and charter schools, Matthew said he hoped, in the future, that charter schools would be more open with their ideas and sharing of expertise and focus less on the competition side of the charter school debate. He also acknowledged that districts need to “get over ourselves” and recognize that there are some kids who are getting a “vastly different experience” in some charter schools than they would in the home district.

Paulberg’s Frank highlighted the leadership and vision of the charter school leader as creating a quality option within their community. As noted earlier, Frank believes that the director of the charter school, Jayne, works hard to create an inclusive environment serving their shared students - “our kids”-and that this philosophy and their success in achievement fosters a collaborative relationship. He stated, “Jayne’s school [ranked in the top 5] for their MCAS
scores this year. It was in the newspaper. I called to congratulate them. I told my high school principal, ‘find a time to go over there and talk to their teachers…[find out] if they are doing something we can learn from.’” He also described a collaborative effort to build each other’s capacity and share resources to benefit their shared student body—from the district providing special education consultation and training to the charter school sharing professional development seats. “Jayne told me she was doing a bullying workshop in December and had six extra seats and asked me, ‘do you want them?’ I sent it out to my principals and we filled the seats like that. It was free. That was a big plus.”

**Discussion**

Superintendents participating in our study report that districts are experiencing more competition when high achieving students leave the district to enroll in charter schools, thus diminishing the impact of ‘choice’ on supporting high needs students. Although the charter school legislation in Massachusetts changed in 2010 (MGL, Chapter 71, Section 89) to address the need for charter schools to increase enrollment of and support to ELL and Special Education students, superintendents are still reporting perceptions that charter schools do not provide equitable choice options for high needs students – particularly ELL and Special Education students. Superintendents’ perceptions confirm the fear of charter/marketization opponents that choice is being perceived as moving public education away from public good to private good – parents choose education that will best support their child’s needs as opposed to engaging in solutions that support the education of all children in their community.

Many superintendents report that the current landscape for charter school choice is perceived to draw high-achieving students of privilege supported by parents who are empowered to choose a charter school option as a result of having privileged knowledge, financial resources, or wherewithal to make the choice. Many superintendents report that this trend raises concerns
about equity, integration of diverse populations, and depletes the local resources available to districts to support the needs of all learners. Consistently, in both suburban and small urban communities, superintendents report that charter schools, as a whole, are creating competition for students but that the competition for students is largely centered on those students who are more likely to perform well if they remain in the traditional district or if they enroll in a charter school and who are perceived to be less costly to educate. These findings are conclusive in both the quantitative data collected for this study through the survey and through the qualitative data collected through open response survey items and interviews.

Although it is conclusive that, overall, superintendents report a general perception that charter schools are catering to higher achieving students and more engaged parents who seek charter enrollment often as a result of a perception that the charter is a more elite option than the traditional district, there were notable exceptions to this perception in three small urban communities. In Northtown, Highton, and Paulburg the superintendents described in great detail three particular charter schools which, by design or specialized niche or passionate and collaborative leadership, were meeting a need, filling a gap, and strengthening the ability of the district to support the needs of all students. In these three scenarios, the superintendents were able to describe district-charter school relationships that mirror the language in the charter school legislation and that indicate that the district had the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with the charter school, and that the charter school also had the opportunity to benefit from resources and expertise in the district. While all three of these charter schools represent differing models and likely different missions, consistently, in all three scenarios, it was noted that all students were welcome, integrated, and supported. In these three relationships, superintendents report a perception that the charter school did not cater exclusively to high-achieving students or students with more advantaged parents, but instead that they mirror the pluralistic focus of the
entire public education system – providing another option for publicly funded students to achieve success.

**Summary Statement**

This individual study built on Ricciardelli (2014), which explored the perception of superintendents about competition within the educational marketplace, by further exploring the types of students and types of parents superintendents report exert more or less competitive pressure on the district. This individual study drew conclusions that the types of students leaving a district do impact the feeling of competition. When high achieving students are perceived to be more likely to leave a district for a charter school, the competitive pressure faced by the district results in frustration, anger and feelings that the charter school movement in Massachusetts is unfair and undermines the public education system which is required to support the needs of all students. Conversely, when charter schools are perceived as complementing a district in supporting the needs of all students -“our kids” as Frank from Paulberg noted-the influence of charter school competition is collaboration, sharing of best practice, replication of innovation and as William from Northtown noted, “embracing” of the charter school as another public option. This individual study is complemented by Steedman (2014), which will build on the conclusions drawn in Ricciardelli (2014) and in this study, by exploring the types of initiatives superintendents report undertaking in response to charter school competition in Massachusetts.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Our research question sought to answer: How does a superintendent’s perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school in her/his district impact the development of district innovation? In Ricciardelli (2014), our research focused on superintendents’ perception of the education marketplace – ranging from enrollment trends to funding formulas and national and state policies. In Cummins (2014), our research focused on the perceptions of superintendents about the types of students most and least likely to enroll (or stay enrolled) in charter schools and the types of parents most likely to seek choice options and how those characteristics influenced the competitive pressure faced by traditional districts. In Steedman (2014), our research focused on the ways superintendents reported responding to the competitive pressure from charter schools – noting both innovative and not innovative reactions, and noting patterns in the types of parents/students particular innovations and actions appear to be designed to retain or attract. The following sections will demonstrate various ways in which perceptions of market pressure (Ricciardelli, 2014), nuances to the types of pressure experienced (Cummins, 2014) and actions taken by superintendents (Steedman, 2014) intersect revealing trends and patterns that lead us to overarching conclusions. In Chapter 5, overarching conclusions and patterns between our lines of individual inquiry are synthesized in pursuit of implications for district leaders, policy and practice, and future study. Table 5-1 displays the synthesis of findings in Ricciardelli (2014), Cummins (2014) and Steedman (2014).
Table: 5-1 *Themes from Chapters 4 (Ricciardelli, Cummins & Steedman) (Superintendents’ Perceptions and Reports)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts</td>
<td>Charter schools exist in a landscape of other choice</td>
<td>Lack of support for students with disabilities and other high cost students</td>
<td>Revamp/start programs to compete with technical schools; capital and technology improvements; Training for teachers to improve skills targeting specialized populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds</td>
<td>Enrollment/Funding implications; difficult decisions about staffing and programming</td>
<td>Types of students and parents leaving (“low cost” “high performing”) increases this pressure; budget cuts cause more to leave; other cuts affect other kinds of students</td>
<td>Pressure to keep certain kinds of students influences district’s innovative priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response of Superintendents to Parent Consumers</td>
<td>Parents (as consumers) are perceived to be making choices – but because they are not paying for it, it not a rational market</td>
<td>More engaged parents are making choices ; choices perceived to be to support private goals, not community needs</td>
<td>Specific programs targeting marketing, outreach and communications to parent community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Equity, Diversity and Priorities</td>
<td>Charter Schools serve to separate communities and decrease democratic principles</td>
<td>Underrepresentation of some populations; perceived homogeneity; focus on high performers</td>
<td>New program development seems to cater to high performing students (honors, AP, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Funding Formula and Implications</td>
<td>Fairness in charter market – funding formula unfair</td>
<td>Expense higher than the expense to educate charter choosers; charters serving high needs students results in less pressure and more collaboration</td>
<td>Advocating and taking active stance in opposing charter schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Realization of Legislative Intent</td>
<td>Implementation not as intended legislatively</td>
<td>Market does not benefit all learners</td>
<td>Funding formula disincentives collaboration and sharing of best practices as intended by legislation</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Conceptual Framework

