

Running Head: Why Parents Choose or do not Choose Cyberschools for their
Children

Why Parent Choose or do not Choose Cyberschools for their Children

A Dissertation
Presented to
The College of Graduate and Professional Studies
Department of Special Education
Slippery Rock University
Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Special Education

by
David J Furka
June 2023
© David J Furka, 2023

Keywords: cyberschool, distance learning, brick-and-mortar school, supplemental
program

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee Chair: Dr. Richael Barger-Anderson, Ed.D.
Professor of Special Education
Slippery Rock University

Committee Member: Dr. Robert Isherwood Ed.D.
Associate Professor of Special Education
Slippery Rock University

Committee Member: Dr. Anne M. Butler, Ed.D.
Chief Academic Officer
Agora Cyber Charter School

ABSTRACT

Parents and guardians have many options regarding the type of educational institution that their child can attend. The two most common options for school-aged children are a traditional brick-and-mortar school or a cyberschool. Since children come from diverse backgrounds, have individual needs, and learn differently, it is important for children and their parents and guardians to understand what each type of school has to offer so they can make an informed decision. This study aimed to understand the specific reasons why parents and guardians choose cyberschools for their children. Ten participants were asked to complete a survey and answer open-ended interview questions; answers were analyzed using Weiss's 4 I's framework to determine key factors of school choice. Furthermore, participant responses and collected enrollment data were analyzed to determine student enrollment trends over the past five years at six cyberschools in Pennsylvania. The findings of this study indicated that there are specific, but different, characteristics that both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools possess that influence parents and guardians choices regarding educational institutions. Based on this study some parents and guardians prefer the safety and teacher communication that cyberschools offer, and some parents and guardians prefer the extracurricular activities that brick-and-mortar schools offer. Additionally, this study analyzes if the Covid-19 pandemic persuaded parents and guardians to choose one type of school over the other. The data collected from this study can help parents and guardians make informed decisions, based on their children's needs, to which type of schooling would be most beneficial to them. Additionally, data can help school administrators make changes within their school to help maintain or increase student enrollment by meeting a larger range of student needs.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my family, my friends, and most importantly, God. I could not have accomplished this without their support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Cyberschools.....	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Options for Parents and Guardians.....	9
School Choice.....	10
Purpose Statement/Research Questions.....	12
Significance and Relevance.....	13
Delimitations.....	15
Definition of Terms.....	16
Conclusion.....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review:.....	20
Introduction.....	20
Overview of Cyberschools.....	20
Types of Cyberschooling.....	21
Challenges Students Face.....	22
Challenges Teachers Face.....	24
Challenges Parents and Guardians Face.....	26

Instructional Challenges.....	27
Implications.....	29
Conclusion.....	30
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology.....	32
Purpose.....	32
Methodology.....	33
Location.....	35
Participants.....	35
Data Collection.....	38
Data Analysis.....	39
Sources of Data.....	41
Presentation of Results.....	42
Limitations.....	43
Summary.....	44
Chapter 4: Findings.....	46
Introductions to the Findings	46
Hierarchical Code Framing	46
Demographics.....	47
Disability.....	48
Number of Students.....	49
Household Income.....	50
Political Affiliation.....	51
Ethnicity.....	52

Final Code Table.....	53
Participant Demographics.....	60
Interests.....	62
Ideologies.....	62
Participant Responses-Interests.....	63
Participant Responses: Ideologies.....	67
Advantages and Disadvantages.....	71
Enrollment.....	84
Conclusion.....	88
Chapter 5: Summary of Findings and Implications.....	100
Introduction to Findings.....	100
Summary of Findings.....	100
Implications.....	104
Recommendations for Future Research.....	107
Conclusion.....	109
REFERENCES.....	110
Appendix A.....	124
Appendix B.....	125
Appendix C.....	130
Appendix D.....	131
Appendix E.....	132
Appendix F.....	135

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Final Codes Placed into ‘I’ of Decision-Making Framework.....	55
Table 2. Final Code Process Table	56
Table 3. Total Student Enrollment at a Cyberschool in Pennsylvania	87
Table 4: Enrollment Trends	88
Table 5. Participant Deciding Factors.....	94

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Disability and School Choice.....49

Figure 2. Number of Learners Per Household50

Figure 3. Household Income51

Figure 4. Political Party Affiliation52

Figure 5. Ethnicity53

Figure 6. Interests & Ideologies.....84

Chapter 1: Introduction

Cyberschools

With the advancement of technology, parents and guardians have more options on the type of education they want their children to receive. This study researched the question “Why do parents and guardians choose or not choose cyberschool for their children?” To fully understand this question, this study researches the reasons parents and guardians are choosing or are not choosing cyberschools for their children’s education.

Parents and guardians want to ensure their children’s needs are being met at school. One of the most important factors parents and guardians need to consider regarding their children’s schooling is that they are receiving a high-quality education that meets their individual needs. Research shows “that with school options, parents and guardians not only will be able to find a high-quality school but be able to match their academic, behavioral, cultural, or philosophical preferences with school communities sharing the same views. School choice, in this sense, is a form of expression” (Lubineski & Weitzel, 2010, p. 16).

This study investigated the reasons why parents and guardians choose or do not choose to enroll their children in a cyberschool that offers synchronous and asynchronous programs. Synchronous learning is when a student is in a virtual classroom in real time with a teacher while asynchronous learning is when a student is working at their own pace at their own time (Branon & Essex, 2001). By definition, a cyberschool is a school that uses online methods of teaching (Cambridge University Press, 2021). The data from this study was collected through survey responses and interview responses. Additionally, this study investigated enrollment trends of the top six cyberschools in Pennsylvania with

the highest student enrollment, over the past five years. The schools in this study instruct students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The data was collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's enrollment reports and by the participants' responses.

For the purpose of this study, Weiss's (1995) decision-making framework was used to understand the reasons why parents and guardians are choosing or are not choosing cyberschools. Weiss's framework considers the data or information collected and the interests and ideologies parents and guardians possess (Connell, 2016). This framework was used in the study to identify the interests and ideologies parents and guardians have when deciding on which type of school to enroll their children. The results of this study will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Problem Statement

Cyberschools have not been in existence as long as brick-and-mortar schools, as cyberschools date back to the 1990s (Fredig & Kennedy, 2018). Therefore, parents and guardians may not fully understand the advantages and disadvantages of cyberschools. Perhaps parents and guardians have personal biases towards cyberschools because of their own experiences in a cyberschool environment. Regardless, the advancement of technology and the growing number of cyberschools in Pennsylvania present parents and guardians with the question of whether to enroll their child in a local school district, a cyberschool, or another educational institution. These questions are particularly important in Pennsylvania, as Pennsylvania ranks among the top three states in the country where cyberschool enrollment is an option (Hacke, 2017). Although cyberschools have only

been available since the early 1990s (Connell, 2016), they offer parents and guardians another option for their child's education.

A cyberschool setting may not be the best choice for every student, just as a traditional school may not be the best option for every student. According to Paul (2012), all students require different individualized plans to be successful in school. All learners benefit when information is put forth in diverse ways that engage a multitude of the senses (Paul). Studies suggest that the reason students benefit from receiving information in diverse ways is due to students having various learning abilities (Beasley & Beck, 2017). Cyberschools do have potential advantages, such as accommodating schedules and offering a broader span of courses (Beck & Beasley, 2020). Cyberschools can also serve disabled students who have difficulties attending in-person classes. (Miron & Gulosino, 2016). For example, "Some of the reported benefits of virtual schools include offering convenient lessons that fit a learner's schedule, enabling students who have other obligations during the daytime hours to finish their educational goals, and providing additional periods for learning" (Beck & Beasley, 2020, p. 2194). Although this may be an advantage for some, other families may see this as a disadvantage as their situation may not be conducive to having their children at home.

Parents and guardians must be educated on the advantages and disadvantages of cyberschools to make the most informed decision regarding school choice for their children. This includes the need for parental involvement. Research indicates that when students' parents and guardians are involved, children are more likely to succeed (Wilder, 2014). Liu et al. (2010) suggests that parents and guardians can have an even greater impact on their children's online learning than in traditional courses, especially when

students take most or all their courses online. Cyberschool parents and guardians can communicate the importance of academics to their children and prioritize education in the home. For example, “Giving attention to each part of the cyberschool, parental role will send a powerful message to the students” (Foleno, 2021, para. 10). If parents and guardians are more informed on what cyberschools have to offer, then they have the opportunity to use that knowledge to make an educated decision on whether cyberschool is the best fit for their children. For example, cyberschools usually use a combination of asynchronous and synchronous instructional methods (Beasley & Beck, 2017).

Synchronous communication is a real-time way for students and teachers to interact at the same time, while asynchronous communication implies interaction in a delayed time because of bandwidth gaps that arise from contextual issues. In other words, students have more time for feedback and can file their answers when teachers are offline (Branon & Essex, 2001). Some students may find an asynchronous learning style more beneficial while others seek a synchronous learning style. Based on an individual student’s needs, this may be an important factor when parents and guardians consider cyberschools for their children. Also, parents and guardians of children with disabilities need to know if their child’s specific needs are best met at a traditional brick-and-mortar school, or if having the student engage in school at home alongside a parent or guardian is more beneficial.

Another aspect of online learning is the possibility of virtualization. Burdina et al. (2019) defines virtualization as “a process in which the basic social needs of an individual are met via computers and mobile devices” (p. 2). Virtualization involves students as young as preschool elementary age experiencing a virtual learning

experience; teachers may find that these students already have the foundational skills needed for online learning (Burdina et al.). In 2022, 339.1 million families had internet in their home which is 92% of the total population in the United States (Kemp, 2022). Since technology (computers, internet, tablets, etc.) is common in most homes, students may feel more comfortable learning and engaging with peers in a virtual setting as opposed to a traditional brick-and-mortar school.

Are parents and guardians choosing the most beneficial placement for their children? Will children benefit more from a brick-and-mortar school or a cyberschool? This study will collect data to help advance research and enable parents and guardians to make informed decisions regarding their child's education by identifying the reasons parents or guardians are choosing cyberschools or brick-and-mortar schools.

This study gathered information from parents and guardians of students in kindergarten through 12th grade to determine the reasons parents and guardians chose cyberschools or traditional brick-and mortar-schools for their children. A survey and interview questions will be used to identify the specific reasons why parents and guardians made schooling choices. The data from this study will report the enrollment rates for top six highest enrolled cyberschools in Pennsylvania over the past five years. To determine the top six highest enrolled schools, the researcher will collect enrollment data from the 2017-2018 school year. Enrollment data, along with the information supplied by the participants, may help identify possible trends in school choice. One important aspect of the study is to investigate if environmental conditions, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, played a role in enrollment rate changes in the cyberschools considered in this study, or if other factors appeared to contribute to that change.

An additional need for this study is that data shows that in comparison to brick-and-mortar school, cyberschools have typically been underperforming. Murphy's (2019) study found the following:

The ACT Academy Charter School, one of 15 cyber charter schools in the state, enrolled 104 ninth through 12th-grade students last school year, according to information on their website. Its most recently released state test scores were dismal with just 13.6% of its students at grade level in English language arts/literature; 4.6% in mathematics/Algebra; and 4.6% in science/biology. (para. 4)

In addition, a study done by Protheroe (2010) showed that a small number of cyberschools performed significantly lower than traditional brick-and-mortar schools on average. While this study demonstrated that 17% of cyberschools provided superior education, 37% of cyberschools produced scores that were significantly lower than traditional public schools.

This draws the question of what do brick-and-mortar schools offer that cause brick-and-mortar students' test scores to be higher than those of students in cyberschools? There is very little research as to why cyberschools are showing poor academic scores; however, parents and guardians are still enrolling their children in these cyberschools.

The data collected from this study may also help cyberschools understand the specific reasons parents and guardians chose a brick-and-mortar school. Subsequently, the data from this study can assist cyberschools in making changes that are more favorable to students, parents, and guardians. In turn, this study may help improve students' academic abilities while increasing or maintaining enrollment rates.

Simultaneously, this study may also help brick-and-mortar schools maintain or increase student enrollment by making changes based on the reasons parents and guardians choose a cyberschool for their children. If administrators can understand what factors contribute to retention and attrition on their physical campus, then they can also make the necessary improvements to help meet the needs of students, parents, and guardians. Making such adjustments are critical because many traditional schools are losing funding due to an increase in enrollment within cyberschools; thus, causing financial hardships (Ahn & McEachin, 2017). Most of public-school funding comes from local, state, and federal sources. In addition, “cyberschools do not charge students tuition – they receive the majority of funding from their students' residential school districts... [and money received] is based upon a statutory funding formula, which requires tuition rates for both nonspecial and special education students” (Education.pa.gov, 2022). As a result, when students leave a public school to attend a cyberschool, the public school loses funding.

Conceptual framework

For this study it was necessary to use and modify Weiss’s (1995) four “I’s” of decision outcomes: institutional decision-making, interests, ideologies, and information. Only two of the four were used to analyze the data in this study: interests and ideologies. The other two “I’s”, information and institution were not necessary for this study. This conceptual framework takes into consideration the varied resources different people bring to the decision-making table (Connell, 2016).

According to Connell (2016) “Weiss defines interests as self-interests”; therefore, “In terms of school choice, parents’ interests could include giving their children access to

an alternative curriculum based upon their academic level and individual needs” (p. 6). This may include students, parents, and guardians wanting to have smaller class sizes, avoid safety concerns, or have a more direct line of communication with the teachers.

According to Weiss (1995), ideology examines principles, values, and philosophy. These values provide strong emotions to an issue. However, since most people have many values and principles, ideologies can sometimes conflict with one another (Connell, 2016).

One possibility of why parents and guardians place their children in cyberschool is due to the amount of self-discipline required of them by the school. Generally, most cyberschools enroll children throughout an entire state which can create a diverse population. Consequently, cyberschools may offer a variety of languages accommodations to adapt to the diverse population. Also, “parents might also value having their children at home and therefore choose cyberschooling” (Connell, 2016, p.7). Personal preferences or other factors encourage cyberschool enrollment. This study investigates the reasons behind cyberschool enrollment.

Weiss’s (1995) remaining two principles which are not addressed, are institutional decision-making and information. Connell (2016) states, “Weiss describes information as the knowledge and ideas a person uses to make decisions and stresses that most of the knowledge a person has comes from experience” (p. 7). Institutional decision-making and information principals are irrelevant to the current study due to the possibility that cyberschools were not available during the time that the participants in Weiss’s study were attending school. Cyberschools were recently becoming available, or participants had no knowledge of cyberschools being an option.

It is Connell's (2016) observation that "when looking at school choice, [the] information could be gathered from friends, the school or the media, or could be based upon personal experience" (p. 7). This renders Weiss's "I" irrelevant, as the information being gathered is coming directly from the participant. The information being gathered is not coming from friends, the school, or the media.

This study identifies some of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of parents and guardians comparing a typical brick-and-mortar school and a cyberschool. The goal of this study is to understand why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children. Using Weiss's (1995) ideologies and interests, this study will investigate the deciding factors parents and guardians used when making their school choice. According to Connell (2016), "To some parents who choose cyberschools, it might be the use of a school-provided computer and free internet access which is supplied to them upon enrollment" (p. 7). Connell further states that "While self-interests might change, few people would make a decision which would be counter to his or her self-interest" (p. 7). Students, parents, and guardians may choose cyberschools for various reasons, such as academic quality, parental involvement, nonbureaucratic school culture, and family structure (Buckley & Schneider, 2007; Milliman & Maranto, 2009). This study aims to expand on the reasons behind cyberschool choice.

Options for Parents and Guardians

Thirty years ago, parents and guardians had different educational options for their children than they do today. For example, beginning in 1982, homeschooling became a permissible option for education, eventually expanding to all 50 states (Coulson, 1999).

Today, families can choose from traditional public schools, public charter schools, public magnet schools, private schools, online academies, and homeschooling. This was not always the case in the past. Typically, children would attend the local traditional public school, be homeschooled, or parents and guardians could pay to send their children to a private school. With the advancement of technology, the first cyberschool was created in 1989 (Kentnor, 2015). As of 2020, there are 691 fully online K-12 schools in the United States (NCES, 2020). For the purpose of this study, only cyberschools and traditional brick-and-mortar schools will be researched.

School Choice

Why are parents and guardians choosing cyberschools over traditional schools for their children? Are parents and guardians accurately informed of the differences, and do their values and beliefs play a factor in their school choice? Two people can obtain the same information, but if their values differ, the information can be interpreted quite differently. For example, a school can receive high state test scores, and one person's beliefs may lead them to think that the school is only teaching to the test, while the other person's beliefs may lead them to think that the school is teaching a well-rounded curriculum (Connell, 2016). Betebenner et al. (2005) states, "Critics of school choice claim that there is inequality among parents on their capacity to choose because certain parents may lack the information needed to participate in meaningful deliberation, and others may lack trust in authorities" (p. 2289). The data from this study differentiates the varying interests and ideologies parents and guardians have when making school choice.

A school day at a Pennsylvania cyberschool is, in many ways, similar to that of a brick-and-mortar school day (McFarlan, 2011). Before a student begins class online in

the home utilizing a synchronous learning schedule, they will turn on their school-issued laptop computer which may be preloaded with all the programs necessary. Synchronous students will sign into virtual classes based on the schedules given to them by the school. Similar to a brick-and-mortar school, the virtual classroom uses a platform that is determined by the school district. Once signed into class, a student can interact using their webcam, microphone, and/or chat box with their teacher and peers. Teachers may create lessons and share the material on the screen for all to see. Teachers may also share videos, songs, and interactive lessons with their classes. Students use a digital “hand” to raise when they wish to respond to questions from the teacher. Students in special education are required to have a “learning coach” sit with them during class to assist them if needed; those in general education are encouraged to do the same since the teacher cannot be in proximity of the student. Accelerate Learning Coaches (2022) define a learning coach as a “parent, family member, or another adult that is at home with the student while the student is going through their courses” (para 2.). Typically, one learning coach is assigned to each student enrolled in the cyberschool.

Furthermore, cyberschool students take tests and quizzes just like in a brick-and-mortar school; however, do not use conventional paper and pencil assessments (Whalley & Barbour, 2020). Instead, cyberschool students use virtual forms to answer questions. Students get breaks between classes, for lunch, and sometimes during these breaks students are required to work in a virtual benchmark program that collects academic data. This is a form of progress monitoring. Sanetti et al. (2014) defines progress monitoring as “frequent, ongoing assessment of a student's progress toward the goals of the intervention” (p. 64).

Students, teachers, parents, and guardians have specific challenges they face in a cyberschool setting. There are also instructional challenges instructors and learners face. Understanding these challenges may give school districts the ability to understand why parents and guardians make the educational choices they do. This allows educational administrators to further adapt their curriculum, policies, and political procedures.

To understand the choices that parents and guardians made to enroll their children in a cyberschool or a brick-and-mortar school, individuals who agreed to participate in the study were asked the following questions:

1. What do you believe the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school are?
2. What do you believe the disadvantages of a brick-and-mortar school are?
3. What do you believe the advantages of a cyberschool are?
4. What do you believe the disadvantages of a cyberschool are?
5. Moving forward, do you think you will keep your children enrolled in their current school or enroll them elsewhere? Why?

Purpose Statement/Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the reasons parents and guardians choose or do not choose to send their children to cyberschools. Understanding these reasons may help both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools gain information needed to make the necessary changes to better serve students and to increase and maintain student enrollment rates. The two essential questions of this study are:

1. What are the reasons parents and guardians are choosing or are not choosing cyberschools?

2. How, and in what direction, have cyberschool student enrollment numbers changed over the past five years?

Significance and Relevance

Cyberschools focus on the utilization of technology for student education. Ghory and Ghafory (2021) believe:

The advancement of technology has had an influence on every part of our lives, from banking to the way we connect with others. Indeed, technology has become an essential component of sustaining civilization, and its incorporation into education is consequently unavoidable. Technology not only gives students access to a plethora of online materials, but it also helps them study. (p.168)

One result of the use of technology in education is that not every student follows the same daily school schedule, which may include riding a school bus to and from school and sitting in a single classroom setting. In many cyberschools, the student sits in home at their computer and listens to the teacher instruct the class when class begins. Some classes are more engaging for students while others may be lecture-based. Other classes focus on group work and activities (Dingeldein, 2021).

The major difference for students between cyberschool and brick-and-mortar is that cyberschool students engage in class on a computer, in the home, and not within a traditional school setting. A typical school day for cyberschool students may vary, but on average lasts five and a half hours per day (PA Virtual Charter School, 2022). Unlike students in a traditional brick-and-mortar school, cyberschool students can earn a high school diploma without ever setting foot in a school building. They meet the same requirements as brick-and-mortar school students but can graduate from home. For

example, one school requires that students complete 23 high school credits and complete the Keystone Exam, which focuses on Algebra I, Literature, and Biology, to graduate. (Agora Charter Cyber School, 2022; Education.gov, 2022).

While it can be known that virtual schools are expanding rapidly, there remains little research evidence to support or justify the expansion (Molnar, 2021). One major area of concern is that cyberschools are underperforming academically compared to traditional brick-and-mortar schools. For example, Molnar (2019) found that the national graduation rate of traditional schools averaged 84% while cyberschools averaged 50.1% . Furthermore, Pennsylvania's charter cyberschools were studied. According to The University Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO, 2019), it was reported The Stanford University found negative results in student academic performance. The Stanford University report also stated that nearly every cyberschool was identified by the state Department of Education as among the lowest performing schools in the state based on school or student subgroup performance for the 2017-18 school year (CREDO).

There has been no conclusive evidence as to why cyberschools generally produce lower test scores and graduation rates (Bourp, 2016). Does it relate to the teachers, the curriculum, the population of students, or various other factors? Bourp discovered that some teachers believed that parents and guardians could act as obstacles to their child's learning by being overly or unengaged in certain types of learning activities. In addition, cyberbullying and self-perception may lead to poor academic scores (Muzamil & Shah, 2016).

Although this study will not give definitive reasons as to why cyberschools are underperforming, it may lead to further research by shedding light on why parents and

guardians are choosing cyberschools. This research can help facilitate changes and adaptations within the school setting, allowing for increased effectiveness. This study hopes to identify what cyberschools have to offer that brick-and-mortar schools do not. This may educate administrators of traditional schools; therefore, giving them the knowledge on how to adapt and be more appealing to parents, guardians, and students by meeting individual needs.

This study is also particularly important to brick-and-mortar schools as they have been decreasing their student enrollment to cyberschools. For example, "Looking at the two years between the school year that began in 2019 and the one that began in 2021, cyber enrollment increased 63 percent and cyber surplus increased by 647 percent — or over 10 times the rate of enrollment" (Brandt, 2022, para. 15). The data collected within this research will identify why cyberschool enrollment has increased. This study aims to provide insight as to why brick-and-mortar schools are losing enrollment to cyberschools. The information could be used to make improvements and adaptations to help increase or maintain student enrollment in traditional schools.

Delimitations

This study began in April of 2022. Only participants with children who attended school in Pennsylvania were included in this study. The participants were a parent or legal guardian of the student. Participants with children who do not have children enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade were not eligible for this study. The data collection only took place during a two-month time frame. The data is limited to being collected in two ways. Data collection includes results from a virtual survey and an interview with the researcher. The completion of the online survey and interviews were

limited to three months. The participants concluded the surveys and interviews by the end of May 2022. The survey was conducted online with the use of Survey Monkey, while individuals participated in the interview over the phone and face-to-face with the researcher. The in-person interviews were limited in location. They took place in the interviewer's home, the local Starbucks, and Panera Bread in Butler, Pennsylvania. The survey consisted of basic demographics and reasons parents and guardians are choosing either cyberschool or brick-and-mortar school. Participants were asked specific questions during the interview regarding the factors that impacted their decision-making process for their child's educational setting. The interview allowed them to elaborate more on their responses.

Definition of Terms

To facilitate the understanding of the content in this mixed-method study, the following is a list of terms and definitions used throughout the study.

Charter Cyberschool. An independent public school established and operated under a charter from the Department of Education, in which the school uses technology to provide a significant portion of its curriculum to deliver a significant portion of instruction to its students through the Internet or other electronic means. A charter cyberschool must be organized as a public, nonprofit corporation. A charter may not be granted to a for-profit entity (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Cyberschool. A school that uses online methods of teaching (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Brick-and-mortar school. A brick-and-mortar school is a traditional school where the student and teacher are physically present in the same location during instruction (Tomei, 2008).

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). A standardized test given by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to rate school and student academic performance. These tests are administered to grades three through eighth, and 11th.

3rd, 6th, and 7th Grades: PSSA tests in English Language Arts and Math

4th Grade: PSSA tests in English Language Arts, Math, and Science

5th Grade: PSSA tests in English Language Arts and Math

8th Grade: PSSA tests in English Language Arts, Math, and Science (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022.)

Supplemental curriculum. A curriculum intended for use only in conjunction with one or more curricula (Law Insider, 2022)

Distance Learning. A learning system when the teacher and student are separated geographically or technologically (Rogers, 2009)

Synchronous learning. Synchronous learning refers to a learning activity where students and instructors are engaging in learning at the same time. In a synchronous learning environment, the instructor often uses audio and/or video teleconferencing, virtual classrooms, and instant messaging (Ruiz et al., 2006).

Asynchronous learning. Asynchronous learning is online or distance education that does not happen in real time, and the instructor applies e-mail and online discussion boards to conduct interaction (Ruiz et al., 2006).

Parent/Guardian. For the purpose of this study, "guardian" refers to the person who, under court order, is the guardian of the person, or the child, or the public or private agency, with whom the child has been placed by a court. "Parent" refers to the biological or adoptive mother or father of a child but does not include a parent whose parental rights have been terminated (NCSL, n.d.).

Student. Someone who learns at a school in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Traditional Education. Education in which instruction takes place between an instructor and students, and where all are physically present in the same classroom (Law Insider, n.d.).

Conclusion

Parents and guardians have many options as to the type of educational setting to enroll their children. The two options discussed in this study for parents and guardians are to enroll their children in a cyberschool or a brick-and-mortar school. With cyberschools becoming more common, an increasing number of parents and guardians may consider this option. The purpose of this study is to understand the specific reasons parents and guardians are choosing cyberschools or brick-and-mortar schools for their students. Understanding these reasons will help both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools make improvements that can attract parents and guardians to enroll their children in their specific school of choice.

The next chapter briefly explores the history and types of cyberschools. It will also discuss the challenges students, teachers, parents, and guardians face. In addition to those challenges, Chapter Two will identify instructional challenges within the

cyberschool setting. Chapter Three explains the methodology of this study and includes a survey and interview that will be used to gather and analyze the information. Chapter Four provides the findings and a summary of the data. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study, provides a summary of the findings, and includes recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on cyberschools. To identify the research, the following steps were taken. First, key words were identified. These keywords include cyberschool, distance learning, online education and parent choice. They were used to search for relevant articles published in peer-reviewed journals in the following databases: EBSCO Host, ERIC and Google Scholar. Only studies published after 2017 were considered. The search yielded 20 studies.

In what follows, before discussing findings from the review, a brief overview of cyberschools in the United States is presented. This is followed by a discussion of four themes that emerged from the review. The chapter concludes with a restatement of the research questions and an overview of what is presented in Chapter Three.

Overview of Cyberschools

Students learning through “Distance education has been part of the educational landscape in the United States for over 150 years” (Agostinelli, 2019, p. 1). The origin of cyberschools can be traced back to the Pittsburg Shorthand Training Program, which began in 1852 as the first correspondence course in the United States (Casey, 2008). This program utilized the United States postal service to mail cutting-edge stenographic techniques to secretaries across the country (Agostinelli). This type of distance learning soon changed in the 1940s. The invention and wide distribution of radio and television technologies defined the second generation of distance education (Agostinelli). While one-way media transfer of information was successful, radio and television offered a more personalized experience for the learner by being able to hear and see the instructor

(Casey, 2008). The first incarnation of what is considered a K–12 virtual school appears to have been launched in the summer of 1995, with the Cyberschool Project in Eugene, Oregon (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006).

Types of Cyberschooling

Cyberschools usually use a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instructional methods (Beasley & Beck, 2017). Synchronous learning refers to all types of learning in which learners and instructors are in the same place, at the same time, for learning to take place. This can include virtual meetings with small groups or an entire class (Finol, 2020). In synchronous learning students usually go through the learning path together while accompanied by their instructor; the instructor can provide support while students are completing tasks and activities (Finol). Additionally, asynchronous learning allows for learning at different times. Teachers typically set up a learning path that allows students to engage at their own pace (Finol).

As of 2016, 25 out of 50 states report offering cyberschools. In 2017-2018, 501 full-time cyberschools enrolled 297,712 students. Enrollments in cyberschools increased by more than 2,000 students between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. These numbers do not include student enrollments in blended schools. A blended school combines virtual, i.e., cyber, learning with traditional face-to-face instruction in the classroom (Miron et al., 2018). In what follows, the four themes that emerged from the literature review are discussed. The themes are challenges students face, challenges teachers face, challenges parents and guardians face, and instructional challenges.

Challenges Students Face

Findings from studies on cyberschools show that students enrolled in cyberschool face many challenges (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Guo, 2021; Evisen et al., 2020; Hakim, 2020; Hasan & Bao, 2020; Hijazi & AlNatour, 2021; Mahyoob, 2020; Manoharan et al., 2022; Ozdamli & Karagozlu, 2022). One of the challenges students face in cyberschool is cyberbullying (Guo). Cyberbullying generally refers to deliberate and repeated aggressive activities inflicted toward a specific individual or group of individuals via the use of electronic technology (Guo). Moreover, it was found that students who were involved in cyberbullying were at a high risk to engage in physical fight and substance use, while females who are cyberbullies are less likely to engage in these activities (Guo).

According to Guo, “delinquent peer association, social control, and negative emotion conditioned the relationships of cyberbullying roles with physical fight and substance use in different ways and the moderating effects varied by gender” (p. 1). Research draws a distinction between cyberbullies and cyberbully victims. Findings show that the association between being a cyber-victim and physical fight was greater when adolescents interacted with more delinquent peers. Moreover, being cyber-victims showed a greater relationship with substance use when adolescents had lower degrees of negative emotion (Guo). For example, “Differentiating the effects of distinctive cyberbullying roles and the relevant conditioning effects can be important in understanding adolescent violence and substance use” (Guo, p. 9).

Cyberbullying is not the only challenge students face in cyberschool. Students had to face challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Hasan & Bao, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Manoharan et al., 2022; Ozdamli & Karagozlu, 2022). For

example, “With the pandemic, there was an urgent transition to online education. In this process, challenges were experienced” (Ozdamli & Karagouzlu, p. 167). Findings of studies undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that students showed high anxiety in the online setting, and their stress was due to the difficulties in e-learning and their fear of losing an academic year (Hasan & Bao; Ozdamli & Karagozlu). Also, the lack of communication between students and their lecturers provided challenges which led to low levels of motivation, confidence, and experience in online learning (Hijazi & AlNatour, 2021; Manoharan et al.,). Additionally, it was found that many K-12 students reported feelings of isolation and helplessness especially in the beginnings of lessons and so preferred traditional classrooms (Evisen et al., 2020). Another study found that many students had difficulty completing schoolwork due to their home environment, lack of interest, and inability to complete assignments independently; therefore, students desired more support from their school and more interactive lessons (Lau & Lee, 2020). It was also found that learners had a low level of motivation and a poor virtual connection with their instructors (Hakim, 2020). These challenges have been shown to lead to poor academic performance, a high level of dropouts, passive learners, demand for more interesting online lessons, and lack of authentic language learning (Ali, 2020; Beck & Beasley, 2020; Boothe, 2020; Girik Allo, 2020; Hijazi & AlNatour; Mathew & Chung, 2020; Sevy-Biloon, 2021; Susilowati, 2020). Lastly, another study found that “Over four years, Colorado online schools yielded three times more dropouts than graduates” (Beck & Beasley, p. 2193).

Challenges Teachers Face

Students are not the only ones who face challenges. Teachers have their own set of challenges. Johnson et al. (2022) states, “The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced unprecedented challenges to educational institutions in the United States and globally” (p. 1). The first challenge teachers face is transitioning from face-to-face instruction to online teaching. For example, “Public and private schools and school districts continue to grapple with challenges associated with transitioning from fully face-to-face instruction at brick-and-mortar schools to fully or partially online instruction” (Johnson et al., p. 1). Beck and Beasley (2020) found that there is a lack of teacher training for instructing cyberschool. They also found that early career teachers need common planning times and regular support in order to increase their expertise. Another study found that many teachers reported to having limited knowledge and experience regarding the delivery of an online education (Johnson et al.,). The study also reported that unless time is given for virtual teachers to receive professional development in differentiation, movement towards expertise may be impeded. Additionally, teachers, as they transition, face challenges due to having more tasks, fulfilling family duties during work hours, adapting to new styles of training, and the overall feelings of uncertainty (Nogales-Delgado et al., 2020).

A second challenge teachers face has to do with factors related to the motivation of teachers within cyberschool education (Sengil Akar & Kurtoglu Erden, 2021). It was found that many teachers feel that they have little control of how distance education is presented. They state that decisions are left to the discretion of the school administration, which in turn, decreases teacher motivation (Sengil Akar & Kurtoglu Erden). Teachers also expressed a lack of motivation because of health and economic situations. One

teacher stated that because she had to deal with a person infected with the highly contagious Covid-19 in her proximity, she was too fearful and anxious to continue distance education (Sengil Akar & Kurtoglu Erden). Teachers were also less motivated due to teaching and assessment methods associated with online education (Ozdamli & Karagozlu, 2022). Almazova et al. (2020) determined that teachers have problems organizing productive interaction with students in the online environment while using active and collaborative teaching methods. Furthermore, teachers emphasized that preparing lessons for online learning can take twice as long to develop than traditional brick-and-mortar schools (Ozdamli & Karagozlu, 2022).