Our overarching questions as discussed in Chapter 1 addressed whether marketplace competition from charter schools spurred innovation in traditional public districts. We hypothesized that the perceptions of some Massachusetts superintendents are influenced by the presence of a charter school as well as by other school choice options in their district and this, in turn, impacted their perceptions of the competitive education marketplace. Our conceptual framework (Figure 1-1), attempted to convey how market pressure and charter school presence could influence how superintendents across the Commonwealth perceive this competition. Our survey and interviews have provided insight as to how superintendents have responded to this competitive pressure, mainly by allocating both human and financial resources in the name of innovation as a way to blunt the impact of these market forces.

Do superintendents feel the pressure of market forces from charter schools? The answer is yes. In our survey, we heard from 61 superintendents, approximately twenty-two percent of the Commonwealth, and there is indication that competitive pressure is felt. Our nine interviews produced specific times when a superintendent stated that s/he felt the presence of charter schools had led the superintendent to consider ways in which to respond to this market-based pressure.

Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts

All of the superintendents interviewed in the study acknowledged the presence of educational options to students within their respective districts in addition to charter schools. These options include inter-district school choice, regional vocational-technical, and private schools. While the focus of this study was on the competitive pressure of charter schools on public school districts, data from superintendents indicate that the competitive pressure they are experiencing emanates from a larger landscape of schooling options. Upon beginning our research we did not anticipate that the these other educational options and their competitive
pressure would be discussed by superintendents as extensively as they were, but given the
ingoing importance placed on them by many of the superintendents who were interviewed, the research
team felt compelled to report their effects. Among the most talked about non-traditional public
school public options is the Massachusetts Inter-District School Choice Policy.

The inter-district school choice option as provided for in Massachusetts legislation
provides parents with the option of enrolling their child in a district that has opted into the
program. A number of superintendents acknowledged that the school choice program supports
the school budget by allowing it to fill seats vacated by declining enrollment. While some
communities have expressed concern about how opting into the school choice program would
affect their district, challenging economic times have provided the impetus for school
committees to opt into the program. Frank, the superintendent from Paulberg, acknowledged that
financially, the school choice program hurts his district more than the funding he loses from
charter school enrollment. He commented that, “It's probably in the neighborhood of 350
students to 400 students that choice out…it's like 1.5 to 2 million dollars out going annually.”

Superintendent respondents from wealthy communities reported that they feel more
competition from private schools than they do from charter schools. One superintendent
concluded that, “We are not losing money …the parents pay for that [private school education].”
Superintendents noted that they also felt competitive pressure from technical and vocational
schools, and that the marketing strategies were often very aggressive and in one case
disingenuous to students with regard to admissions.

In describing parental engagement in school choice, superintendents recognized the
importance of transportation access, which is often a function of geography and socioeconomic
status. Superintendents also reported that parents opt for private schooling because of legacy
traditions, and also because some parents feel that they need to place their children into different
schools so that they can have access to a highly individualized education. The changing socio-
demographics and the declining economy had a major effect on the ability of parents to pay for a
good that the public school was delivering. In Northtown, an urban area that has seen great
demographic change in the past 20 years, the superintendent reported that his community has
seen a dramatic reversal in the numbers of students who have opted to go to private schools.

Several superintendents expressed frustration over the ability of non-traditional public
schools to be selective in serving “high cost students.” One superintendent commented that, “if a
student in a wheelchair wanted to take welding in [the district school]…I have to find a way to
let that happen. That could be a $200,000 expenditure… but the regional [vocational school]
doesn’t…because there’s a fallback. There’s a mandated local education.” Frustration with the
lack of responsiveness by vocational schools and charter schools in serving students with special
needs was resounding.

In order to maintain student enrollment and compete within the landscape of school
choice options including charter schools, vocational/technical programs, inter-district choice, and
private schools, superintendents reported that they have been engaging in more assertive and
strategic marketing campaigns; they have undertaken capital improvements; they conduct
program and curriculum reviews on a periodic basis; and they have developed targeted programs
designed to address the needs and desires of their respective communities. The superintendent of
Stowville now requires his high school and middle school administrative staff to coordinate
efforts to provide students with presentations to eighth grade students about the district’s high
school program that is comparable to the local vocational/technical school’s “whiz-bang”
presentations. The superintendent of Paulberg has ended a tradition of sending all grade-eight
students on a field trip to the local vocational/technical school because of the disproportionate
number of “top students” the school tends to admit to their program. The superintendent of
Wincler reports having built a state of the art performance venue to compete with the schools
that have comparable facilities in that district’s geographic area including private schools and
Regis Charter School. The superintendent of Wheatfield reports that her district conducts rotating self-studies of curriculum and programs, and that they make field visits to other public districts and private schools to get a sense of the larger picture and the attributes that may need to be revamped or bolstered so that the district can remain competitive with private, and vocational/technical high schools. The district of Hillbury has established a unique language immersion program and a progressive Montessori program to attract the largely middle to upper-middle class population in his community to support district schools over primarily private and parochial school options.

**Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds**

Through the survey and semi-structured interviews we studied the topic of how superintendents perceive the effect of charter school enrollment on their districts, as discussed in Ricciardelli (2014). Table 5-2a below illustrates that among the respondents in the survey, 31% of respondents indicated that they perceived charter schools had a *moderate* or *major impact* on student enrollment in their districts. Additionally, 45% of them reported that charter schools have either a *moderate impact* or *major impact* on the district budget. Deeper analysis of these data yields the following predictable finding: the higher the percentage of students enrolling in charter schools, the greater the impact on district budget, district priorities and decisions, and the credibility/reputation in the district as is illustrated in Table 5-2b. For example, in districts where less than 3% of students opt to attend a charter school 10% of reported responses indicated that there was *moderate* or *major impact* on district priorities and decisions. Compared to districts in which 3-6% of students opt to attend charter schools, 35% of total reported responses indicated that it had moderate or major impact, and 75% of total responses of superintendents reporting a 7-9% enrollment percentage indicate a perception that there has been moderate or major impact on district priorities and decisions. Similar percentage point spreads exist among perceptions of effects on district budget and credibility and reputation above and below 3% thresholds.
We asked superintendents to identify one or more initiatives that they perceived had taken place as a result of charter influence in their district. Table 5.2c identifies the top four categories in which superintendents reported that initiatives had occurred broken down by enrollment percentage. Seventy-five percent of superintendents reporting a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had initiated changes in curriculum and instruction. Forty-eight percent of superintendents with a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had initiated changes involving marketing materials and/or strategic communications. Fifty eight percent of superintendents with a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had initiated capital improvements to buildings and infrastructure, and 27% of those with a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had designed specialized programs. As is shown in Table 5.2c, percentages are lower for superintendents reporting both a 0-2% and 7% and greater enrollment rate. The tipping point therefore with regard to initiatives appears to be within the 3-6% enrollment rate range.

Table 5-2a

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<th>Attributes</th>
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<th>Minimal Impact</th>
<th>Moderate Impact</th>
<th>Major Impact</th>
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<td>District Priorities or Decisions</td>
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<td>Credibility or Reputation of Schools</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages are rounded to the tenths and therefore may not add up to 100% in each row.
Table 5.2b
Superintendents’ Perception of Charter Schools on Various Attributes Having Moderate or Major Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents by Enrollment Percentage</th>
<th>District Budget</th>
<th>District Priorities or Decisions</th>
<th>Credibility/Reputation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0% – 2%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% – 6%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% – 9%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2c
Top Initiatives Reported by Superintendents by Enrollment Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiatives Reported</th>
<th>Enrollment Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum &amp; instruction initiatives</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing materials/strategic communications</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of specialized programs</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Survey respondents could identify multiple initiatives in their responses, and therefore percentage totals across rows do not equal 100%. Includes top four initiatives reported.

Table 5.3 Survey Responses: Likelihood of Advanced Students to Enroll in Charter Schools with Impact on District Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report of Charter School Impact on District Budget</th>
<th>Perception of Likelihood of Students with Advanced MCAS Scores to enroll in Charter Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Likely at All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Impact</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Impact</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Impact</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Impact</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although student enrollment certainly played a role in influencing the perception of the competitive marketplace, we found that the percentage of students leaving a district to enroll in a charter school may have less influence on how the superintendent experiences and reacts to that pressure than the type of students and parents reported to be most likely and least likely to leave. We found that superintendents in districts experiencing fewer than 1% of students leaving for charter schools reported perceptions based on reports from colleagues or based on previous experiences, but were not currently experiencing competitive pressure from charter schools. In some of these districts, however, school choice to neighboring districts, vocational schools and/or private schools were reported to be a greater source of competition for some districts with little charter school presence. We found that in both urban and non-urban communities reporting 1% -9% of their students enrolling in charter schools, many superintendents expressed that they felt competitive pressure exacerbated by the types of students leaving (disproportionately high achieving) and the types of students not leaving (disproportionately low achieving). We found that in three urban communities, with charter enrollment ranging from 1% to 4%, there were reports of collaborative relationships and sharing of ideas between a charter school and the district – influenced by what the superintendents in these districts described as specialized programs and/or compatible leadership and vision for educating all students.

Several superintendents expressed concern, with regard to fairness, that charter schools exist to serve only a segment of the population, and leave out students with special needs, English language learners, those with behavioral problems, and those without parents who are vested in advocating for their child’s education. One superintendent expressed that lack of oversight allows charters to cherry pick and churn students with special needs. Another superintendent put it succinctly when he said,

“If I may use a baseball metaphor, Commonwealth Charter Schools (again, proper noun or not) start with a 3-0 count for their student achievement goals: they have strong and
persistent parental buy-in, and they do not have serious behavior issues, whether related
to disabilities or otherwise. The challenge of educating a child with the advantage of
engaged parents, no matter how demographically "disadvantaged" the child is, is simply
not as great as it is for regular public schools.”

Another superintendent expressed concern that charters were “selective in not accepting
students with disabilities” and when students are diagnosed with a disability “they are asked to
return to public schools.” A common sentiment is that charters “are benefiting mainly middle
class parents who do (did) not want their children attending ‘bad’…public schools” where the
population was ‘not like’ the persons sending their children to a charter school.” Fairness and
equity was questioned by a superintendent who said, “Charter schools benefit greatly by not
having major budget drivers like mandated: Special Education tuitions, collective bargaining,
transportation expenses, & school committee and finance committee scrutiny.”

Matthew from Highton, a superintendent who describes himself as “not being a charter-
hater” acknowledges that charter schools serve a legitimate need and says that, “my well-
educated guess is that many students begin at the charter as a result of having been bullied, or
having perceived being bullied.” He believes that one charter school in his geographic area
serves this population of children well. However, this superintendent acknowledges that
“(there) exist(s) a pattern of taking students and sending them back if it does not work out—deal-
making along the lines of "you can stay here and repeat ninth grade, or return to your home
school as a tenth grader.”

A response from the survey shows frustration both in terms of the population of students
left in the “real” public schools and the funding mechanism. One anonymous respondent wrote
that he/she believed it contributed to the underfunding of “REAL Public Schools and skim off
the more talented students leaving school districts with the more challenging students to educate
with less funding. The superintendent of Stoddard comments that, “You know charter school
competition is simply an arbitrary, capricious fact of where somebody decides to set up their charter school.” He went on to describe what he had learned from colleagues in another region in which the competition from charter schools and private schools is particularly challenging for what he described as “poorer” districts in that region.

In the survey, superintendents were asked to identify the likelihood of different student groups to enroll in charter schools. Of the respondents, few indicated that they thought ELL students, special education students, and students that are recipients of free and reduced lunch would be *moderately likely* or *extremely likely* to enroll in charter schools. The response percentage for each of those student groups was 6%, 6%, and 5% respectively. The response percentage for those superintendents indicating that students with Advanced MCAS scores would be *moderately likely* or *extremely likely* to enroll in a charter school was much higher at 63%. We then delved deeper and viewed the specific initiatives undertaken by superintendents as a response to retaining students with higher achieving students as indicated by their Advanced MCAS scores (See 5-4). Of those superintendents indicating that change has occurred as a result of wanting to retain higher achieving students, the highest percentage of them, 41%, indicated that they have embarked on a program of strategic communications and marketing materials. Twenty-two percent of them report initiating specialized programs, and 16% report new curriculum and instruction initiatives.
Table 5-4:

*Perception of Likelihood of High Achievers to Enroll in Charter and Responses to Charter Presence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiatives in part influenced by presence of Charter</th>
<th>Perception of Likelihood of Advanced MCAS Scorers to Enroll in Charters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not likely at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New curriculum &amp; instruction initiatives</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications to school hours of operation</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launching of marketing materials or strategic communications about district programs</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications to work conditions for staff</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of specialized programs</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in pace or level of priority for initiatives we planned to do anyway</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the semi-structured interviews, the research team delved even further to learn about the specific marketing, specialized programs, and curriculum and instruction initiatives undertaken by district leaders to attract and retain these higher achieving students. All superintendents who were interviewed expressed the need for them to communicate their district’s merits and achievements to their respective communities. All could articulate specific marketing and or strategic communications they have undertaken over the past several years to counteract the competitive pressure they have been seeing from various out-of-district educational sources including inter-district school-choice, vocational/technical education, and private and parochial schools. In Northtown, Stoddard, Paulberg, Wincler, Stowville, Hillbury, Nottingham, and Highton superintendents reported that academies and/or specialized programs designed to address the needs of higher achieving students have been established.