A third challenge, which is highly overlooked, is cyberbullying from parents and guardians to teachers (Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2019). One study reported that despite the important positive contributions made by parents and guardians in the school setting, online parental aggression is a problem for teachers. Küçüksüleymanoğlu stated in his study that nearly 75% of teachers stated they had received harassing or threatening messages from parents and guardians. In these messages, parents and guardians often act “in demeaning, manipulative, threatening, and/or directly or passively aggressive ways with teachers” (Küçüksüleymanoğlu., p.152). Communicating with parents and guardians has become “a source of undesirable occupational experiences for teachers” (Küçüksüleymanoğlu, p.152). Additionally, schools with larger populations tend to have more instances of cyberbullying than those with smaller populations. This may be because parents and guardians communicate with one another and may influence each other negatively about the teachers and school functioning (Küçüksüleymanoğlu).

Lastly, teachers face challenges with technology. Many teachers do not have easy access to technology and those that do, often have poor internet connection (Johnson et al., 2022; Rasiah et al., 2020). In addition, teachers report that the technology makes it difficult for them to monitor their students' behaviors and progress on their work. This makes it difficult for teachers to provide their students with feedback (Saha et al., 2022).

Challenges Parents and Guardians Face

Along with students and teachers, parents and guardians have their own share of challenges with online schooling. One challenge has to do with managing their children's online learning. Parents and guardians of students who attend a brick-and-mortar school may not be fully prepared to do this (Bourp et al., 2019). One study showed that many parents and guardians were unable to provide the types and levels of support their children needed to be successful in cyberschooling (Bourp et al.). It was also stated that the students' parents and guardians stopped engaging in the students' learning when the parents' and guardians' offers were rejected by the student. Even if parents and guardians can offer the necessary support, the students must be receptive for the parent to fulfill their responsibilities. Many parents and guardians may be drawn to online learning to lessen their responsibilities while not fully understanding how the change will remove some control and flexibility (Bourp et al.).

A second challenge has to do with misbehaving children. Parents and guardians of children with behavioral concerns who previously attended brick-and-mortar schools may not be prepared to manage them. As a result, some parents and guardians require support from the online program (Bourp et al., 2019). In one study by Bourp et al., a parent stated that due to this, they felt as though they had run out of options for schooling for their

child (p. 104). Bourp et al. state that a parents' and guardians' inexperience with being or supporting an online student will impact how they perceive their roles and the self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills that are required to successfully engage in their children's online learning.

The final challenge teachers face deals with communication. McQuaide (2020) states there is a communication gap between teachers and parents and guardians in virtual settings since there is no face-to-face interaction. McQuaide mentions some schools have family coaches that try to bridge the communication gap by doing in-home visits. A family teacher coach is a person who provides support for students who may struggle with adapting to the online instructional model. The family coach lives in the vicinity of the student so face-to-face contact is possible (Agora Cyber Charter School, 2022). In one study by McQuaide, it was found that sometimes parents and guardians put up a wall and are afraid that family coaches doing in-home visits will judge them. If parents and guardians do not trust the family coach, then they do not see them as an advocate (McQuaide). Ultimately, parents, guardians, and family coaches need to have an open line of communication to best meet the student's needs (McQuaide). The final challenge discussed in this review are the instructional challenges of a cyberschool.

Instructional Challenges

There are instructional challenges that occur in cyberschool. The first instructional challenge has to do with communication. Communication in the classroom between teacher and students can be a challenge as all communication uses technology. One of the critical factors for student success was identified as communication. If there is a lack of communication, student success is reduced (Johnson et al., 2022). One study

suggests that communication between the student and the teacher is at the core of successful learning. (Burdina et al., 2019). For example, “Face to face communication is currently considered more effective than its virtual alternative [because] allows the teacher, student and parent in the conversation to experience a greater level of trust and understanding between each other” (Burdina et al., p. 3).

Another instructional challenge is accessibility. Accessibility in online learning is defined as the use of technology tools to support students of all abilities while meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities (McAlvage & Rice, 2018). Technology is constantly changing and the teacher's role in distance learning must adapt to these changes. Teachers often fail to identify their purpose acting among the technological changes and what is the best method of teaching students in cyberschools (Burdina et al., 2019). Research found by Johnson et al., (2022), focused on the importance of schools providing clear and facilitated access to learning online in a virtual setting. In a study by Admiraal et al., (2017), many teachers were having difficulty with learning and implementing technology applications. Johnson et al., also found that 42 articles alluded to educators’ limited knowledge and experiences regarding online delivery of K–12 schooling. Students also have their own technology problems. For example, “Twenty-one articles reviewed, discussed the challenges inherent with technology access issues and students’ need for parental support in virtual or online environments” (Johnson et al., p.14). Student success relies on the ability for students to access and use technology effectively (Johnson et.al.,).

The last instructional challenge relates to the Covid-19 pandemic. Research shows the Covid-19 pandemic has introduced unprecedented challenges to schools around the

world (Johnson et.al., 2022). Johnson states, “Teacher preparation programs are faced with the challenge of preparing future teachers for new and uncertain instructional realities in the wake of the pandemic” (p.13). The Covid-19 pandemic, however, illuminated gaps in the knowledge base for transitioning to and implementing effective practices in K–12 online teaching and learning at the policy, infrastructure, administration, and teaching levels (Barbour et al., 2020). Due to Covid-19, support for teachers transitioning their courses online require additional technological support and professional development to teach effectively in a virtual environment (Johnson et al.,). There is an “issue of access to technology devices and internet service as a basic consideration for emergency remote instruction and pointed for the need for contingency planning as schools move into a future where the need for rapid transitions to online schooling could be the norm rather than the exception” (Barbour et al., as mentioned in Johnson et al., p. 32).

Implications

Even since before the Covid-19 pandemic was declared in March of 2020, cyberschools have been growing in enrollment across the country (Beck & Beasley, 2020). There has been little research as to the reason why parents and guardians are choosing cyberschools for their children. This study aims to give administrators of both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools the knowledge they need to meet the individual needs of their students. This study will attempt to fill in the gaps of why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children.

Ultimately, it may help cyberschools make the necessary adjustments to meet their

student's needs. In addition, this study will attempt to help educate brick-and-mortar personnel as to what adjustments are necessary to meet student needs.

Furthermore, this research will analyze cyberschool enrollment trends over the past five years. The findings will provide guidance to schools on past and anticipated enrollments in the future. This will allow both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools to make adjustments regarding any changes related to student enrollment.

Conclusion

This review of literature discussed the brief history of distance learning and mentioned how it originated and transformed into virtual cyberschools. There are different types of cyberschooling. Beasley and Beck (2017) mention most cyberschools typically use a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instructional methods. In addition, Beasley and Beck also mentions the increase of student enrollment over the years in cyberschool.

Cyberschools come with challenges, too. This review discussed some of the specific challenges students faced in a virtual setting. Research states that cyberbullying is one of those challenges (Guo, 2021). The other challenge students faced are due to the Covid-19 pandemic as discussed by Ozdamli and Karagozlu (2022).

In addition, this review discussed challenges teachers faced. The Covid-19 pandemic caused difficult transitioning on teachers (Johnson et al., 2022). These challenges include technology issues, a lack of motivation, and training (Sengil Akar & Kurtoglu Erden, 2021; Beck & Beasley, 2020). Parents and guardians also deal with challenges of cyberschool education for their students. Bourp (2019) mentions many parents and guardians are inexperienced with the best practices on how to support their

child in cyberschool. McQuaide (2020) mentions the communication gaps between the parents, guardians, and family coaches. Finally, there are challenges in instructional practices within cyberschools. Burdina et al. (2019) expresses communication between teacher and student as a challenge, ultimately hindering instruction. McAlvage and Rice (2018) and Johnson et al., discuss how communication and technology can be a barrier if teachers and students are not fully capable of using it. Research shows the Covid-19 pandemic increased the need for cyberschool education, with many teachers not prepared to make the switch from traditional school to virtual school rapidly (Beck & Beasley). Chapter 3 will discuss the methods used to gather the data and analyze it to better understand why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschool education for their students.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Purpose

As a parent or guardian raising children, there are many decisions one needs to make. One decision a parent or guardian can make is to decide what is the best form of education in which to enroll their children. There are two common types of schooling a child could attend. The first is a traditional brick-and-mortar school where the child goes to a school building, sits in a classroom, and is taught in-person by a teacher. This has been the most common and widely used form of schooling in the world. There are approximately 43.7 million students attending traditional schools in the United States (NCES, 2020). The other type of schooling is a cyberschool. This is where children attend live classes via the computer from their own homes. First, a student enrolls in a cyberschool. A cyberschool teacher instructs through a camera connected to the computer and can consult with the student after class via secure e-mail (Ellis, 2021).

Although the idea of distance learning has been around for over 150 years, what society considers cyberschools has only been around since 1995 (Agostinelli, 2019; Greenway, 2006). With this being noted, parents and guardians may not have been exposed to, or fully understand, the advantages and disadvantages of a cyberschool education. As of the 2022-2023 school year there were 156 brick-and-mortar schools and only 14 cyberschools in Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022). This suggests that it is more common for parents or guardians to send their children to a brick-and-mortar school than a cyberschool. This study aims to understand the reasons parents and guardians are choosing or are not choosing cyberschools for their children.

This study will also analyze enrollment trends of top six highest enrolled cyberschools in Pennsylvania and the possible reasons for such trends.

There are three ultimate goals of this study. The first goal is to educate parents and guardians of the advantages and disadvantages of cyberschools. This will help ensure students are enrolled in the type of school that best meets their individual needs. The second goal is for both cyberschools and traditional brick-and-mortar schools to make the necessary adjustments to help ensure they are meeting student goals. Goals will be obtained by understanding what parents and guardians look for in a school. Finally, by meeting student's needs, both types of schools may be able to retain or increase student enrollment in their institutions.

Methodology

The intent of this study is to obtain a rich understanding of the complex, individual reasons parents and guardians make the decision of where to send their children for an education. This study uses a qualitative and quantitative mixed methodology in order to better understand why certain parents choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children and how enrollment has changed over the past five years for a cyberschool. Mixed methodology will be used because "Qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study can complement each other by providing results with greater breadth and depth [and] combining what with a possible why can add support for... findings" (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018, p. 144). Mixed methodology is defined as research that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data to ultimately address research questions (Schrauf, 2016). In the case of this study a mixed methodology was most appropriate, as the study aims to understand the specific reasons why parents or guardians

choose cyberschool for their children as well as the enrollment trends of cyberschools. A mixed methodology approach allows for a deeper understanding and helps to examine the relationship between the two research questions. When examining all the factors, it was concluded that a mixed methodology approach was most appropriate for addressing each aspect of the data.

Qualitative research is a type of research that explores deeper insight into the how and why of phenomena (Tenny et al., 2022). More specifically, this method focuses on the how and why parents are making the choice to send their children to a cyberschool or a traditional brick-and-mortar school. As Creswell (2003) explains, words such as “discover”, “describe”, and “explore” are the essence of qualitative research. The reasons parents or guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools will be depicted in the form of codes from data collected by both an interview and survey that each participant completed.

The quantitative method refers to strategies, techniques and assumptions used in a study that relies on the exploration of numerical patterns (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Quantitative research is used to help create understanding and observe specific occurrences (Allen, 2017). This type of methodology was particularly useful when analyzing student enrolment trends in the six cyberschools analyzed in this study. The quantitative method focused on how enrollment of cyberschools has adapted over the past five years. This portion of the study will look for possible trends in enrollment and reasons for these trends. This data will be depicted with the use of tables, figures, and anecdotal notes.

Location

A detailed study was conducted regarding why parents or guardian choose their preferred method of schooling for their children. This study also identifies how enrollment rates have changed over the five years in six cyberschools in Pennsylvania. This study took place in two different settings. The first setting was in-person with the researcher. The researcher met with two of the participants in the greater Butler, Pennsylvania area, located 30 miles north of Pittsburgh. The locations were in local business establishments and the researcher's home. The second settings were via phone calls, a virtual survey, and e-mail. This allowed the researcher to target participants across the state without the inconvenience of travel.

Participants

Chamberlain (2000) warns against methodological ideologies inadvertently leading to overly large samples. Therefore, the current study consisted of ten participants in attempt to avoid wasting time, unnecessary data, and information that is not relevant for the aim of the study (Malterud et al., 2016). According to Crouch and McKenzie (2006), with a small number of participants, the researcher can facilitate a close association with the participants and can enhance the validity of responses. During the current study, the research was able to spend more time with the participants and gain a deeper understanding of their responses during the interviews. In addition, Fiedler and Kareev (2006) argue that small sample sizes can produce more accuracy in their responses. Since a smaller sample allows for more time with the researcher and participants, the researcher is able converse longer and strive for rich responses. In addition, Hertwig and Pleskac (2008) share that small sample sizes tend to underrepresent

rate events that may not be relevant to the study. The reason why a sample size of ten participants was used in the current investigation is because the researcher's intent was to collect thorough participant responses and understand specific reasons for school choice without collecting unnecessary data irrelevant to the study.

The participants of the study include the parent or legal guardian of children who attend either a brick-and-mortar school or a cyberschool in Pennsylvania. Participants were required to be over the age of 18 and have legal custody of the student to participate in the study. The participants could be either male or female. Participants are required to have access to the internet to be able to effectively complete an online survey. The participants must have children that are currently enrolled between kindergarten and 12th grade at the time of the study. The participants may include fathers, mothers, stepparents, grandparents, and any legal guardian over the age of 18 that makes the legal, educational decisions regarding the students educational setting. For the remainder of this study, these qualifiers will be referred to as "parent", "guardian", or "participant." There are no other qualifications for the participants in the study.

In order to obtain participants, convenience sampling was used to coincide with a small sample size. Other sampling methods, such as random sampling, cannot be achieved with smaller sample sizes (Shoaf & Shoaf, 2006). For example, "Convenience sampling (also called accidental sampling or grab sampling) is a method of non-probability sampling where researchers will choose their sample based solely on the convenience... [meaning] that researchers choose the sample as opposed to randomly selecting it, so not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study" (Simkus, 2022, para. 1). Convenience, or non-probability sampling, reduces

the amount of time needed to identify participants. This is important because the study will attempt to identify reasons parents are choosing cyberschools within a short time frame of approximately three months. The researcher chose the participants based on previous knowledge. It was predetermined whether the participant enrolled their child in a cyber or brick-and-mortar school. This was done to ensure a 1:1 ratio of those who chose cyber and those who chose brick-and-mortar. Additionally, convenience samples are a way to intervene if someone has faced a positive or negative experience with a specific school.

Since parents or guardians from any school district within Pennsylvania qualified for this study, researcher biases were limited. The goal of the study was to determine reasons parents or guardians of all demographics are choosing or are not choosing cyberschools; therefore, all volunteers who met the mentioned criteria were able to participate. The only exclusions were that the participant must be a parent or guardian of a school-aged child and that they must attend school within Pennsylvania.

The researcher collected participants in two ways. First, the researcher verbally explained the study to friends, family, and acquaintances who are parents or guardians of school-aged children. A detailed explanation was given outlining why the study was being conducted and what was hoped to be achieved. Secondly, current coworkers that are parents or guardians were verbally asked if they wished to participate. Once participants agreed to be part of the study the researcher supplied them with a series of consent forms to sign in order to proceed. Forms included a voluntary consent to participate, an audio release form, and an enrollment consent form. Once each consent and confidentiality form were signed by the participants and collected by the researcher

the forms were securely locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's home. No one aside from the researcher, has access to the forms. Then, the researcher connected with the participants via phone calls and/or e-mails to schedule a one-hour appointment to review the process of the study. The researcher requested that each participant schedule the meeting with the researcher within three months of signing the consent and confidentiality forms. All participants were scheduled by the end of March 2022. Scheduling and meeting with each participant took approximately three months, concluding by the end of June 2022.

During the time frame that each participant met with the researcher the researcher began to collect student enrollment data from six cyberschools in Pennsylvania over the past five years. This was done two ways. The first was researching the Pennsylvania Department of Education Enrollment statistics and by e-mailing the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) from the school and requesting student enrollment rates. The researcher explained the study and its purpose and requested documentation of enrollment rates over the past five years. No consent or confidentiality forms were needed for this section of the study as enrollment rates are public knowledge. Data collection on enrollment rates were concluded by the end of July 2022.

Data Collection

Data from this study was collected in various ways. First, data from the survey and interview was collected from each participant of the research study. The researcher used deductive coding to organize the data. For example, "With deductive coding, the researcher makes use of pre-established codes, which are developed before interaction takes place with the present data. This involves creating a set of codes based on the

research questions” (Crosley & Jansen, 2020, para. 6). The researcher chose pre-established codes using P for participant, A for Appendix (which will host the blank survey and interview questionnaires), and S denoting standard question number from either the survey or interview response sheet. Each coding symbol will be preceded with colon, ‘:’, and then a number or letter(s) identifying each unique character. For example, A:B will signify Appendix B and P:3 will denote participant three.

Once the participants agreed to be a part of the study, the researcher first e-mailed each participant the survey link to their supplied e-mail address. The researcher requested each survey be completed within three weeks of receiving. Upon completion of the survey, each participant engaged in an in-person or phone interview following the survey. The researcher and participant agreed on a date and time to conduct the interview. The interview questions asked parents or guardians decision-making questions based on their perception and personal experiences within the school setting. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes to complete. After completion of each interview the researcher created written transcripts of each interview for the use of this study. The transcripts will be shredded and disposed of three years after the completion and publication of this report. Finally, enrollment data was collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and from the six cyberschools schools. The researcher e-mailed the districts requesting their schools’ enrollment rates over the past five school years.

Data Analysis

Deductive coding was utilized to group the data together from the survey and interviews. With deductive coding the researcher starts the study with a predetermined set of codes, such as the survey data and interview transcripts (Crosley & Jansen, 2020). In

this case, the survey is coded as Appendix A or A:A and the interview form is coded as Appendix B or A:B. The letter S is also used in this coding and symbolizes standard question number from the survey or interview template. For example, A:A S:20 represents Appendix A– survey and the standard question number 20 found in the prescribed appendix. Deductive coding is very detailed and allows the researcher to focus solely on the data, which are the specific reason parents choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children. The codes included EC for extracurriculars, CO used for communication, SO designed for socialization, SU representing support, SA signifying safety, and ST denoting structure. Once these codes were established the researcher used a hierarchical code frame to create visuals. Medelyan (2021) states, “Hierarchical framing supports a larger code frame and lets the researcher organize codes based on organizational structure” (para. 42). When analyzing the data from the participants, Q-methodology, also known as Q-sort, was used. Q-methodology is used to investigate the perspectives of participants who represent different stances on an issue by having participants rank and sort a series of statements. The researcher utilized a hierarchical graph by developing a chart of the major demographics of the participants of both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools. The demographics include if there are children that have a learning disability in the home, number of learners in the home, household income, political affiliation, and ethnicity. Graphs were used to compare the demographics between parents and guardians that enroll their children in cyberschools versus parents who enroll their children in brick-and-mortar schools. Tables depict educational decision makers and include enrollment rates from the six cyberschools over the past five years. A summary of the findings is included with each table.

Sources of Data

For this study, data was collected from various sources. First, each participant was asked to complete an online survey asking them specific questions regarding their demographics and their reasons for school choice. The data collected from the online survey was analyzed using hierarchical coding. Hierarchical coding is based on the idea that coding will be depicted in the form of quality hierarchy. This is when the bottom of hierarchy entails the minimum information while succeeding layers of the hierarchy adds increasing quality to the graph (Crowcroft, 1998).

Hierarchical coding frame was examined using a figure that depicted participant answers to each question of the survey.

Next, using Q-sort (Q-methodology), the participants completed a series of interview questions with the researcher. Q-sort is a method to better understand participants motives and behaviors in greater depth (Reiber, 2020). Q-sort analyzed participant's reasons in detail as to why they chose or did not choose to send their students to a cyberschool. Data was sorted into two groups. The first group consisted of those who chose cyberschools and the second group consisted of those who chose a brick-and-mortar school as their school choice. Next, the data explained the specific reasons the participants made the decisions they did. This data included family demographics and the individual reasons parents and guardians made their choice. Ultimately, each reason chosen given by the participant was analyzed and depicted with the use of figures.

Finally, data was collected showing enrollment rates at six Pennsylvania cyberschools over the past five years. Using trend analysis, the data was able to be

correlated by specific years as well as comparing increases and decreases in enrollment rates. Trend analysis is a form of analysis that focuses on and quantifying current and future patterns that can be depicted with graphs (Neelamegam & Muthusubramanian, 2022). While combining Q-sort with trend analysis, this study aimed to identify student enrollment trends in six Pennsylvania cyberschools with possible explanations for those trends.

Presentation of Results

The data collected from this study was validated by peer debriefing, colleagues, and professors. Furthermore, the researcher's dissertation committee systematically reviewed the findings, ensured consistency, and analyzed the data to ensure that the researcher effectively made conclusions based on the data.

The results of this study were presented based on participant demographics and responses to the survey and interview questions regarding the reasons they chose or did not choose cyberschool. This included everyone that participated in the survey. The participants were given access to the results of the studies survey and interview questions. The results were shared by sending the participants a copy of the study via electronic mail or through postal mail. A summary of the study, written in layman's terms, was included with the study. The summary highlights the key findings. A thank-you letter for participating and contact information of the researcher was attached to allow further communication for questions or explanation of results. The data was offered to the cyberschools that supplied the researcher with their student enrollment rates over the past five years and the results of the survey and interview. A summary of the findings, a thank-you letter, and contact information was electronically mailed to the cyberschools.

Limitations

Researching why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools come with some limitations. The first limitation is the geographical area where the participants are chosen. This study only included participants within the state of Pennsylvania. If participants were chosen from other states or perhaps, other countries, reasons for choosing or not choosing cyberschools may differ. This study is also using the honor system when asking participants if they are a parent or legal guardian. The researcher had no undeniable proof to know if the participant is a parent or legal guardian aside from verbal affirmation. Additionally, participants may withhold specific feelings or experiences they had with a cyberschool or brick-and-mortar school. This may cause answers to not be entirely valid. Another limitation is that some of the participants for this study are teachers that work for a cyberschool or a brick-and-mortar school. These participants may have personal biases toward one or both types of schools. Also, some of the participants are friends and family of the researcher. Since the researcher works for a cyberschool, there is a chance the participants may answer questions with unintentional or intentional biases due to the researcher's place of employment. Finally, data collection occurred within approximately a three-month time frame to ensure completion of the study in a timely manner. Extending the time of the study would increase the number of participants which may allow for more confidence-leveled trends in the data. There will be no major expenses during this study. The only expense will be purchasing a subscription to Survey Monkey. With more time and financial support to travel to other locations, data collection and analysis may be more specific and precise.

Additionally, this study examined six of the highest enrolled cyberschools in Pennsylvania during the 2017-2018 school year. If this study was to examine every cyberschool in Pennsylvania, the data may depict different information. Furthermore, enrollment trends were analyzed during the previous five years. If the data was retrieved from earlier years, it may depict additional possible trends.

Summary

Overall, this study includes parents and legal guardians of school-age students in Pennsylvania of both cyber and brick-and-mortar schools. Participants were given a survey asking them specific reasons why they did or did not choose to enroll their children in a cyberschool. They also participated in a personal interview to further expand on their responses. A mixed methodology approach was used consisting of both qualitative and quantitative research. Using both in a single study allows for more depth and deeper understanding of the data (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). The qualitative research allowed for the research to discover, describe, and explore the data in depth (Cresswell, 2003). More specifically, this entails the specific reasons parents and guardians are choosing or not choosing cyberschool for their children. In addition, the qualitative research relied on the numerical forms of data (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This included the researcher analyzing student enrollment from six cyberschools and analyzed them for possible trends.

Descriptive statistic and Q-sort (Q-methodology) were utilized to analyze the data found with the support of a hierarchical code frame. Rieber (2020), states, “Q-methodology is used to reveal and study subjectivity within a group of people in a systematic way in order to better understand their motivations and behavior” (para. 2).

This included an interview with the researcher which each participant completed. Questions were related to the specific reasons for their school choice.

Finally, using trend analysis, a way to describe trends with the use of graphs (Neelamegam & Muthusubramanian, 2022), this study was able to identify student enrollment trends in six cyberschools. Additionally, based on participant feedback from the survey and interviews, reasons for those trends were identified. This information is presented in Chapter Four.

Ultimately, this study could assist both cyberschools and traditional schools in making the necessary changes to help maintain or increase enrollment rates and improve school effectiveness by identifying and acknowledging reasons for parent and guardian choice. In addition, this study could identify and understand the reasons for student enrollment trends. Chapter Three included information regarding the methodology, research conducted, and the data analysis used for this study. Chapter Four of this study will identify and discuss the findings of this research.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction to the Findings

As stated in Chapter One, this study examined the reasons parents or guardians choose cyberschools or brick-and-mortar schools for their children. This chapter is organized in terms of the two specific research questions mentioned throughout Chapter One. The first research question reports on the specific factors regarding why parents choose or do not choose cyberschool for their children. The second question analyzes enrollment rates over the past five years in six cyberschools within Pennsylvania. The first research question of this study called for a qualitative approach using deductive coding to analyze the information. The second question of this study called for a quantitative approach for analyzing enrollment in six cyberschools over the past five years. The qualitative approach helped give a rich description of why parents choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children. The survey and open-ended questions are analyzed using a hierarchical coding frame. The quantitative approach helped analyze how student enrollment has changed in cyberschools over the past five year.

Hierarchical Coding Frame

Hierarchical coding frames were used in this study to organize codes based on how each relate to one another. Original data is depicted within Appendix C; therefore, will allow any secondary analysts to determine other meaningful categories on their own rather than being confined to those chosen in this study. First, identification variables were set at the beginning of the data file. Respondents' identifications within the data file were given a unique identification number. Each respondent was labeled Participant 1 (P:1) through Participant 10 (P:10). Participant 1 (P:1), Participant 4 (P:4), Participant 5

(P:5), Participant 6 (P:6), and Participant 7 (P:7) stated their school choice as a cyberschool (CS), while Participant 2 (P:2), Participant 3 (P:3), Participant 8 (P:8), Participant 9 (P:9), and Participant 10 (P:10) stated their school choice as brick-and-mortar school.

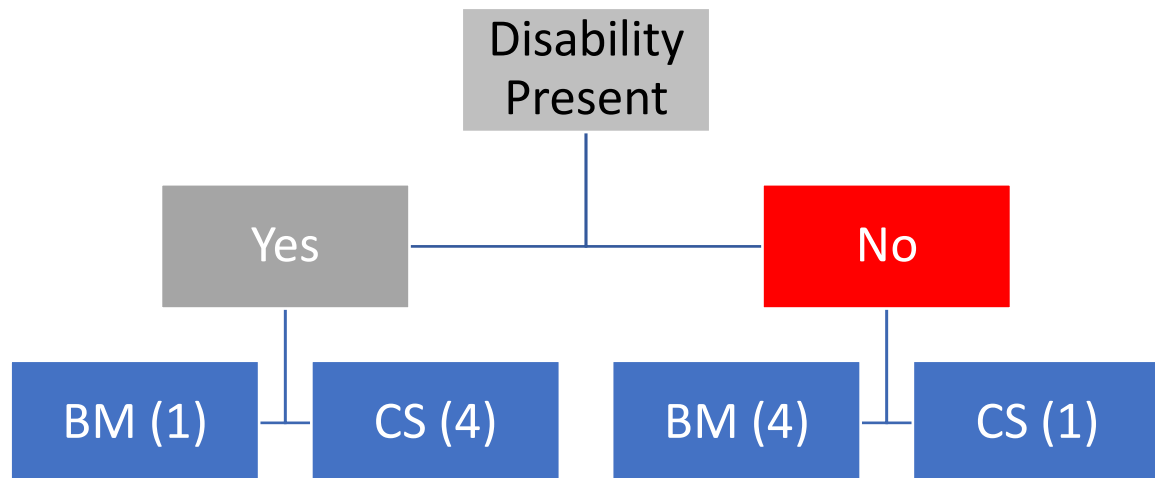
The top-level code within the hierarchical coding frame describes the topic. The mid-level code specifies whether the sentiment is positive or negative or and/or section. The third-level code details the attribute or specific theme associated with each topic. An asterisk was used to signify the most important factor selected. 'BM' represents brick-and-mortar school and 'CS' represents cyberschool.

Demographics

This study consisted of ten parents or legal guardians of school aged children. These children attended either a brick-and-mortar school or a cyberschool in Pennsylvania during the 2022-2023 school year. Of the ten participants, five enrolled their children in a cyberschool and five enrolled their children in a brick-and-mortar school. The researcher intended for an equal number of participants to ensure a 1:1 ratio; therefore, ensuring equality between those that attend a cyberschool and those that attend a brick-and-mortar school. The participants are categorized into six categories. These categories include if the children in the home are identified with a learning disability, the number of students in the home, household income, affiliated political party, and ethnicity. The first of these categorizes analyzed are parents who have children identified with a learning disability.

Disability

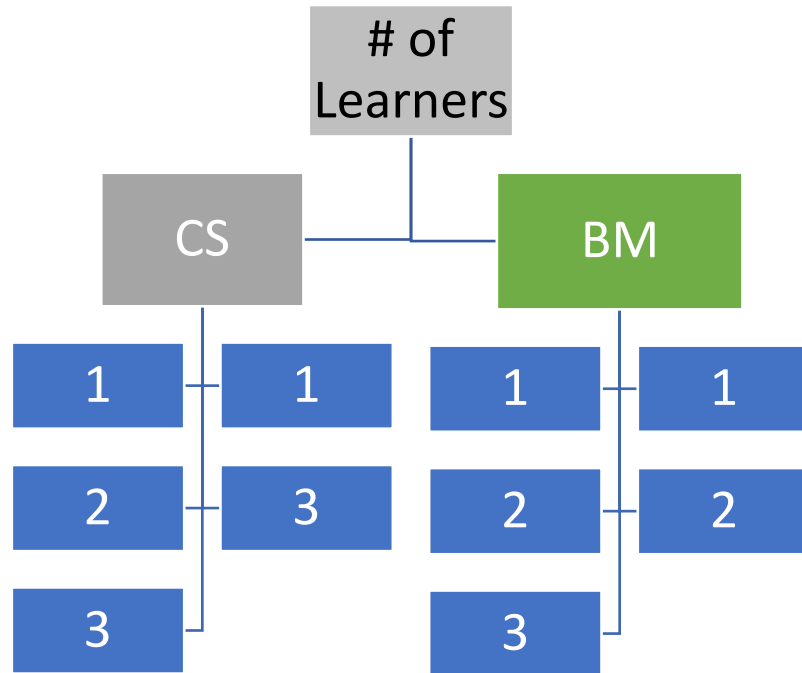
Ten parents or legal guardians, also known in this study as Participant 1 (P:1) through Participant 10 (P:10), were asked if they have children who are identified with a learning disability that attend a school, grades kindergarten through 12th grade, in Pennsylvania. P:1, P:4, P:5, P:6, and P:7 selected cyberschool as a school choice. Four of the five participants (80%) mentioned having at least one student in the home that is identified with a learning disability. P:7 mentioned not having a child identified with a learning disability. P:2, P:3, P:8, P:9, and P:10 selected brick-and-mortar as their school choice. Four of the five participants do not have a child in the home with a disability (80%), while P:3 mentioned having a child in the home identified with a disability. This difference is greater than or equal to 10% correlating a significant difference. The likelihood that a participant with a child identified with a disability chooses a cyberschool is greater than the likelihood that a participant with a non-identified child chooses a brick-and-mortar setting. The impact of having a child with a disability and school choice is depicted in Figure 1. Cyberschool choice is depicted as CS and brick-and-mortar is depicted as BM.

Figure 1*Disability and School Choice***Number of Students**

The second category that was analyzed for this study was to identify how many children were within each of the participants' homes. Participants selecting cyberschool as a school choice had an average of two learners within the home, and participants selecting brick-and-mortar as a school choice had an average of 1.8 learners within the home. This difference is less than 10%; thus, correlating no significant difference. There is suggestive minimal data that a participant with a larger number of learners in the home chooses a cyberschool setting and a participant with a smaller number of learners in the home chooses a brick-and-mortar setting. This information is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Number of Learners Per Household Attending Cyberschools (C) and Brick-and-Mortar Schools (BM)



Household Income

The third category analyzed in this study determined the household income for the families with children that attend either a cyberschool or a brick-and-mortar school.

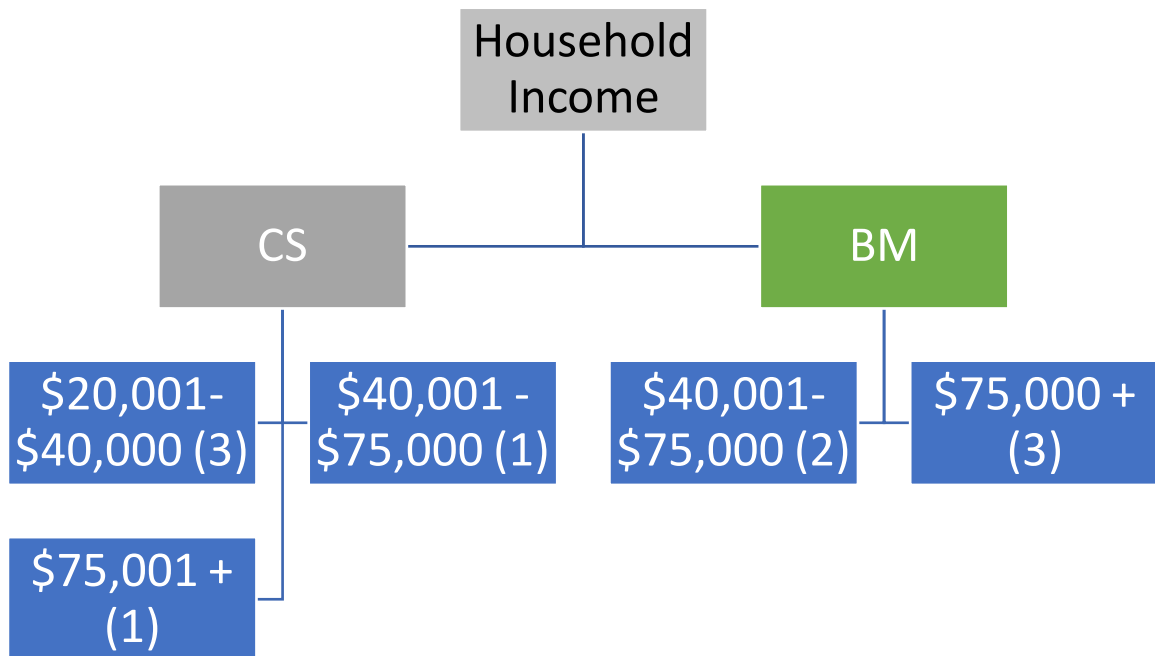
Based on the 10 participants of this study, the overall income for the families who enrolled their children in a brick-and-mortar school was significantly higher than in the cyberschool. Regarding the participants with a school choice of cyberschool, P:1, P:4, and P:6 stated their average household income is between \$20,001 and \$40,000 per year.