Our initial results from 61 Commonwealth superintendents who filled out the survey, and from nine individual interviews seem to substantiate our initial hypothesis as represented in our conceptual framework, namely, that one component can influence the others without requiring a sequential relationship. We anticipated that the manner with which superintendents have experienced the pressure of charter schools also impacted how they perceived charter school competition, and how they react to that competition. The data collected substantiate this claim.

**Response of Superintendents to Parent Consumers**

Throughout our study, superintendents consistently identified parents as consumers in the educational marketplace. While some superintendents used market-based terms such as “consumer” and/or “market”, others described conditions consistent with marketplace features without using specific terminology. Mark, from Stowville, stated that in his district, students have the opportunity to go to a charter school that includes the word “advanced” in its title. Mark argues that in his case, parents are not participating in a “rational market” in which price
and product influence winners and losers. First, parents aren’t “footing the bill” and secondly, parents aren’t fully investigating the charter school’s achievement and outcomes. He perceives that they are choosing to enroll because there is an assumption that this is a school for “advanced” students. Similarly, Eric from Wincler reported the story of running into a mother of a sophomore who had had a “great 9th grade year” but still went to the charter in 10th grade because her name was pulled from the waiting list. Eric noted that this perception of long waiting lists and elite nature of a school influenced perceptions of opportunities available to students by virtue of enrolling in an elite school as opposed to being based on a negative experience at the traditional public school. Eric, Mark, and several others described this marketplace phenomenon as “getting a private school education” with public dollars. Since parents are not funding this choice, many superintendents argue that it is not a real market since parents go shopping for a choice with someone else’s (the district’s) funds.

Although superintendents report conditions that are inconsistent with a rational market, it was reported by more than half of the interviewees and survey respondents that certain kinds of parents were aware of and taking advantage of charter schools. These parents were described as “highly engaged” by one superintendent; another superintendent described them as parents who were likely to have “had their kid on their lap reading a book.” Several superintendents described parents who were likely to choose charters as being those who “are involved” or “care” about education, or simply who “know” about the options available to them. These parents were described – to varying degrees – as making a choice that they believed was best for their child. Some participants noted that this threatened to re-segregate schools if parents could choose to place their child in a school with other kids like him or her. Other participants noted that democratic principles of public education – to serve ALL students - was in conflict with the market-based programs; to paraphrase one superintendent, parents are often making a choice seeking the answer to the question, “What can be done for MY child?” while superintendents are
required to seek answers to the question, “What should our schools do for our ALL of our communities’ children?”

In addition to superintendents perceiving that a certain group of parents were being attracted to charter schools, most superintendents indicated that certain types of parents were left out of the market place. These parents were described as being unaware, uninformed, or unable to meet the parent requirements. One superintendent reported that charters could require school-day volunteering and attendance at meetings – reducing access to parents who could not afford to take time off from work, or for whom transportation or language was a barrier. Mark felt that the parents of students who were average or struggling learners would be dissuaded from even applying to the charter school saying, “That’s not for my kid; that school is for advanced kids.”

As noted in Steedman (2014), marketing, advertising and strategic communications were reported to be a prevalent response to charter school competition. Given the perceptions of superintendents about certain kinds of parents being drawn to charter schools, it is not surprising that superintendents have responded with outreach, public relations, and strategic communication – including advertising. Our study did not attempt to characterize the types of communications or the target audience for those communications. However based on other findings in Ricciardelli (2014) and Cummins (2014), we believe there is likelihood that communications may be targeting the parents of higher achieving students. Given that in Steedman (2014) we learned that superintendents perceive parents to be the choosers - or consumers - although not always based on rational market-driven reasons, and in Cummins (2014) we learned that superintendents largely believe that more engaged parents are likely to be making the choice to leave the district – it would be logical to assume marketing and advertising responses to charter school pressure are likely to be geared to that same population of parents that one superintendent noted “was cognizant enough to know the options out there.” It seems that superintendents are responding to parents seeking the best option for their child by making sure that the parents...
inclined to make a choice are aware of how their own public district may in fact be the best personal choice for the child.

**Perceptions of Equity, Diversity and Priorities**

Many superintendents responded in the survey and in interviews that they were concerned that charter schools (and school choice) presented equity dilemmas – particularly when parents were perceived to be making choices based on desires for homogeneity or being with like students. One superintendent described parent choice behavior as “white flight” and another superintendent described an inability to combat “deep seeded beliefs” of parents that caused them to prefer sending their child to school with fewer “brown” or “poor” students.

Parent choice behavior and reasons were one factor in superintendents’ perceptions of equity threats. Several also referenced charter schools as limiting diversity – particularly for high needs or lower performing students. Superintendents reported that students were “returned” to the district when a charter school identified that a child’s needs were too great and that they “didn’t have a program for them.” Other superintendents reported “counseling out” behaviors that included convincing parents that it was in their best interest to voluntarily withdraw from the charter school, thus defaulting to the local public option. Still other superintendents reported that charter schools were designed to prevent parents of certain kinds of students from even considering the charter as an option and/or that charter schools were simply not accessible to portions to parents who were less engaged or did not have access to information about choice options for a variety of reasons.

Despite this concern about equity and “resegregation of schools” as one superintendent named it, there were no patterns of responses reported by superintendents that served to address these equity concerns. It could be argued that efforts to attract or retain high performing students could be designed to maintain diversity in a student body and to, as one superintendent called it, “retain the brain trust” as high performing students and highly engaged parents clearly
have benefits to offer a school community. However, we found it interesting that although superintendents consistently reported concern that charter schools were underserving special education, ELL and in some cases lower income students – there was only one interviewee who indicated collaborating with a local charter school to build their capacity to better serve higher need students.

**Perceptions of Funding Formula and Implications**

From the data gathered in the surveys and the interviews, a perception shared by a large number of superintendents was that the way the charter school law has been implemented in the Commonwealth is unfair. There were some who understood the educational rationale for the design of charter schools, and stated that the reform might have resulted in widespread educational innovation across the state, if not for implementation of an unjust funding scheme. In its current iteration, however, it is perceived by superintendents that the way the funding is formulated is a considerable liability to the district public school.

There is a perception that the students who score the highest on MCAS as well as other high achieving pupils are leaving the district schools to enroll in charter schools. Motivated by either their own internal academic drive or else by parents who view the charter as a more elite option, participants in our study perceive that high performing students are seeking enrollment in charter schools far more frequently than Special Education, ELL or economically disadvantaged students. Superintendents believe that this choice by the savvy consumer is having a direct impact on their bottom line. This causes students who cost little, yet who have the potential to boost test scores, to seek alternatives outside the district, disproportionally leaving behind higher cost, lower performing students.

There are some reported instances where charter schools are serving a high-needs population of students who had not been successful within the district public schools. Examples of this can be found in charters that might serve a higher percentage of students on the autism
spectrum or schools that serve teen-age parents or students who have been incarcerated. As a result, there is less market pressure felt in the district that send these students to these charter schools with a unique mission and/or approach to learning. Our data indicate that in these instances, where the charter serves a particular niche for students whose needs were not being met in the traditional setting, there seems to be greater programmatic collaboration between the charter and the district schools.

As these instances of collaboration were not the norm, most superintendents indicated that they were not interested in collaborating with charter schools, as most felt that in terms of academic programming, student support, athletics or the arts, the charters were not providing anything particularly innovative in comparison to what was being offered in the district. This led some superintendents to take on a more active, political role in advocating for a specific policy to be changed. Of the nine superintendents interviewed, four mentioned policy advocacy when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district. Matthew, an urban superintendent, indicated that the expanded presence of charters has led him to take on a more political role in fighting against their expanded presence in his district. He was not against the rationale of charter schools, but he did not believe that the concept or niche as described by the proponents of this particular charter differed from what he and his fellow district superintendents could offer. He mentioned how he worked with other superintendents to defeat the introduction of a second charter school close to his district.

There was a charter school application to go into Great Horizon and we fought against that one very hard. If the folks who were bringing it forward had a good plan, I don’t think we probably had enough fight to defeat it. It was more about the quality of the plan... I could not as an educator see anywhere where this place would be serving any individual or group of kids better than how I knew we can serve them or any of our neighbors can serve them.
William, an urban superintendent, explained that he has taken a very active role in trying to defeat any proposed legislation that would remove the cap on charter schools. He believes that the presence of charters have led to a new level of advocacy not before seen in Massachusetts superintendents.

My mantra to our association was that we have to start taking a more active role in policy setting of the state at the state house and with the DESE. Our call to action was labeled Lead Up. The superintendents have to start the Lead Up, leading up and influencing the policy because the statehouse was doing things that they haven’t done before. We actually brought 86 superintendents to some hearings last spring…I think that superintendents and public school leaders have to start raising a voice and educating bureaucrats who make rules because they are approached by a charter school body and a corporate body to start schools. We have to start pushing back against them. We haven’t ever pushed back. What we see here is part of our initial stages to push back and we are going to push more and more.

Although charters have been growing in more urban centers, Jonathan represents a rural district but has taken up the fight against charter school expansion. He frames his advocacy as a type of innovation.

Compliance is the enemy of innovation…. I think funding needs to be addressed. I think if funding can be addressed then local school districts will not see charters as the enemy and we can start actually saving some money by collaborating and cooperating. Charter schools are the drunken brother-in-law of families in Massachusetts. The superintendents want nothing to do with them, they won’t cooperate with them, they won’t collaborate with them, they won’t do anything. They tolerate them and hope they go away. And that’s wasteful and that is inappropriate…. you know, local public schools can learn something from them. But that information is stuck in that charter school because
nobody’s talking to them because we don’t like them…because they took our money away.

**Limited Realization of Legislative Intent**

The anger and resentment felt by some superintendents in the Commonwealth certainly goes against the initial hopes of the designers of the 1993 Education Reform Act. As the data suggest, the emotion surrounding the funding formula has inhibited many superintendents from reaching out to charters to find common ground.

The competition that is brought forth by the marketplace seems to be having the opposite effect from what the legislators’ intended. Although there were examples of specific innovations that were developed in response to the presence of a charter in the district, like new STEM initiatives and innovation schools that focus on the Arts, the fact that superintendents in our survey listed advanced marketing and targeted communications as the most selected innovation present speaks volumes as to the impact that marketplace competition has had on districts in Massachusetts. The qualitative section from our survey indicated that this specific innovation was, by far, the most frequent innovation taking place across the Commonwealth in response to marketplace pressure. As one superintendent indicated,

> Not just due to charter schools, but with their impact and the overall impact of a declining student population we have closed two schools in eight years. Annually, we are losing over two million dollars to charter schools. The students leaving are typically already proficient and advanced as measured by MCAS. We have had to spend additional money on marketing our district-print ads, radio, etc. to maintain the district's credibility.

We were able to determine that 18 out of 21 superintendents who responded that there was a major or moderate impact on enrollment in their district due to the presence of charter schools also launched innovations associated with marketing.
Massachusetts charter school legislation (MGL Ch. 79, Section 89, 1993; 2010) was intended to assist struggling schools and to infuse a sense of competition in the educational marketplace, in hopes that with a focus on those districts that can demonstrate student achievement would force lower performing, and even reform-resistant, schools to change or risk losing market share. All boats would rise in this grand experiment. The evidence suggests, however, that superintendents do not believe that the hopes of the ERA have not come to fruition. Superintendents perceive that consumers view the charter as an elite option. These consumers will, therefore, seek opportunities at the charter, disproportionately leaving behind students who may be more expensive to educate and who may be less likely to be high performers. Rather than helping the most academically challenged students, actions often were targeted to those students that the superintendents did not wish to lose because of the impact on budgets and test scores. The vast majority of specific programs identified as an innovation were Honors Academies, more AP courses and programs that supported the gifted and talented. Very few superintendents mentioned a specialized program to serve Special Education, ELL or low-income students. It is important to note that superintendents who reported that a charter was doing well with these populations also reported reaching out for support and to learn from or collaborate with charter schools. One superintendent noted that because of the success rate the charter had with his “troubled students” the district had collaborated with the charter school and had improved its own alternative programs as a result.

Although a list of innovations by charters is revealing and it aligns with our overall research question and our conceptual framework, we sought to investigate possible influences on why superintendents were launching particular innovations. We investigated patterns between the perceptions of superintendents of the reason why they believed the parents, as consumers, appeared to select a charter school (e.g. parents saw the charter school as an “elite option” for their children) and the type of innovation launched by the district. Although a superintendent
could choose more than one innovation, our data indicate that the launching of a specialized program and/or curriculum and instruction initiatives was selected by forty percent of the superintendents who perceived that parents select charters as an elite option Often and Most of the Time. Fifty-six percent of respondents who perceived that parents select charters as an elite option Often and Most of the Time also replied that they had launched marketing materials and strategic communications.

Our research team heard from superintendents who blamed the funding formula for disincetivising collaboration and the sharing of best practices. Even when both the charter and district had similar AP programs, there was no evidence that teachers and administrators were attempting to share best practices because the structure, as it stands now, forces both sides to attempt to out-perform the other. Although there were examples when district schools and charters felt like they could-co-exist and, at times, worked with one another around select issues, like bullying, the practice was not widespread.
Conclusions

Our study emerged as relevant and timely as demonstrated by the level of interest from our participants. Charter schools are a hotly debated topic in Massachusetts and superintendents who volunteered to participate in our survey and interviews expressed great interest in sharing their opinions, experiences, and suggestions related to the topic. We learned that overall, charter schools are certainly impacting traditional public school districts in a variety of ways and that districts are responding in a variety of ways. Most prominent within our study is that superintendents reported feeling a greater amount of competitive pressure when charter schools are perceived to be attracting high performing students from their districts and/or are perceived to be underserving higher needs students. Within this competition for higher achieving students, superintendents reported concerns about equity and diversity but also largely reported responding to this competition with strategic communication, marketing and development of programs that, at least on the surface, appear to be targeting higher achieving students and their parents. With these overarching conclusions in mind, the final section of our study will include a review of the limitations to our study, policy recommendations, recommendations for district leaders, and will conclude with implications for future study.