Additionally, P:4 stated that their annual household income is between \$40,000 and \$70,000, and P:7 stated their income is \$75,001 and above. For those that chose brick-and-mortar school for their school choice, P:2, P:3, and P:10 stated their total household income is above \$75,000. In addition, both P:8 and P:9 stated their total household income ranges between \$40,001 and \$75,000. There is statistical data to state that a

parent selecting cyberschool as a school choice has an average household income of \$20,001-\$40,000 annually, and a parent selecting brick-and-mortar as a school choice has an average household income of \$75,000 +. Household income of cyberschool and brick-and-mortar school students is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Household Income of Cyberschool (C) and Brick-and-Mortar (BM) School Students



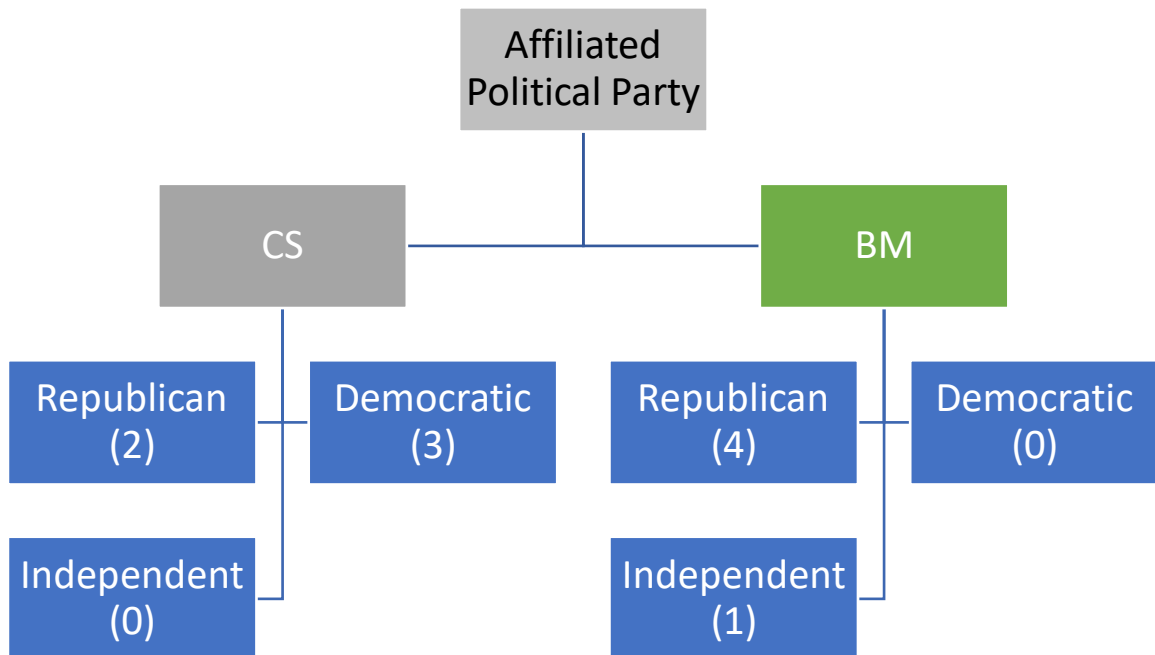
Political Affiliation

Next, the participants were asked to state their affiliated political parties. All 10 participants of the study answered this question. The cyberschool participants, P:1, P:4, and P:5 affiliate themselves with the Democratic Party while P:6 and P:7 affiliate with the Republican Party. For the brick-and-mortar participants, P:2, P:3, P:9, and P:10 affiliate themselves with the Republican Party while P:8 associates themselves with the Independent Party. There is statistical data to state that a participant selecting cyberschool as a school choice is more likely to politically affiliate with the Democratic Party and a

participant selecting brick-and-mortar as a school choice is more likely to politically affiliate with the Republican Party. Figure 4 shows a greater number of participants with a school choice or cyberschools chose the Democratic Party and participants with a school choice of brick-and-mortar schools chose the Republican Party.

Figure 4

Political Party Affiliations of Cyberschool and Brick-and-Mortar School (BM) Parents and Guardians



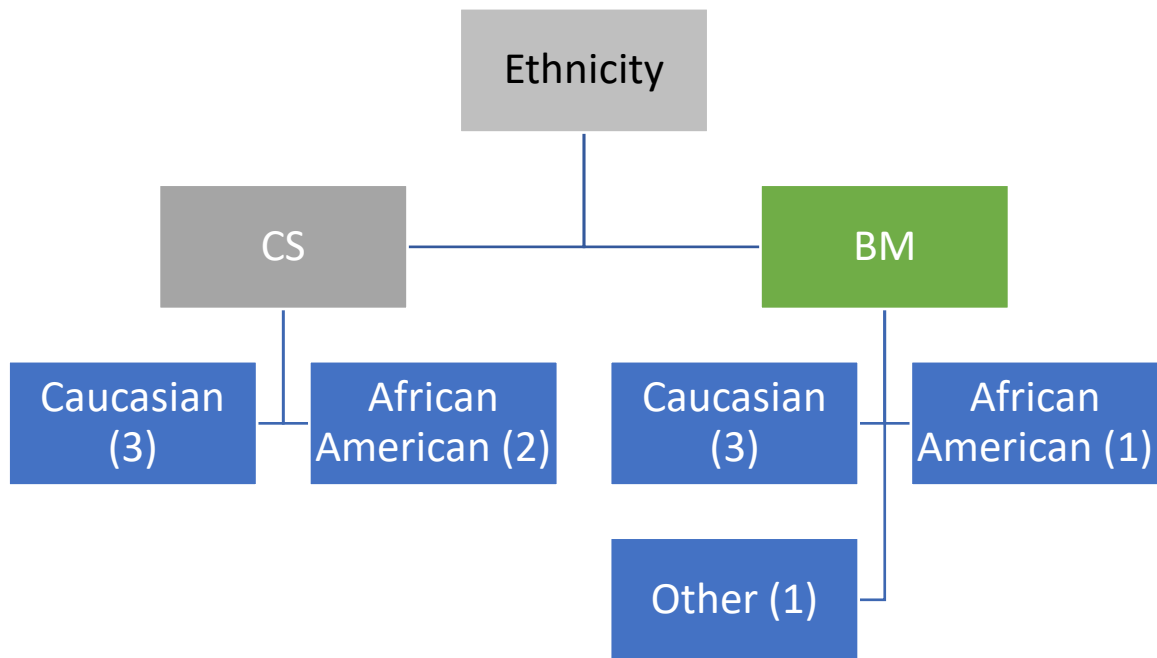
Ethnicity

The final demographical data gathered from this study was to determine the ethnicity of the participants. Of the five participants who enroll their children to a cyberschool P:1, P:5, and P:7 identify as Caucasian while P:4 and P:6 identify as African American. Of the five participants that enroll their child to a brick-and-mortar school P:2, P:8 and P:9 identify as Caucasian. In addition, P:3 identify as “other” and P:10 as African American. There is no significant difference in ethnicity data from the participants;

therefore, determining that no one ethnicity outweighs another regarding participant school choice. Ethnicity of the participants in cyberschools, and brick-and-mortar schools is depicted below in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Ethnicity



Final Code Table

Content analysis process was conducted at the conclusion of the survey submissions. The first step in this content analysis was providing descriptive coding by assigning shorthand designations to aspects of the survey data in order to be easily retrieved. The 10 participants were asked five open ended questions. Open-ended questions and textual answers in the survey questionnaires, Appendix A: Standard 20 and Appendix B: Standards 1-4, required an independent coding process with clearly defined layout or coding structure. First, each survey response was coded to classify the survey,

question number, and participant identification. Survey responses are coded as follows: 'A' symbolizes the survey appendix, 'S' denotes standard question number, 'P' symbolizes participant number, 'Consists Of' is indicated by a plus sign +, and 'Lack of' is indicated by the negative sign, -. The coding begins in column one, titled 'A & S & P,' located in Table 1. The code 'A:B S:2 P:4', for instance, designates Appendix A survey, standard question two, and Participant 4.

Next, pattern coding was done in columns three and four. The pattern coding process began by rereading each participant's open-ended survey responses and placing them into the first code. The first code consisted of key words, statements, and phrases. These key words, statements, and phrases were identified as potential themes in column three titled, 'Preliminary Codes.' The responses were reread until codes were filled with responses and sorting the patterns of responses with more specific codes. This process was replicated until assurance of certain established pattern of codes that fit under each theme were recognized. These specific codes were then placed into column four titled, 'Final Code.' The specific patterns that emerged included Extracurriculars, Communications, Socialization, Safety, Structure, and Support. Codes were then supplied to each final theme. Codes given to final themes are as follows: Extracurriculars are symbolized by 'EC' and the shading green, Communications is signified by 'CO' and the shading blue, Socialization is recognized by 'SO' and the shading light gray, Safety is denoted by 'SA' and the shading yellow, Structure is represented as ST and the shading orange, and Support is indicated by SU and the shading dark gray. Table 2 demonstrates the final codes given to the qualitative data.

Once themes and coding were identified each theme was then categorized into an educational reform known as shared decision-making (SDM) framework. The SDM process is an on-going practice of making educational decisions in a collaborative manner. According to Weiss (1995), there are several factors that impact the decisions of parents. Weiss suggests that there are four “I’s” (4-I’s) that affect responses in the shared decision-making process. These four I’s include interests, ideology, information, and institutional norms. This study identified two of the four I’s. The two I’s consisted of interests and ideology. The other two, information and instructional norms, were deemed irrelevant to this study.

According to Weiss’s (1995) 4-I’s framework, interests are outlined in terms of self-interest. The way a participant views their situation will outline their personal interests. Weiss explains that a participant’s past, personal, and professional experiences assist influencing their self-interests. However, ideology consists of the combination of a participant’s values, principles, philosophy, and political orientation (Weiss). Table 1 depicts the codes within this study, which is categorized between interests and ideologies.

Table 1

Final Codes Placed into ‘I’ of Decision-Making Framework

Interests	Ideologies
EC = Extracurriculars	SA = Safety
CO = Communications	ST = Structure
SO = Socialization	
SU = Support	

Table 2 demonstrates the raw data, preliminary codes, and final codes determined from the data.

Table 2

Final Code Process Table

A & S & P	Raw data	Preliminary Codes	Final Code
A:A S:20 P:1	'Behaviors are managed at home, great teachers, good communication' - Cyber	Teachers Communication	+ CO = Communications
A:A S:20 P:2	'Children involved in sports which offer great opportunities' - BM	Sports	+ EC = Extracurriculars
A:A S:20 P:3	'Traditional parent and I believe traditional schooling is best for my children.' - BM	Structure Traditions	+ ST = Structure
A:A S:20 P:4	'2 of 3 children have disabilities and I can help support then during live classes.' - Cyber	Disabilities Home Support During Live Classes	+ SU = Support
A:A S:20 P:5	'Teacher's communicate well and accommodate' - Cyber	Teacher Communication Accommodating	+ CO = Communication
A:A S:20 P:6	'My children do well with routine and cyberschool is that' - Cyber	Structured Day	+ST = Structure
A:A S:20 P:7	'I enrolled my children in cyberschool due to Covid-19. They are much safer at home' - Cyber	Safety Covid-19	+ SA = Safety
A:A S:20 P:8	'My son plays baseball and opportunities to travel'-BM	Sports	+EC = Extracurriculars
A:A S:20 P:9	'My child has excellent teachers and helped him during tough times'-BM	Excellent Teachers	+SU = Support
A:A S:20 P:10	'Both of my sons are on the football team'-BM	Sports	+EC = Extracurriculars

A:B S:1 P:1	‘Socialization/relationships’ - Cyber	Opportunities for Companionships	- SO = Socialization
A:B S:1 P:1	‘Hands on with a teacher/in person instruction’ - Cyber	Face-to-Face Structure	-ST = Structure
A:B S:1 P:2	‘Extracurricular activities’ - BM	Extracurriculars	+EC = Extracurriculars
A:B S:1 P:2	‘Building bonds/friendships’ - BM	Opportunities for Companionships	+ SO = Socialization
A:B S:1 P:2	‘School academics push students’ - BM	Academic Encouragement	+ ST = Structure
A:B S:1 P:3	‘Traditional setting with structure’ - BM	Traditional Structure	+ ST = Structure
A:B S:1 P:3	‘Rules’ - BM	Structure	
A:B S:1 P:3	‘Social Ques’ - BM	Structure	
A:B S:1 P:4	‘Socialization’ - Cyber	Opportunities for Companionships	+SO = Socialization
A:B S:1 P:4	‘Sports and activities’ - BM	Extracurriculars	+ EC = Extracurriculars
A:B S:1 P:5	‘Making friends’ - Cyber	Opportunities for Companionships	+ SO = Socialization
A:B S:1 P:5	‘Hands-on learning’ - Cyber	Individual support from teachers in person	+SU = Support
A:B S:1 P:6	‘Extracurricular activities’ - Cyber	Extracurriculars	+ EC = Extracurriculars
A:B S:1 P:6	‘Building relationships with friends’ - Cyber	Opportunities for Companionships	+ SO = Socialization
A:B S:1 P:6	‘Better curriculum and trained teachers’ - Cyber	Teacher and School Structure	+ ST = Structure
A:B S:1 P:7	‘Children can build stronger friendships in BM’ - Cyber	Stronger Relationships	+SO = Socialization
A:B S:1 P:8	‘School has great resources, iPads, computers etc.’ - BM	School Resources	+ SU = Support
A:B S:1 P:8	‘Sports, my child plays baseball close-by’ - BM	Sports	+ EC = Extracurriculars
A:B S:1 P:9	‘Communication is great with the teachers’ - BM	Teacher Communication	+CO = Communication
A:B S:1 P:9	‘The academics are top notch’ - BM	Academics	+ SU = Support
A:B S:1 P:10	‘My boys play football and cyber doesn’t offer that’ - BM	Sports	+ EC - Extracurriculars
A:B S:2 P:1	‘Safety/intruders in school’ - BM	Safe Environment	-SA = -Safety
A:B S:2 P:1	‘Bullying’ - BM	Trauma Informed	
A:B S:2 P:2	‘Bullying’ - BM	Trauma Informed	-SA = -Safety
A:B S:2 P:3	‘Large number of students in classroom’ - BM	Classroom Size Structure	-ST = -Structure

A:B S:2 P:4	‘Safety’ - BM	Safety	-SA = -Safety
A:B S:2 P:4	‘Bullying from teachers and/or peers’ - BM	Trauma Informed	
A:B S:2 P:5	‘Bullying from other students and/or peers’ - Cyber	Safety	-SA = Safety
A:B S:2 P:6	‘The local school is overpopulated’ - Cyber	Lack of individual support	-SU = Support
A:B S:2 P:6	‘I worry my kids will be bullied’ - Cyber	Safety	-SA = Safety
A:B S:2 P:7	‘When Covid-19 hit, I was worried about them getting it’ - Cyber	Safety	-SA = Safety
A:B S:2 P:8	‘Adjusting work schedule when school cancels’ - BM	Structure	-ST - Structure
A:B S:2 P:9	‘Bullying in school’ - BM	Safety	-SA = Safety
A:B S:2 P:10	‘Exposure to drugs’ – BM	Safety	-SA = Safety
A:B S:3 P:1	‘Communication with teacher’ – Cyber	Teachers Communication	CO = Communications
A:B S:3 P:1	‘Support my child and not worrying about bullies’ - Cyber	Trauma Informed	SA = Safety
A:B S:3 P:2	‘Beneficial for students with disabilities, self-motivated, or strong technology background’ - Cyber	Benefits Student Trends	+SU = Support
A:B S:3 P:3	‘Flexibility’ - Cyber	Flexible Structure	+ST = Structure
A:B S:3 P:4	‘Communication with teachers’ - Cyber	Teachers Communication	+CO = Communications
A:B S:3 P:4	‘Family support/behavior management’ - Cyber	Family Coach Support and Psychology/Guidance Counselor Support	+SU = Support
A:B S:3 P:5	‘Safety of being home’ - Cyber	Safety	+SA = Safety
A:B S:3 P:5	‘Teachers communicate with my daily’ – Cyber	Communication	+CO= Communication
A:B S:3 P:6	‘Teachers respond to e-mails and texts quickly’ – Cyber	Communication	+CO = Communication

A:B S:3 P:6	'I am able to understand and manage behaviors at home' - Cyber	Safety	+SA = Safety
A:B S:3 P:7	'Enrolled children due to Covid-19' – Cyber	Safety	+SA = Safety
A:B S:3 P:7	'Communicate with teachers regularly' - Cyber	Communication	+CO = Communication
A:B S:3 P:8	'Children with special needs or behaviors could be managed at home better' - BM	Supporting special needs	+SU = Support
A:B S:3 P:9	'Cyberschools use more types of technology' – BM	Additional support utilizing technology	+SU = Support
A:B S:3 P:10	'Keep students safer from bullying and exposure to drugs' – BM	Safety	+SA = Safety
A:B S:4 P:1	'Lack of socialization' - BM	Opportunities for Companionships	-SO = - Socialization
A:B S:4 P:2	'Lack of extracurricular activities' - Cyber	Lack of Extracurriculars	-SO = - Socialization
A:B S:4 P:2	'Lack of personal relationships' - Cyber	Lack of Opportunities for Companionships	
A:B S:4 P:2	'Lack of hands-on teacher' - Cyber	Lack of Face-to-Face Structure	-ST = -Structure
A:B S:4 P:3	'Lack of socialization' - Cyber	Lack of Opportunities for Companionships	-SO = - Socialization
A:B S:4 P:4	'Motivation' - Cyber	Driving Force	-SU = -Support
A:B S:4 P:4	'Lack of friendships/socialization' - BM	Lack of Opportunities for Companionships	-SO = - Socialization
A:B S:4 P:5	'Lack of meaningful friendships' - Cyber	Lack of meaningful friendships	-SO = Socialization
A:B S:4 P:5	'Lack of hand-on instruction' - Cyber	Lack of Support	-SU = Support
A:B S:4 P:6	'Minimal socializing' – Cyber	Minimal Socializing	-SO = Socialization
A:B S:4 P:6	'No fieldtrips - Cyber	Support outside of classroom	-SU = Support

A:B S:4 P:7	'No option to play sports or be in a band' – Cyber	Lack of extracurricular	-EC = Extracurriculars
A:B S:4 P:8	'Son couldn't play baseball in cyberschool' – BM	Lack of extracurricular	-EC = Extracurriculars
A:B S:4 P:9	'Both parents work and no one to stay home with my child' - BM	Lack of support	-SU = Support
A:B S:4 P:10	'My children are very involved in football and couldn't play in a cyberschool.	Lack of extracurriculars	-EC = Extracurriculars

Participant Demographics

This study consisted of 10 participants who are the parents or guardians of students in kindergarten through 12th grade attending school in the state of Pennsylvania. The participants completed a survey which included general demographic information. The participants are labeled P:1 through P:10

P:1 is a parent or guardian of one student in a cyberschool. This participant stated that their student does have a learning disability. P:1 also stated that their household income ranges between \$20,001-\$40,000 per year and that they affiliate themselves with the Democratic Party. Furthermore, P:1 mentioned that their ethnicity is Caucasian.

P:2 is the parent or guardian of students that attend a brick-and-mortar school. P:2 has three school aged children, none of which identify with a learning disability. The total household income in the home is above \$75,000, and they affiliate themselves with the Republican Party. This participant best describes their ethnicity as Caucasian.

P:3 is the parent or guardian of students with a school choice of brick-and-mortar with two children in the home. At least one of these children is identified with a learning disability. The total annual household income is over \$75,001 per year, and the

participant affiliates themselves with the Republican Party. P:3 also identifies their ethnicity as “other”.

P:4 is the parent or guardian with a school choice of cyberschool and has three students in the home. P:4 has at least one child in the home that is identified with a learning disability and has a household income is between \$20,001 and \$40,000 per year. P:4 affiliates themselves with the Democratic Party and stated their ethnicity is African American.

P:5 is the parent or guardian with a school choice of cyberschool. This participant has one child in the home that is identified with a learning disability. It was also stated their total annual household income is between \$40,001 and \$75,000. P:5 affiliates themselves with the Democratic Party and their ethnicity is Caucasian.

P:6 is the parent or guardian with a school choice of cyberschool. P:6 has three children in the home with at least one child identified with a learning disability. The combined annual household income is between \$20,001 and \$40,000. P:6 affiliates themselves with the Republic Party while stating their ethnicity is African American.

P:7 is the parent or guardian with a school choice of cyberschool. P:7 has two children in the home, neither being identified with a learning disability. The combined annual household income is above \$70,001. P:7 affiliates themselves with the Republican Party and their ethnicity is Caucasian.

P:8 is the parent or guardian with a school choice of brick-and-mortar. P:8 has one child in the home that is not identified with a learning disability. The combined annual household income is between \$40,001 and \$75,000. This participant affiliates themselves politically as an Independent while stating their ethnicity is Caucasian.

P:9 is the parent or guardian with a school choice of brick-and-mortar. P:9 has one child in the home that is not identified with a learning disability. The combined annual household income is between \$40,001 and \$75,000. P:9 affiliates themselves with the Republican Party and stated their ethnicity is Caucasian.

P:10 is a parent or guardian with a school choice of brick-and-mortar. P:10 has two children in the home, neither of which are identified with a learning disability. The combined household income is above \$75,001 per year. P:10 affiliates themselves with the Republican Party and stated their ethnicity is African American.

Interests

Weiss (1995) defines interests as self-interests and believed that people define interests based upon how they identify with the situation in which they are presently involved. Weiss argues that new information can alter their definitions of both where their interests lie and the most judicious course for satisfying them.

The survey and interview in this study looked to gather data on the personal interests of why parents choose cyberschools or brick-and-mortar schools for their children. After reviewing the participants responses, the researcher found that there were four consistent responses from all 10 of the participants. These interests included extracurricular activities (EC), communication (CO), socialization (SO), and support (SU).

Ideologies

According to Weiss (1995), ideology examines principals, values, and philosophy. In other words, ideology can be referred to as one's beliefs. The interview and survey aimed to gather personal ideologies of why parents choose or do not choose

cyberschool for their children. After reviewing the participants responses, the researcher found two consistent ideologies. These include safety (SA) and structure (ST).

Participant Responses—Interests

The participants were given a survey with questions that ask them their deciding factors when making school choice based on a collection of options. Their responses are categorized into interests and ideologies based off Weiss' (1995) "4 I's" framework. The following responses are their responses that are categorized as interests.

P:1 had a school choice of cyberschool. When asked the deciding factors of school choice, P:1 stated that communication between the parent and the teacher was one of the main reasons that they continue to choose a cyberschool. P:1 mentioned they communicate with the teacher on a weekly basis. Furthermore, P:1 stated that their children's teacher goes above and beyond to help students while demonstrating excellent communication with the family.

P:2 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. When asked what the deciding factors were when making a school choice base on interests, P:2 mentioned that their deciding factors included school resources and extracurricular activities. In addition, P:2 said that the curriculum is fantastic, and their school has all new computers and iPads for the students to use. The single most important deciding factor for P:2 are the extracurricular activities. P:2 has three children who are all involved competitively in school sports. It was mentioned that the sports programs are highly recognized at their school. During the interview, P:2 stated that their children can build strong bonds in a brick-and-mortar school with teachers, coaches, and peers. Overall, the extracurricular activities are the main reason for their school choice.

Based on interests, P:3, with a school choice of brick-and-mortar, mentioned communication with teachers as a deciding factor. It was stated that even though they only communicate with their children's teachers less than once per week, the communication is thorough and is enough for them to be satisfied. The teachers typically reply via text message and e-mails by the end of the school day. P:3 did not mention any other interests. Overall, P:3's deciding factors, based on interest, consisted of the ability to communicate with teachers.

P:4 had a school choice of cyberschool. When asked the deciding factors of choosing cyberschool P:4 mentioned the support, excellent communication with the teachers, and convenience of the location. The school offers P:4 all the resources needed for their children to be successful, such as technology and supplemental programs. This participant mentioned one of their children are very involved in computers and the school accommodates them. They mentioned that they communicate with the teachers between two and four times per week. Communication is typically done through e-mail. The teachers ensure the family has the knowledge to use the resources that best meet their children's needs. P:4 has children identified with disabilities and it was mentioned that behaviors are easily managed in the home.

P:5 had a school choice of cyberschool. When asked the deciding factors on their school choice based on interests P:5 mentioned communication between the school and teachers. P:5 stated that when they first inquired about cyberschool the school was quick to reach out and welcome the student. It was also stated that they were given adequate training on how to navigate through the various resources and promptly answered

questions this participant had. It was also noted that the teachers communicate with the family daily, usually at the beginning, during, and end of class.

P:6 had a school choice of cyberschool. The key deciding factors on their school choice were the communication with teachers and the school resources. P:6 stated they are very happy with their children's teachers. They communicate both strengths and concerns of their children regularly and offer immediate responses to questions. P:6 mentioned having three students in cyberschool and how it can be difficult attending to all three at the same time. It was mentioned that the teachers understand the struggle at home and do a wonderful job keeping the children focused and engaged.

P:7 had a school choice of cyberschool. The main deciding factor on their school choice, based on interests, was strong communication with the teachers. P:7 stated that the teachers give frequent updates on their children's progress. P:7 mentioned that they work from home. Even though they are at home with their children they are unable to give their children constant attention during class time; therefore, it is important that the teachers communicate efficiently.

P:8 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. The deciding factors, based on interests, consisted of the academic curriculum, school resources, and extracurricular activities their brick-and-mortar school offers. P:8 states that the school challenges their child academically and that the teachers offer additional support to students that are struggling. It was also mentioned that homework is given daily but is not overwhelming for their child. Additionally, P:8 states their child often comes home sharing new information they learned at school. Furthermore, the school offers a variety of opportunities and resources to improve learning. Their child has access to laptop

computers and iPads to use during certain classes, and since their child is very interested in technology this is a huge benefit. Furthermore, P:8 mentioned their child has the opportunity to partake in at least one, if not two, field trips throughout the school year. Finally, P:8 has a child that plays baseball for the school and suggested that they do not believe cyberschools offer the option to play sports. P:8 mentioned that the brick-and-mortar school has an excellent baseball team and is a great activity for their child.

P:9 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. Their deciding factors included the school's curriculum, school resources, and parental involvement opportunities. P:9 mentioned that their school is highly recognized academically and they are very happy with their child's education. Their child is pushed academically without causing frustration. P:8 chose school resources but declined to elaborate on their response. Additionally, P:8 mentioned parental involvement opportunities. This participant is on the school board and helps make important decisions for the school. P:9 believes that it is important for parents to have the opportunity to help make decisions and volunteer their time to support the children.

P:10 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. Their deciding factors included the school curriculum and extracurricular activities. P:10 mentioned that their children's classes are very engaging, and their children seem to learn relevant concepts. It was also mentioned that both of P:10's children play on the baseball team. The coaches are fair but encourage the children to do their best. P:10 stated that the baseball team does very well and that their children enjoy playing while learning what it means to be a part of a team.

Participant Responses—Ideologies

Lubienski and Weitzel (2010) state with school options parents not only will be able to find a high-quality school, but will also be able to match their academic, behavioral, cultural, or philosophical preference with school communities sharing the same views. School choice, in this sense, is a form of values expression (Lubienski & Weitzel). According to Weiss (1995), ideology examines principles, values, and philosophy. Since most people have many values and principles, ideologies can sometimes conflict with one another, even when it is a single person who holds those values and beliefs (Connell, 2016). The following responses are categorized as ideologies based on Weiss' (1995) "4 I's" framework.

P:1 stated one of the reasons they chose a cyberschool was because of safety concerns. It was mentioned the participant does not have to worry about school intruders or other safety concerns that may arise in brick-and-mortar education. Although P:1's child was in cyberschool before Covid-19, the Covid-19 pandemic played an important role in keeping their child in cyberschool. P:1 said they did not want to expose their child to the possibility of contracting Covid-19 thus, making Covid-19 part of their decision-making process. At the time of this study, P:1 was not considering a change in school choice.

P:2 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. They stated the structure, specifically the daily routine, was one of the deciding factors of choosing a brick-and-mortar school. P:2 stated their children need structure and the school offers that. In addition, the school really challenges students, and if a student earns a C grade in an academic class, they are not able to participate in sports until the grade is at least a B.

Finally, P:2 stated that the school is very close to the family's home, so the students do not have a long bus ride, and if the children need picked up from school, it is only a short distance to travel. Covid-19 did not play a role in their decision-making process. No other ideology deciding factors were mentioned. At the time of this study, P:2 was not considering a change in school choice.

P:3, with a school choice of brick-and-mortar, mentioned structure and safety as being the deciding factors of their school choice. This participant mentioned they are a traditional parent and believes traditional schooling is best for their children. They believe the traditional school structure at their current school is strong, offers hands-on instruction, and that in-person education is the most engaging for their children. P:3 mentioned they feel their current school is very safe. There are security guards at every door. Also, anyone coming into the school must go through a metal detector. Finally, there is a police department near the school, thus P:3 believes their children are safe. Covid-19 did not play a role in their decision-making process. At the time of this study, P:3 was not considering a change in school choice.

P:4 had a school choice of cyberschool. This participant stated that since there are three children in the home, two identified with a learning disability, they believe the structure at home is a better fit for their children than being in a school building. P:4 stated that they can sit with their children during all classes and give them the guidance needed without the worry of behavioral or safety concerns that may arise in a brick-and-mortar school. They believe the structure at home is more appropriate than a school can offer. P:4 also mentioned that they prefer the structure of classes in cyberschool. Classes are shorter and their children need breaks after each class to refocus, which is not always

an option in a brick-and-mortar school. Additionally, P:4 mentioned Covid-19 played a role in their decision-making process. Their children were once in a brick-and-mortar school and switched at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, At the time of this study, P:4 is not considering a change in school choice.

P:5 had a school choice of cyberschool. The two deciding factors consisted of safety and convenience of location. P:5 has a child identified with a learning disability and expressed concerned that if their child was in a brick-and-mortar school their child may get bullied. This participant also stated that Covid-19 was not a factor as the concern for bullying was well before the pandemic. In addition, the location of schooling is convenient for P:5. It was mentioned that P:5 is a stay-at-home parent and can sit with their child during class time and ensure their safety. At the time of this study P:5 was not considering a change in school choice.

P:6 had a school choice of cyberschool. The two deciding factors P:6 chose were convenience of location and safety. This participant has three children in the home with at least one identified with a learning disability. P:6 stated that they are home during the day and can with sit their children to manage behaviors and ensure that their children are doing their classwork. Brick-and-mortar school were a concern for P:6 because they noted that their children would struggle academically due to behaviors and/or a lack of focus in a traditional setting. P:6 also mentioned safety as a concern. It was stated that Covid-19 had an impact on their decision-making process. P:6 expressed concern that even though their children have not been bullied they might experience bullying in a brick-and-mortar school. At the time of this study P:6 was not considering a change in school choice.

P:7 had a school choice of cyberschool. The two deciding factors for this participant included safety and convenience of location. P:7 mentioned the reason they chose a cyberschool was due to Covid-19. One of the children in the home has a compromised immune system that could be fatal if contracting Covid-19. This participant said this circumstance is the main reason for their decision. P:7 said, “As long as my children are healthy and safe, I am at peace” In addition, P:7 stated that they work from home, so it is convenient for their children to attend a cyberschool. At the time of this study, P:7 was not considering a change in school choice.

P:8 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar school. The deciding factors for P:8 consisted of entirely interests which included curriculum, school resources, and extracurricular activities. Covid-19 did not play a role in their decision-making process. At the time of this study, P:8 is not considering a change in school choice.

P:9 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. The deciding factors for P:9 were safety and convenience of location. P:9 mentioned that their child was previously bullied in a brick-and-mortar school. They stated the school responded well to the incidents and bullying is no longer a concern. P:9 did consider enrolling their child in cyberschool during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic but decided against changing schools. It was mentioned, as a single parent, that no one can be home with the child on a regular basis due to P:9's work schedule and being on the school board. Additionally, P:9 explained that the local brick-and-mortar school is close to their home and their child has a short bus ride to and from school. If the child needs picked-up from school, it is a short drive there which makes the school convenient. At the time of this study P:9 was not considering a change in school choice.

P:10 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar school. Their deciding factor was convenience of location. This participant is unable to be home during the school day with their children if they were to attend cyberschool. P:10 stated, “The local school is close-by, and it just makes sense, especially since my children play football.” Covid-19 did not play a role in their decision-making process. At the time of this study, P:1 was not considering a change in school choice.

Advantages and Disadvantages

After the completion of the survey participants completed a five-question interview to further explain the reasons for their school choice. Four of these questions asked the participants what they believe to be the advantages and disadvantages of both cyber and brick-and-mortar school. The fifth question asked participants if they plan on keeping their children at their current placement or switching schools, and why.

P:1, with a school choice of cyberschool, stated that they believe the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school are the socialization opportunities. They believe that this setting is more beneficial for children to make meaningful relationships with their peers. Students can make friends in person and build stronger bonds. It was also mentioned that P:1 believes that a hands-on approach may be more beneficial for most students. This entails a teacher showing students various concepts in person opposed to over the computer.