Limitations

- Email & Omission of Research team member – email that was originally distributed to recruit participants included the language “participation in this study will assist us as we advocate in the charter experience” as well as omitted the name of one of our research team members who also happens to be the principal of a charter school.
- Small N in general for survey respondents (22% of all MA Superintendents)
- Very small N (5) for Urban Districts – particularly given that 77% of charter schools exist in urban settings
• Omission of Connecticut Valley Superintendents Roundtable
• Possible Interviewer influence on responses (responding in interviews in ways that may have connoted agreement with opinions)
• Descriptive data incomplete – as survey did not ask for rural/urban/suburban designation but only district size and geographic round table
• Didn’t provide an option related to offering training or support to charter schools in supporting high needs students
• Interviewed three superintendents from districts reporting fewer than 1% of students leaving to enroll in charter schools. This presented limited information about competitive pressure given that these districts sent so few students out. Perhaps the team should have established a minimum enrollment rate before then proceeding to a geographic distribution.

Policy Recommendations

Massachusetts DESE to play a role in bringing district and charter school leaders together. Our recommendations for district and charter leaders, as well as for public policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, suggest the need to bring both sides together. Even though direct governmental interference may go against the concept of the free market, there may be select issues that state level policy-makers and the DESE could identify where it would be mutually beneficial for charter and district leaders to meet and share best practices.

The state needs to create policy incentives and remove barriers for district/charter school collaboration. Current policy is perceived by district leaders to have established a “zero-sum game” in which competition is perceived as creating an educational environment of winners and losers. At the base of this perception is the funding formula that is perceived to penalize public school districts by decreasing funding for their district based on charter enrollment. This
“winner-loser” mentality is counterproductive to collaboration. Massachusetts should consider enacting initiatives that stimulate collaboration instead of stifling it and thereby creating a “win-win” situation for all students.

The state should commission a study that identifies how the current funding formula affects both public school districts and charter schools. Both the survey and interviews indicate a resounding feeling of animosity toward the funding formula established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Per pupil expenditures of public school districts do not take into consideration their ability to provide an educational environment based on an economy of scale. Study respondents overwhelmingly expressed concern that competition cannot exist within a context in which the funding is unfairly distributed. This unequal playing field has contributed to a “quasi-market” – one in which pure supply and demand forces cannot operate fairly. Advocacy by district leaders about how the charter funding formula directly and adversely affects their school districts to lawmakers may eventually create a more even playing field for which competition can occur. Given that both districts and charter schools identify the funding formulas as being unfair or disincentivizing the enrollment of high needs students, the state should commission a study to measure the impact of the funding formula on equity in Massachusetts schools. Current policy exacerbates an existing equity problem in Massachusetts’ schools: higher cost students including special education and English language learners typically cost districts more money to educate – and they are perceived as the students less likely to apply and enroll in charter schools. Massachusetts policy needs to address how to increase the enrollment of these groups in charter schools, and mitigate the effect of the cost differentials among high cost and low cost students.

Recommendations for District Leaders and Charter Leaders

Maintain a balance between competition & collaboration. Given the current policy and funding environment that is perceived to promote competition and inhibit collaboration, it is
our recommendation that district leaders make personal efforts to reach out to their local charter school(s) in the spirit of creating the best public educational opportunities for all students. Our research has indicated that in a couple of communities healthy competitive and collaborative relationships exist and do benefit students by capitalizing on joint teacher professional development opportunities. Our study, however, has revealed that this is not the current norm. District leaders and charter school leaders should consider developing partnerships to address the under-representation of special needs populations including ELL students and students with disabilities. Competition will be most productive if district leaders and charter leaders seek examples of effective charter/district relationships as part of their advocacy.

**District leaders must be political players.** Public school superintendents would be well served to engage in the political process – both in their local districts and in the state-wide political advocacy arena. As the voice of their district, it is important that they engage in consistent dialogue with various constituent groups including students, parents, educators, town/city and state level policy-makers, and the local business community about the merits of the public school system. Education and advocacy beyond the typical communication media are important as the superintendent capitalizes upon his/her “bully pulpit.” District superintendents should engage in state level policy advocacy with an added emphasis on the equity issues that the current policy raises. It is important that this advocacy not only occur in the state bureaucratic framework of the DESE, but also perhaps more importantly in the legislative arena with regard to educational and advocacy efforts to state legislators. District leaders are highly respected members of the educational community and policy-makers often seek out their technical expertise regarding educational issues. Superintendents should consider more vociferous advocacy to policy-makers and make themselves available to them for advice and consultation about the direct effect of state policy on district schools.
District and charter school leaders should have an astute understanding of the funding formula. Given the complexity and nuance of the charter funding formula, it is important for superintendents, business managers, building leaders, charter leaders, and community members to better understand the actual funding impacts in districts on an ongoing basis. This is especially important as district leaders engage in policy-level change in regard to the current funding formula. Our research has suggested that there is a wide range of the level of understanding of the complex formula – and its effects - among district level leaders.

Learn from charters that serve a particular need. A majority of the interviews with superintendents revealed that they were unaware of the niche or area of specialization of charter schools. Since legislation requires that charter schools identify their mission or area of specialization before getting state approval, each charter school must have a specific identifiable niche or goal. In some cases, the area of specialization can be a support to the public school district rather than a competitor. For example, one district superintendent reported that a local charter high school that addresses the needs of teens with one or more children of their own was actually a source of support for the district rather than a source of competition. He reported that he maintains a professional relationship with the leadership of that school and oftentimes finds himself referring students to that charter school because of the added support it offers that specific population of students. Awareness of a niche or area of specialization could actually provide a means of support - rather than source of competition – to the public school district.

While there are currently disincentives for districts and charter schools to collaborate and share best practices, district leaders may want to learn from charter schools in other regions that serve a particular need. Our study has revealed that the most collaborative public school district/charter school relationships exist in areas where the charter school has identified a targeted niche.

District and charter school leaders should identify commonalities. District leaders
should consider initiatives or programs that would benefit the district and charter to undertake in common such as sharing teacher professional development opportunities and the sharing of curriculum initiatives.

**Promote the notion of “our students.”** District leaders should embark on an advocacy campaigns throughout the community that the students from that locality are “our students” regardless of where they opt to attend school. This may weaken the “us” versus “them” mentality and encourage a “win-win” educational philosophy among community groups – one that is central to our democratic principles in public education.

**Ensure all programs promote equity and access for all learners.** District level superintendent and charter school leaders should work to ensure that high quality specialized programs offered in district schools and charters promote equity and access for all learners. The mission and goals of school districts and charter schools must be carried out with fidelity – not simply in a superficial manner to seemingly address a requirement.

**Implications for Further Study**

**Replicate this study for charter school leaders and private school leaders given the impact of competition from charter schools on private school enrollment.** In our investigation, we learned that competition took on many forms in the Commonwealth. Charter schools were just one consumer option impacting district schools. Our survey could be modified to ask similar questions to charter school, private school and/or Catholic school leaders.