When asked about the disadvantages of a brick-and-mortar school, P:1 stated that safety was a major disadvantage. P:1 expressed concern regarding school shootings, bomb threats, and bullying that happens in brick-and-mortar school. P:1 acknowledged

that bullying could happen in a cyber setting, although it can be monitored more easily than in a brick-and-mortar school. P:1 prefers having control over their child's safety.

When asked what the advantages of a cyberschool are, P:1 stated, "Communication with the teacher is a major advantage. I am in communication with my child's teacher at least once per week". They continued to explain, "The teachers are very responsive to my communication in the cyberschool my child attends. Also, my child has a severe learning disability. With a cyberschool, I can sit with (my child) during class and help in an environment (my child) is comfortable in, and I don't have to worry about (my child) being picked on in a traditional school."

When asked what the disadvantages of a cyberschool, P:1 mentioned that there is a lack of socialization between students. It was stated that they believe students are not able to make meaningful friendships as they would in a brick-and-mortar school because the students do not get the opportunity to meet each other. P:1 also mentioned that cyberschools lack the hands-on approach from their teacher. Neither of these factors were enough to deter P:1 from choosing a cyberschool for their child. Overall, P:1 is very pleased with their current school choice and does not plan to change schools.

P:2 mentioned that the major advantage of their brick-and-mortar school are the extracurricular activities, such as sports. All of P:2's children are engaged in a sport through their local school. It was mentioned the students can build strong bonds with their teammates, teachers, and coaches. They also stated the academic structure of the school is an advantage. This participant mentioned, "The school pushes the students academically. If they currently have a C or lower in any class, they cannot participate in the sports until their grade is improved to at least a B."

The only disadvantage that this participant mentioned regarding a brick-and-mortar school is that bullying does happen frequently in their school. Two out of the three of P:2's children have experienced a form of bullying in school. Even though the school has an anti-bullying policy, it still happens. P:2 acknowledged that the teachers and staff are on alert for bullying, but they cannot catch every instance. For example, bullying frequently happens on the school bus and at school-sponsored sporting events. Overall, P:2 is pleased with their current school choice and does not plan on switching schools.

P:2 stated they are not familiar with cyberschools and what they have to offer. This participant said they never researched them. Additionally, it was mentioned P:2 assumes cyberschools are beneficial for children who are self-motivated, excel in technology, or children with certain special needs.

P:2 said the disadvantages of cyberschools would most likely be the lack of extracurricular activities, lack of personal relationships, such as making friends, and the inability to partake in hands-on activities. This participant reiterated they are not familiar with that cyberschools offer or do not offer. P:2 does not plan on changing their school choice.

P:3, who had a school choice of brick-and-mortar, mentioned that the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school consist of being in a typical learning setting with other students of the same age. They believe that this is the best setting for learning, understanding social cues, rule following, and overall structure. Students are able to build personal bonds with their teachers and peers.

P:3 mentioned one disadvantage regarding brick-and-mortar schools, which is that classroom sizes tend to be large. P:3 stated their children are in classrooms with over 25

students and that the students may not be receiving individual attention or may be overlooked by their teachers.

P:3 stated that the biggest advantage of a cyberschool would be the flexibility. Although it would not benefit their specific family, P:3 said that cyberschool may work well for other families who may be stay at home parents or the children are old enough to be alone during the day. P:3 mentioned they never researched cyberschools although, they know a family who has a child enrolled in one.

Furthermore, P:3 believes that the biggest disadvantage of cyberschools would be the lack of socialization. P:3 has a child identified with autism and it is important to them to ensure that their child engages with other students to develop appropriate social skills which they feel cyberschools do not offer. When asked if P:3 plans on keeping their children in a brick-and-mortar school, they said, "I plan to keep both my children enrolled in their current brick-and-mortar school. For my family, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, so it makes sense for us to keep them in traditional school."

P:4 had a school choice of a cyberschool. This participant believes the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school include socialization and extracurricular activities. P:4 stated it is easier to make "real life" friends in a brick-and-mortar school. They also mentioned brick-and-mortar schools have more extracurricular options for their children to participate in, such as sports. P:4 stated they heard children could be involved in sports while attending cyberschool but did not know the details.

P:4 stated that the major disadvantage of a brick-and-mortar schools are safety concerns. They worry about incidents such as school shootings. P:4 feels confident in their schools security procedures but realizes dangers could still arise. P:4 is also

concerned with their children being exposed to drugs within their local brick-and-mortar school. In addition, they have a concern that the school may not be respecting children with disabilities with no way for the participant to know.

P:4 stated the first advantage of a cyberschool is the exceptional communication with the teachers. P:4 stated that anytime they need help from the teacher, their calls and e-mails are returned in a timely manner, usually within one day. Support at home is the second advantage mentioned. P:4 likes the idea of being able to sit with their children during classes and offer their children 1:1 support. This way, the participant is always aware of what is being taught in the class and can offer support as needed.

One disadvantage mentioned about cyberschool is the lack of motivation from their children in the morning. It was mentioned that it can be difficult to get their children up and out of bed in time to sign into class. This requires multiple prompts from the participant to get their children up and ready. The second disadvantage of cyberschool is the lack of socialization and being able to make meaningful friendships in school. P:4 said, "Although friends can be made online, everyone lives in a different area of the state so the chances of students meeting each other is slim." Overall, P:4 is pleased with cyberschool and does not plan on changing their school choice. P:4 did consider sending their one child, who is not identified with a learning disability, to a brick-and-mortar school; however, they stated that their child is doing well in cyberschool and does not find a need to make the switch. Therefore, the participant is not making any changes at the time of this study.

P:5 had a school choice of cyberschool. This participant mentioned the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school are the social opportunities and the hands-on

learning approach teachers can offer. P:5 stated their child made friends in cyberschool but none of them live close enough to meet. With traditional school all the children live in proximity with each other.

P:5 stated that the disadvantage of a brick-and-mortar school is the amount and frequency of bullying that takes place. P:5 has a child identified with a learning disability and their major concern is that other children will not understand their child's disability. The concern is that the child may be judged and bullied in a traditional school. It was also briefly mentioned that P:5 worries about possible teacher mistreatment but did not wish to elaborate on this topic.

P:5 stated the advantages of cyberschool are safety, convenience of their child being at home, and the communication with the teachers. P:5 knows that their child is safe and not being bullied while attending cyberschool. Additionally, P:5 is home during the day, so it is easy to sit with their child during class time. Furthermore, P:5 is extremely satisfied with how the teachers accommodate their child. P:5 said, "My child gets the support they need to be successful!" In addition, the teachers communicate with the participant daily, typically during class time, so there is never a disconnect between school and home.

P:5 mentioned two disadvantages of cyberschool. The first being the inability to make friends. Even though their child talks to their classmates each day it is impossible to meet any of them in person during the school day and make real-life connections. The other disadvantage is that P:5 must model hands-on activities and sometimes does not fully understand how to do so correctly. The teachers offer suggestions and support but it still can be a struggle. P:5 stated that it would be more beneficial if the teacher was

helping their child in person. Overall, P:5 is happy with cyberschool and had no plans to make changes at the time of this study.

P:6 had a school choice of cyberschool. This participant stated that the advantages of brick-and-mortar schools are the ability participate in extracurricular activities and to build friendships. P:6 mentioned that their children do not have the same opportunities, such as belonging to clubs, joining the band, or playing sports as traditional schools offer. In addition, P:6 mentioned that although their children have friends, none of their real friends are from school. Being that students live in different areas of the state it is difficult to find classmates that live nearby.

P:6 stated the three disadvantages of brick-and-mortar schools. These include overpopulated classrooms, bullying, and overall safety. They said that the local school has several hundred students in one building. P:6 stated that they feel like this could be very distracting to their children and are concerned about how much attention the students receive. They expressed concern that their children would be overlooked or forgotten about. Additionally, bullying in the local school is a known problem. P:6 does not want to worry their children are being bullied, picked on, or in a fight while in school. Covid-19 is another concern. With so many children in one building P:6 worries that the virus will spread throughout the school. Finally, there have been reports of children bringing weapons and drugs into the schools. This participant does not want their children to be exposed to these dangerous situations.

P:6 mentioned that the advantages of cyberschools are communication with the teachers and a safer environment. Since parents are with their children in a cyber setting, P:6 stated that it is much easier to communicate with the teachers. The parent could ask

to speak with the teacher before or after class or send them an e-mail. This participant said, “It is much easier to know how my children are doing in class because the teachers update me throughout the week.” In addition to communication with teachers, P:6 stated cyberschooling can be much safer than a traditional school. There is minimal risk for bullying and contracting Covid-19 while having no risk for fighting or exposure to drugs.

P:6 mentioned the two major disadvantages of cyberschool; the first disadvantage is the lack of socialization. They mentioned that although cyberschools allow for socializing it is not the same as meeting teachers and friends in person. This participant has children with learning disabilities and mentioned that cyberschool is going very well, but children with certain disabilities need to learn appropriate social skills that cyberschools may lack. Finally, P:6 mentioned their cyberschool does not have physical field trips. They stated that the teachers do their best with incorporating virtual fieldtrips, which although fun, are not the same as taking a class somewhere in public for a first-hand experience.

P:7 had a school choice of cyberschool. This participant stated that the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school are stronger relationships with teachers and peers and a more challenging curriculum. P:7 had experiences in both brick-and-mortar schools and cyberschool. They stated that the curriculum at the brick-and-mortar was slightly more engaging and challenged their children more. They were exposed to more hands-on activities such as experiments. In addition, the children can build stronger and more personal bonds with their teachers and peers since they can engage with them in person.

P:7 said that they feel the disadvantages of brick-and-mortar schools are safety and bullying. P:7 has one child with a compromised immune system and once the Covid-

19 pandemic unfolded they switched to cyberschool. This participant was concerned for their child's health if their child was to contact the Covid-19 virus. In addition, P:7 mentioned that bullying is a known concern at their local school. They did not want their children to deal with potential bullying from other peers. They acknowledged bullying can happen in any school setting, but it cannot be monitored as easily in a brick-and-mortar school.

P:7 stated that the advantages of a cyberschool is that they are safer, communication with teachers is more efficient, and cyberschools could be more convenient for some. They said that cyberschools reduce the risk of student bullying and contracting sicknesses. P:7 stated that they have not seen cyberbullying in their current cyberschool. In addition, since parents are typically beside their children during class the parent can reach out with questions or concerns directly with the teacher without having to request a meeting and drive to the school. Finally, P:7 believes that schooling from home could be convenient for parents who are stay at home parents or who work from home, and that although this is not necessarily an advantage for everyone it can be for some.

P:7 mentioned that one major disadvantage of cyberschools is the lack of extracurricular activities. They stated that most brick-and-mortar schools offer students the option to join various sports teams, clubs, and music bands. Cyberschools typically do not offer as many or as engaging extracurriculars. Ultimately, children who wish to participate in extracurricular activities may find that cyberschools are not best choice.

P:8 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. This participant stated that the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school are the school resources and extracurricular

activities that are offered. It was mentioned that they believe some brick-and-mortar schools may provide resources that promote learning, for example, iPads, computers, and fieldtrips. P:8 admitted to not having a full understanding of what cyberschools offer but believe brick-and-mortar schools offer various resources that cyberschools may not offer. In addition, brick-and-mortar schools offer a wide range of extracurricular activities, especially at the high school level, for example, the participant mentioned sports such as baseball and football.

P:8 stated one disadvantage of brick-and-mortar schools. They said that their school often has delays and/or cancellations during the winter months. This is a disadvantage because this causes stress on the participant because they must be at work at a specific time. When school delays or cancels it causes many parents to adjust their schedules last minute which can be a major inconvenience. P:8 did not wish to comment on any additional disadvantages of a brick-and-mortar school.

P:8 stated they are not fully aware of what the advantages of cyberschools are but mentioned managing behaviors for students with behavioral concerns may be an advantage of cyberschools. They stated that if the child is at home and exhibit aggressive behaviors the behaviors can be managed by the family without the worry of other students being in danger. Furthermore, P:8 said they have no other comments on advantages of cyberschools because they are not fully educated on them.

P:8 stated the major disadvantage of cyberschools is the lack of extracurricular activities, such as sports. Again, P:8 said they do not know for sure if cyberschools offer such activities. However, they believe that if a cyberschool enrolls students across an

entire state they probably do not offer the students the chance to partake in sports or other afterschool activities.

P:9 had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. They stated the advantages of brick-and-mortar school is communication between the parents and school and the quality of the curriculum. P:9 admitted that they are only familiar with one school district but feel that the teachers and administrators do a fantastic job letting the families know how the students are doing and keeping them updated on important events. This is typically done with sending home flyers, e-mails, and phone calls. Additionally, they believe that the curriculums used in brick-and-mortar schools are more engaging and challenging for the students. P:9 admitted to not knowing the curriculum cyberschools use but feel brick-and-mortar school curriculums are “top notch”.

P:9 believes that the major disadvantage of brick-and-mortar schools is the bullying from other students. This participant stated that they believe children can be cruel and bullying is a problem in all traditional schools. P:9 feels that bullying is the biggest barrier for student achievement in school. P:9 stated that they could not think of other disadvantages of brick-and-mortar schools.

P:9 stated that the major advantage of cyberschools is their use of technology. It was mentioned that “tech savvy” students may do very well in a cyberschool setting. P:9 believes that cyberschools promote the use of technology being that the entire school day is done virtually. Since classes are conducted online students with an interest in computers could flourish in a cyberschool setting.

P:9 stated that they believe there are two major disadvantages of cyberschool. The first is that some parents may not be able to be home to sit with their child during the

school day. Many parents work during the day and are unable to support their children, especially younger children, during class time. Additionally, P:9 mentioned that students may not have the same socialization opportunities in a cyberschool setting as they would in a traditional brick-and-mortar school setting. They feel that building relationships in-person is more beneficial than online. This participant had no further comments and does not plan on changing their school choice.

P:10 has a school choice of brick-and-mortar. This participant stated that the advantage of a brick-and-mortar school are the options for children to participate in extracurricular activities, such as sports. P:10 believes that these activities, specifically sports, help children gain discipline, learn how to be a part of a team, and encourage building friendships. They feel that discipline and teamwork are important qualities for children as they grow up.

P:10 mentioned that the major disadvantage of a brick-and-mortar school is that children can be exposed to drugs and alcohol at a young age. They said that even though their school employs security guards, has metal detectors, and a no drug policy, children still find a way to bring illegal substances into the school. Aside from exposure to drugs and alcohol P:10 does not believe that there are any other disadvantages to a brick-and-mortar school.

P:10 believes that the major advantages of a cyberschool are that children are safer from bullying and being exposed to drugs and alcohol. Even though P:10's children have not personally struggled with bullying it was mentioned that the participant realizes that bullying happens in brick-and-mortar school, and this could be eliminated in a cyber setting. In addition, P:10 mentioned that cyberschools eliminate the concern for children

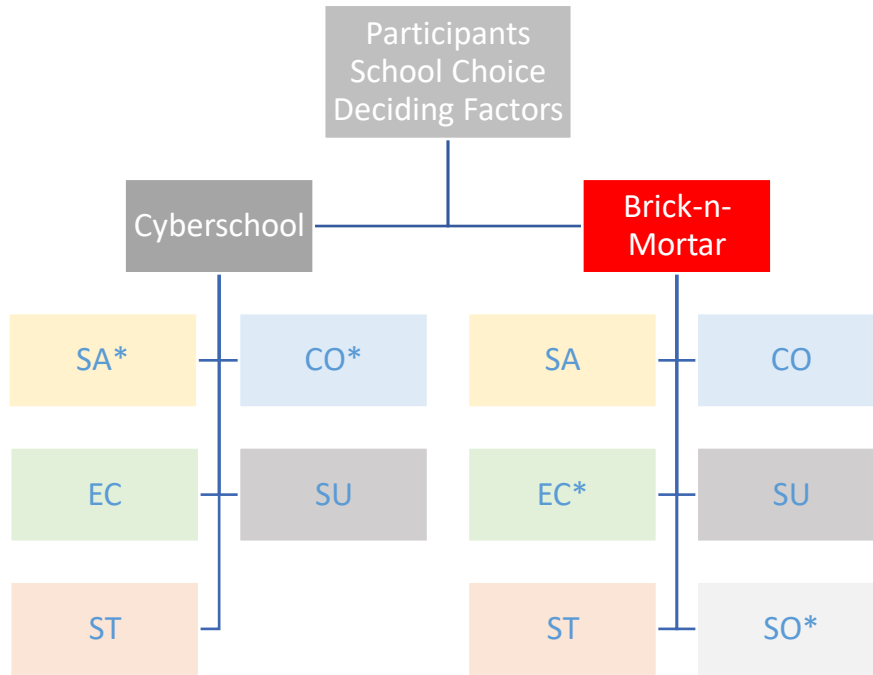
to be exposed to drugs and alcohol at school. They acknowledged children could still be exposed to these substances, but at least it would not be in school since students are not together in a physical building.