**Examine SAT scores and four-year graduation rates of students from charter schools and those graduating from traditional public school districts.** This study might examine the question of whether there is truly value added to students attending charter schools. By examining SAT scores and graduation rates, we might be able to uncover whether the 1993 legislation is living up to its promise to make charter schools “models for replication in other public schools.”
Study to explore the phenomenon of charter schools competing with high-performing district schools. We might explore how the competitive marketplace is altered when a charter is placed in a traditionally high-performing school district. The study might investigate what types of students are attracted to the charter option in this scenario as compared to a charter in less high-performing district.

Replicate Lacireno-Paquet (2002) study that explored “cream skimming” and “cropping” behaviors of market and non-market-oriented charter schools in Massachusetts. This study would replicate the Lacireno-Paquet study in Washington D.C., in which they found different clientele being targeted at market-driven and non-market-driven charter schools. Market-driven charter schools were found more likely to operate in ways that limited access to high needs students (both advertently and inadvertently) and nonmarket driven charter schools were found to be more likely to focus specifically on high needs students or specialized populations. By looking at Commonwealth charter schools through the lens of market-orientation, we could determine if the phenomenon has a similar or different manifestation in Massachusetts.

Develop a longitudinal study exploring the outcomes of students who returned to district from charter and those who remained at charter schools. We could take many years and follow a select cohort as they navigate the educational marketplace in Massachusetts. By observing the progress of students who remained at the charter school and those that returned, we might determine whether returning to the district school had any negative educational or social impact.

Test the perceptions of superintendents in a variety of categories with real enrollment data. This study could determine whether the perceptions of superintendents about charter schools with regard to types of students, funding and achievement levels are accurate after an analysis of the data. We could then return to the superintendents who initially took our
survey and investigate whether perceptions have changed or been confirmed after looking at the
data.

**Study the actual reasons parents choose charter schools.** We could use a mixed-methods study to analyze the specific reasons why parents select the charter option over the traditional public school.

**Study the collaboration of superintendents and charter school executive directors to determine what factors might be instrumental in establishing a successful district-charter collaborative relationship.** This study would be primarily focused on leadership methods that are employed by charter school executive directors and district superintendents who choose to collaborate in the face of competition. Specific factors would be analyzed to determine whether those leadership qualities could be replicated across the Commonwealth.

**Study the impact of international performance of U.S. students on policy priorities.** Using the results of the PISA test, as well as other international educational indicators, we could determine whether these data have any bearing on the development of policy in Massachusetts.

**Study the role of the teachers unions in supporting or rejecting potential charter school innovation.** A mixed-methods study might investigate how members of teacher unions view the 1993 Educational Reform Act, particularly in regard to whether they are aware of any innovations in the local charter schools. The study might seek to determine if there is any effort to replicate and explore the factors that allow district and charter school collaboration around innovation. Barriers to innovation could also be analyzed.

**Study the role of choice in political campaigns on both sides of the aisle.** A political science study could explore how local and national politicians are using the role of choice to frame their political message about education. What words, phrases, images and data are politicians employing to target voters?
Study the impact of charter schools on homeschooling. This study might explore how the educational marketplace has impacted the place of homeschooling in the Commonwealth. We might explore whether the legislation on charters has had a negative or positive impact on the homeschool movement.

Study the impact of charter schools on private schools. This study might explore how the educational marketplace has impacted the place of private schools in the Commonwealth. We might explore whether the legislation on charters has had a negative or positive impact on the private schools.

Study the impact of virtual learning on choice options. We could investigate how virtual learning and/or massive open on-line courses (MOOCs) have altered the educational marketplace with regard to consumer choice.

Study the demographics of those engaging in inter-district school choice in Massachusetts. Our investigation elicited a new perspective on the role of inter-district school choice in the educational marketplace in Massachusetts. Although there were some superintendents who felt that their districts were being negatively impacted by the presence of charters, consumers participating in school choice have also had an impact on district racial and socio-economic demographics.

Contribution to Practical Knowledge

This study will provide superintendents in Massachusetts with a wealth of substantive information on collective perceptions about charter schools, the impact of charter school competition on traditional public districts, and the relationship between charter school competition and innovations enacted in public districts. We anticipated that our findings would reveal that while respondents were reluctant to admit to competitive pressure of charter schools stimulating change in their districts, the number of reported changes as expressed in the interviews revealed that charter schools have had a competitive effect on public school districts.
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Appendix A – SURVEY

We are conducting this survey as part of a Boston College doctoral dissertation on the impact of charter schools on decision-making in traditional public schools. Participation in this survey is voluntary, but your participation will greatly benefit our study and we believe will add value to the leadership of M.A.S.S. This should take about 10-15 minutes of your time.

Thank you for your participation.

1. Participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. Information provided in this survey will be used in our study only in aggregate form. No individual district or participant information will be identified in our reporting. To consent to participate in this survey and for your responses to be used in the aggregate, please check the button below confirming your consent to participate.

☐ I consent to participate in this Survey
☐ I decline to participate in this Survey

2. Please select the region to which your district is assigned for the M.A.S.S. regional superintendent round-tables.

☐ Berkshire County
☐ Connecticut Valley
☐ North Shore
☐ Old Colony
☐ South Shore
☐ TriCounty
☐ Worcester County
☐ Merrimack Valley

3. Is your district assigned to the Urban Superintendents Network?

☐ Yes
☐ No
4. Please select the enrollment range that most accurately captures the size of your district. If your district is not a K-12 district please also click the choice "Not a K-12 District" and then specify the grade levels in your district.

- [ ] less than 1,500 students
- [ ] 1,500-2,500 students
- [ ] 2,501-4,000 students
- [ ] 4,001-6,000 students
- [ ] 6,001-10,000 students
- [ ] More than 10,000 students
- [ ] Not a K-12 District - please specify grade levels in your district

5. Is there a local or regional charter school that your district's students are eligible to attend?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other, please specify

6. What percentage (%) of students leave your district to enroll in a charter school?

- [ ] Less than 1%
- [ ] 1% to 2%
- [ ] 3% to 4%
- [ ] 5% to 6%
- [ ] 7% to 8%
- [ ] 9% or more
7. Which of the following ratings best describe your perception of the impact that charter schools have on your district in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
<th>Minimal Impact</th>
<th>Moderate Impact</th>
<th>Major Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student enrollment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District budget</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to community partnerships</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student demographics</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District priorities or decisions</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to extracurricular and/or recreational facilities</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility or reputation of schools or district</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, Please specify</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please provide additional information or examples for any of the areas above in which you reported a "moderate" or "major" impact of charter schools on your district.

8. What is your perception about the likelihood of the following groups of students to enroll in charter schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Minimally likely</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Extremely likely</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELL Students</td>
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<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Advanced MCAS scores</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Students</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students qualifying for Free or Reduced lunch</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, Please specify</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Which of the following ratings best describe your perception about the frequency with which parents use the following as reasons when they choose to enroll a child in a charter school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement results in your district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement results in the charter school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophy or approach to education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a choice or alternative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Geography or distance from home</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent perception that charter is more &quot;elite&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, Please Specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Does your district collect data from parents about their reasons for choosing charter schools?

☐ Yes (Please explain below.)
☐ Not yet, but in the works. (Please explain below.)
☐ No
11. Please select initiatives your district has undertaken that are, in part, influenced by the presence of a charter school option for your students. Please select all that apply.

In the text boxes below each initiative you select, please provide information about the initiatives that you think would be helpful for our study.

☐ New curriculum & instruction initiatives

☐ Modifications to school hours of operation

☐ Launching of marketing materials or strategic communications about district programs

☐ Modifications to work conditions for staff

☐ Capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure

☐ Design of specialized programs

☐ Change in pace or level of priority for initiatives we planned to do anyway

☐ None

☐ Other, Please specify

12. Please name your district. This information is requested so that we can explore statewide data and patterns. No survey participant or district will be named in our study and all responses to this survey and any other activities will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used throughout our report. Answering this question is optional, but strongly encouraged to strengthen our study.
13. We will be conducting additional activities including interviews to further deepen our understanding of this topic. If you would be willing to participate, please select from the activities below.

☐ Individual interview

☐ Interest in receiving a copy of the executive summary of the report produced

☐ If interested in participating further in our study, please provide your name and contact information below

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your perceptions of or concerns about charter schools?

[ ]

Thank you so much for participating in our study! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us: Cathy Cummins, Bernadette Ricciardelli, or Peter Steedman - cumminck@bc.edu
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

(Corresponding RQ 1) How do Superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?

1. Please name the charter school(s) students in your district are able to attend.

2. What is the purpose/niche for that charter school?

3. What is your opinion of this Charter School(s)? What is your opinion of Charter schools in general?

4. Has this perception changed depending on your role in the district? If so, how? [probe: or for any reason?]

5. Does the Department of Education role in approving and funding Charter Schools impact your perception of Charter Schools? If so, how?

6. How would you characterize your communities’ views about charter schools? [probe for examples or evidence]

7. In what way, if at all, is your district in competition with charter schools or any other school choice option? [probe: Who are the consumers? What are the reasons? What are the conditions?]

Corresponding RQ 2: What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools’ on districts in Massachusetts?


9. (a) Describe the students most likely to leave the district to enroll in a charter school? (b) Describe the students least likely to leave the district to enroll in a charter school? [Probe –Are there any patterns in socioeconomic status, achievement status, demographic trends? Are there students who initially leave but who return to the district? How have you formed this impression? ]

10. Describe the reasons parents use in making the decision to seek enrollment in charter schools. [Probe for class- or school size, founding principle, specialty, reputation, achievement. How have you formed this impression?]

11. How do your perceptions that you have articulated thus far influence your approach to planning initiatives in your district? [Probe for parents, community members, faculty]
(Corresponding RQ 3) **What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?** (Peter)

12. What are some initiatives you have in undertaken in your district? [Probe for specific examples]

13. What are reasons for undertaking each of those initiatives? [probe for influence of charter competition.]

14. What were your goals with these initiatives? [probe for influence of charter competition]

15. How do you evaluate the success of these initiatives?

16. What have you done or are you currently doing to address the presence of charter schools? [probe for actions, non-actions, those that are instructional, organizational, or about publicity]

17. What do you think are the most important issues to address in the next decade concerning the relationship between Districts and Charter Schools? [probe: Is there a role for DESE? Is there a role for Districts? Is there a role for Charters?]
### APPENDIX C – Domain Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Subtopics</th>
<th>Data source #1 (QUANT)</th>
<th>Data source #2 (QUAL)</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<td>“Perceptions of competition?”</td>
<td>Survey questions: 5, 6, 7</td>
<td>Questions from Cluster 1 of interviews: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</td>
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<td>· Enrollment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Financial Impact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comm. Partner01</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Tipping Point?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Community perception of charter and district reputation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer Parent01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Consumer (students &amp; parents)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to Ex.Curr &amp; Rec Fac 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Perceptions of marketplace theory through legislation</td>
<td></td>
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<td>OTHER Competition 01</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Perception of fairness in the charter choice market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer Student 01</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Perception of MA legislative intent and realization of intent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Funding Formula 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Other Sources of school choice competition (private, choice, voc/tech.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Does/How does policy/legislation and funding influence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>how superintendents experience competitive pressure?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question 2 (Cummins)</td>
<td>“Characteristics of pressure?”</td>
<td>Survey questions: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</td>
<td>Questions from Cluster 2 of interviews: 7, 8 a and b, 9, 10</td>
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<td>What is the nature of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in MA?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comments from Survey: 6, 7, 8, 9, 12</td>
<td>Stud Type:ELL02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Types of students</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Stud Type:Free/Reduced 02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· School conditions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Relief</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Stud Type:Sp.Ed.02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Achievement results</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Other types of students02</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Chooser reasons</td>
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<td>School Conditions 02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Sustainability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provides Relief - Fills Gap 02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Specialization/Niche</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Are there certain kinds of students exiting that create more or less perceived pressure?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chooser Reasons 02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Are there conditions or characteristics of charter schools that decrease competitive pressure and influence collaboration?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Class Size 02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Are there patterns to the types of students leaving or not leaving?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School Size 02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· CHURN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curr. Design 02</td>
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<td>· Creaming</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Ach. Results 02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Types of Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spec Program 02</td>
</tr>
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<td>Alternative/Choice 02</td>
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<td>Learning Time 02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Specialty/Niche 02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Domains

### Sub-Question 3 (Steedman)

What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?

**“Actions in response?”**

- **Innovative or not?**
  - Administrative
    - Infrastructure
    - Facilities
    - Communication, Marketing & Promotion
    - Professional Development
  - Instructional innovations
    - Specialized Program
    - Extended learning time
    - Pedagogical Practices
    - Curriculum
    - Student Assessments
    - Professional Collaboration
    - Technology
  - Changes (Not Innovative)
    - Policy Advocacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source #1 (QUANT)</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Comments from Survey: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Overarching Question:

How does a superintendent’s perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school in his/her district impact the development of district innovations?

**“What kinds of pressure results in what kinds of actions?”**

Filter question pairs/triads:

- 6 (%) → 7 (impact)
- 8 (student type) → 7 (impact)
- 9 (choice reasons) → 7 (impact)
- 8 (student type) → 10 (initiatives)
- 9 (choice reasons) → 10 (initiatives)
- 7 (impact) → 10 (initiatives)
- 2, 3, 4 (demog.) → 7 (impact)
- 2, 3, 4 (demog) → 8, 9 (type/reas.)
- 2, 3, 4 (demog) → 10 (initiatives)

Filter question pairs/triads:

- 2 (niche) + 8 (student) → 9 (reason)
- 3 +4 (attitude) → 7 (impact)
- 2 (niche) → 11 (initiatives) + 15 (inn.)
- 9 (ch. reas) +6 (comm. vw.) → 7 (impact)
- 8 (student type) → 10-15 (initiatives)
- 9 (choice reas.) → 10 (initiatives)
- 7 (impact) → 10 (initiatives)

Meta-Inference:

QUAN ↔ Qual