P:10 mentioned that the major disadvantage of a cyberschool is the lack of extracurricular activities, specifically sports. At one time, P:10 researched cyberschools and said that some do offer various extracurricular activities but feel they are not as engaging as brick-and-mortar schools. P:10 said their children play football and they were unable to find a cyberschool where being on a football team was possible. This participant did mention they thought children could be on the local schools sport teams while attending cyberschool but was unsure of the validity of this.

Deciding factors from the participants in cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Interests & Ideologies



Note. An asterisk indicates the most important factors selected.

Enrollment

Research question two examined how cyberschool enrollment rates have changed over the past five years. Therefore, it was determined that student enrollment in six cyberschools in Pennsylvania has fluctuated over the past five years. The six schools will be coded C:1, C:2, C:3, C:4, C:5, and C:6. This study briefly delves into the changes and possible reasons enrollment has changed. Participants were asked if the Covid-19 pandemic played a role in their decision-making process. In addition, data was collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education on the number of students enrolled from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2021-2022 school year at six cyberschools in Pennsylvania (see Table 3 below).

Student enrollment data was collected from the Department of Education. During the 2017-2018 school year C:1 enrolled 9,676 students, C:2 enrolled 8,592 students, and C:3 enrolled 6,029 students. Furthermore, C:4 enrolled 2,593 students, C:5 enrolled 2,074 students, and C:6 enrolled 1,898 students. Between the six schools 30,863 combined students were enrolled for the year.

During the 2018-2019 school year C:1 enrolled 10,110 students, C:2 enrolled 8,761 students, C:3 enrolled 5,505 students, C:4 enrolled 2,972 students, C:5 enrolled 2,118, and C:6 enrolled 2,769 students. Combined, these six schools enrolled a total of 32,225 students. This shows an increase of 1,362 students attending a cyberschool.

Furthermore, during the 2019-2020 school year C:1 enrolled 9,856 students, C:2 enrolled 9,294 students, C:3 enrolled 5,143 students, C:4 enrolled 3,055, C:5 enrolled 1,996 students, and C:6 enrolled 3,393 students. Combined, the six cyberschools enrolled 32,692 students. This is an increase of 467 combined students.

During the 2020-2021 school year C:1 enrolled 10,917 students, C:2 enrolled 16,419 students, C:3 enrolled 7,345 students, C:4 enrolled 5,071 students, C:5 enrolled 2,714 students, and C:6 enrolled 8,138 students. Combined, the six cyberschools enrolled a total of 45,533 students. This is an increase of 12,814 students.

Finally, enrollment from the 2021-2022 school year was analyzed and it was concluded that C:1 enrolled 10,469 students, C:2 enrolled 18,090 students, C:3 enrolled 5,211 students, and C:4 enrolled 3,939 students, C:5 enrolled 2,963 students, and C:6 enrolled 6,979 students. Combined, the six schools enrolled 47,651 students. This is an increase of 2,118 students.

Over the past five school years, student enrollment has increased from each of the previous years. Data suggests, but is not conclusive, that the Covid-19 pandemic played a significant role in the increase of students in cyberschools. The largest increase in student enrollment from the previous year was during the 2020-2021 school year. A combined 12,814 more students enrolled in one of the top six cyberschools from the previous year. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2022) states that the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a pandemic in March of 2020 (CDC). During the 2020-2021 school year in Pennsylvania state guidance allowed school districts to decide whether they would use in-person or remote instruction, or a mix of both. Reopening guidance was then changed to allow 3-foot distancing in schools and to recommend that schools in counties with a “moderate” level of community spread of Covid-19 (as tracked in the state’s Covid-19 monitoring dashboard) transitioned to some in-person, as well as hybrid, instruction. Also, five of the 10 (50%) participants mentioned that the Covid-19 pandemic was a major deciding factor regarding school choice. Of those five participants four (40%) of them had a school choice of cyberschool. In addition, one (10%) of the participants mentioned switching from a brick-and-mortar school to a cyberschool mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the Covid-19 pandemic may suggest a reason for the total increase in enrollment during the 2021-2022 school year in cyberschools it does not give supporting details as to the fluctuation in enrollment in individual schools. There is reason to believe that cyberschools “trade” students between each other. Some of the schools in the study have decreases in enrollment while others showed an increase from year to year. This is depicted in Table 4. Table 3 shows student enrollment at the six cyberschool in Pennsylvania used for this study.

Table 3*Total Student Enrollment in cyberschools*

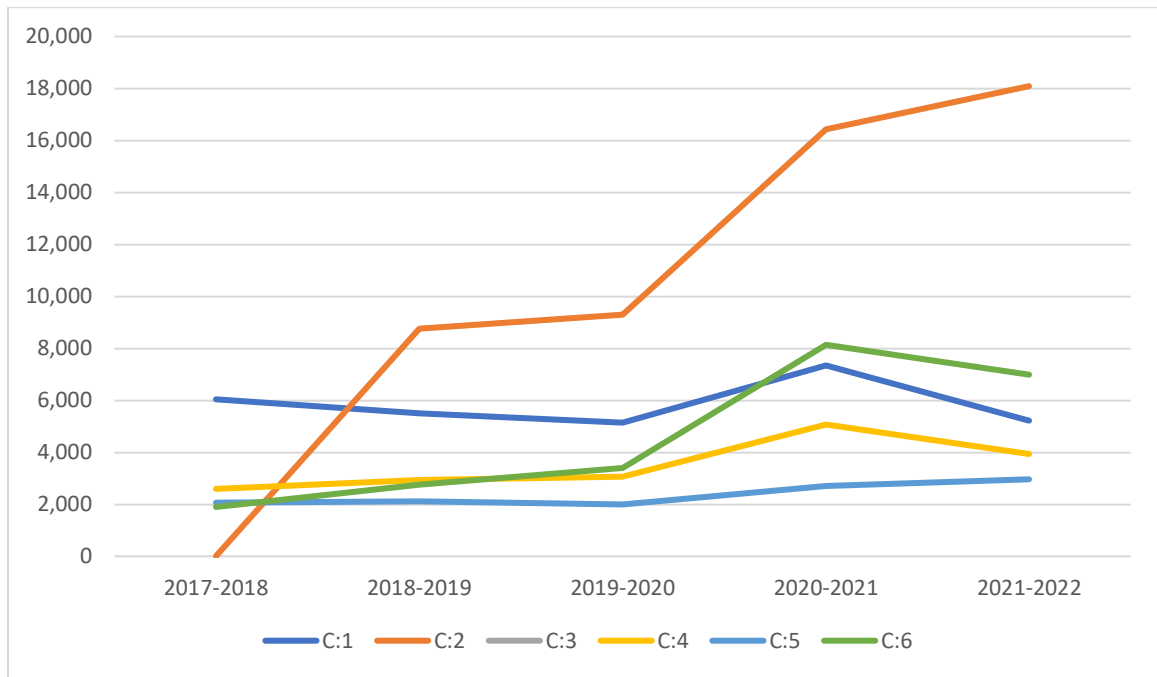
School Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
C:1	9,676	10,110	9,856	10,917	10,469
C:2	8,592	8,761	9,294	16,419	18,090
C:3	6,029	5,505	5,134	7,345	5,211
C:4	2,594	2,927	3,055	5,071	3,939
C:5	2,074	2,118	1,996	2,714	2,963
C:6	1,898	2,759	3,393	8,138	6,979

Note. Data retrieved from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2022).

Table 3 and Table 4 depict the enrollment trends of the six cyberschools in Pennsylvania used in this study from the years 2017-2022.

Table 4

Enrollment Trends



Note. Data retrieved from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2022).

Conclusion

This study analyzed the data as to why parents or guardians chose or do not choose cyberschools for their children. It also briefly looked at student enrollment over the past five years at the highest enrolled cyberschools in Pennsylvania from 2017-2022.

Ten participants were given a survey consisting of 20 questions, then participated in a five-question interview where they could express their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of both cyberschools and traditional brick-and-mortar schools. They also had the opportunity to share any additional information about their school choice experience.

Participant 1, coded as P:1, had a school choice of a cyberschool with one child in the home. P:1 stated their child does have a learning disability. P:1 stated that the three

major deciding factors when choosing a cyberschool was safety, communication with teachers, and convenience of location. With all the school violence that happens in brick-and-mortar schools this participant would rather keep their child home in a safer environment. They also mentioned communication with the teachers is frequent in their current cyberschool. The most important deciding factor was the location. They feel their child is in a comfortable environment where the parent or guardian can sit with the child and assist with learning while managing behaviors.

Participant 2, coded as P:2, had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. They have three school-aged children in the home and reported that none of the three are identified with a learning disability. P:2 stated their deciding factors of school choice consisted of the convenience of location, school resources, and extracurricular activities. It was mentioned the school is in a convenient location not far from the family home. Both parents or guardians work during the day so it would be difficult for their school-aged children to attend cyberschool from home as a parent or guardian is not available to be home with them during school hours. P:2 also mentioned the school resources, which entails the curriculum, was a deciding factor. They believe the school pushes for student success and does not allow students to participate in sports if they are doing poorly in their academics. The most important deciding factor for P:2 was the extracurricular activities. Their children are all involved in sports which P:2 believes are excellent programs.

Participant 3, coded as P:3, had school choice of brick-and-mortar. This participant has two children, both of which are identified with a learning disability. This participant mentioned four deciding factors when choosing schooling for their children.

These four include safety, communication with teachers, student preference, and curriculum. P:3 said that they feel their children are safe in their brick-and-mortar school. This is primarily due to metal detectors accompanied with armed security guards in every building. P:3 also identified communication with teachers was a deciding factor (this was not elaborated on, simply identified on the survey). P:3 also identified student preference as one of the deciding factors. This participant verbally shared with the researcher that their children do not want to attend a cyberschool. P:3 stated that the most important deciding factor when choosing the type of school for their children was the curriculum. This participant feels strongly about traditional education. It was mentioned that P:3 believes in the structure of a brick-and-mortar school, classroom rules, and learning appropriate social ques.

Participant 4, coded as P:4, had a school choice of cyberschool. This participant has three children in the home with at least one of them having a learning disability. P:4 identified four deciding factors when making a school choice. These factors include safety, communication with teachers, school resources, and convenience of location. P:4 mentioned their concern with school safety. It was mentioned if their children attend school from home, the parent or guardian does not have to worry about school shootings or being exposed to drugs. P:4 also identified communication with teachers as a key deciding point. During the interview P:4 stated that the teachers in their cyberschool respond to e-mails in a timely manner. They also communicate via text message which is convenient for this participant. This participant also identified school resources as a deciding factor. P:4 did not elaborate on the specific school resources but did mention everything for their children is going well. The most important deciding factor for P:4 is

the convenience of the location. They find it beneficial that they can sit with their children during live classes because they are able to assist them as well as be aware of everything that is happening during the school day.

Participant 5, coded P:5, had a school choice of cyberschool. This participant has one child in the home that is identified with a learning disability. This participant stated that the deciding factors of their school choice were safety, convenience of location, and communication with teachers. The most important factor was convenience of location. P:5 stated that they are worried if their child were to attend a brick-and-mortar school they would be bullied. This participant is very happy with how well the teachers communicate. It was mentioned the teachers are also very accommodating to their child's specific needs. Although P:5 says that they wish their child had more opportunities to make friends, they are happy with their school choice and do not plan on switching.

Participant 6, coded P:6, had a school choice of cyberschools. This participant has three children in the home with at least one being identified with a learning disability. The deciding factors for their school choice were safety, convenience of location, communication with teachers, and school resources (the most important being convenience of location). P:6 mentioned that they are at home during the day so it is easy to assist their children during class time while managing behaviors that may occur. This participant is also very pleased with how well the teachers communicate with the children and parent. Overall, this participant is happy with their decision.

Participant 7, coded P:7, had a school choice of cyberschool. This participant has two children in the home with neither being identified with a learning disability. Their deciding factors on school choice were safety, convenience of location, and

communication with teachers with the most important factor being safety. P:7 made the switch from brick-and-mortar school to cyberschool due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They mentioned that one of their children has a compromised immune system and are worried that they may contract Covid-19 in school. This participant also works from home, so it is convenient for their children to attend a cyberschool. Additionally, this participant mentioned how well their teachers communicate and respond quickly to e-mails and phone calls. Although they believed their previous brick-and-mortar school had a better curriculum, it was not important enough for them to stay in a brick-and-mortar school.

Participant 8, coded P:8, had a school choice of brick-and-mortar school. This participant has one child in the home that is not identified with a learning disability. The deciding factors of this participant regarding school choice consisted of the curriculum, school resources, and extracurricular activities with the most important being school resources. This participant said their school challenges the children appropriately. P:8 said they believe the children are receiving an excellent education. Additionally, the school offers great resources for children to use. These include iPads and computers. The school also takes them on at least one, if not two, fieldtrips during the school year. Finally, this participant's child plays on the school's baseball team. P:8 stated it was important for their child to play sports and acquire the structure of being on a team.

Participant 9, coded P:9, had a school choice of brick-and-mortar school. This participant has one child in the home that is not identified with a learning disability. The deciding factors of their school choice were safety, convenience of location, curriculum, school resources, and parental involvement opportunities. This participant is on the school board at their local district. P:9 feels they can make a difference and is happy to be

part of the schools decision-making process. Additionally, this participant acknowledged that bullying does take place in the schools but is very satisfied with how well their school responds to any time of bullying. This parent is not able to be home with their child to assist them in a cyberschool, so it is more convenient for the child to attend a brick-and-mortar school. Finally, P:9 stated they are pleased with the curriculum being taught to the children. P:9 declined to give further information regarding the curriculum.

Participant 10, coded P:10, had a school choice of brick-and-mortar. This participant has two children in the home with neither being identified with a learning disability. Their school choice deciding factors were convenience of location, curriculum, and extracurricular activities with the most important being extracurricular activities. P:10 stated their local school is near their home and is easy for them to pick their children up from school when needed. It was also mentioned the school curriculum is tough (in a positive way) and requires students participating in extracurricular activities to maintain good grades. Both of P:10's children play on the football team, and they mentioned the importance for their children to be involved in sports. Table 5 depicts the participants' deciding factors.

Table 5*Participant Deciding Factors*

Participant	School Choice	Deciding Factors	Most Important Deciding Factor
P:1	Cyberschool	-Safety -Convenience of location	Convenience of location
P:2	Brick-and-Mortar	-Communication with teachers -Convenience of location -School resources -Extracurricular activities -Safety	Extracurricular activities
P:3	Brick-and-Mortar	-Curriculum -Communication with teachers -Student preference -Safety	Curriculum
P:4	Cyberschool	-Convenience of location -Communication with Teachers	Convenience of location
P:5	Cyberschool	-School Resources -Safety -Convenience of location -Communication with teachers	Convenience of location

P:6	Cyberschool	-Safety -Convenience of location -Communication with teachers	Convivence of location
P:7	Cyberschool	-School resources -Safety -Convenience of location -Communication with teachers	Safety
P:8	Brick-and-Mortar	-Curriculum -School resources	School resources
P:9	Brick-and-Mortar	-Extracurricular activities -Safety -Convenience of location -Curriculum -School resources	Convenience of location
P:10	Brick-and-Mortar	-Parental involvement opportunities -Convenience of location -Curriculum -Extracurricular activities	Extracurricular activities

Based on this study, there are similar demographic and deciding factors between the participants based on identical school choice. Of the five participants with a cyberschool as their school choice, four of the five mentioned that they have at least one child identified with a learning disability. Thus, 80% of those choosing cyberschool in this study have at least one child in the home identified with a learning disability. Additionally, three of the five participants, 60%, mentioned their combined household income is between \$20,001 and \$40,000. Furthermore, four of the five participants, 80%, affiliate themselves with the Democrat political party. Finally, two of the participants mentioned their ethnicity as African American while three mentioned they are Caucasian. Thus, 40% of the participants with a school choice of cyberschool are African American while 60% are Caucasian.

Those with a school choice of cyberschool share similar deciding factors of school choice. All five of the participants (100%) mentioned safety as a deciding factor with four (80%) of those stating that the Covid-19 played a role in their decision-making process. The data suggests that parents and guardians feel that their children are safe attending school from inside the home. All five (100%) of the participants that chose cyberschools chose convenience of location as a deciding factor. Therefore, data suggests that parents and guardians choose cyberschooling because it is convenient for their child to attend class from home. Again, all five (100%) of cyberschool participants chose communication with teachers as a deciding factor. The data suggests that cyberschool teachers communicate effectively with their students and parents or guardians. The remaining factors had a minimal impact on this study. These include state testing scores

(0), curriculum (0), student preference (00), parental involvement opportunities (0), extracurricular activities (0), and bullying (0).

There are demographic and deciding factor similarities between the five participants that chose brick-and-mortar as school choice. Of the five participants, four, (80%), of them stated they did not have a child in the home identified with a learning disability. Based on this study, the data suggests the majority of those that chose brick-and-mortar school do not have a child in the home identified with a learning disability. Additionally, three, (60%), of the participants stated their total annual household income is above \$75,001 while the other two, (40%), participants stated theirs is between \$40,001 and \$75,000. The data from this study suggests those choosing cyberschool tend to have a higher household income than those that choose cyberschool. Furthermore, four, (60%), of the participants mentioned affiliating themselves with the Republican political party. This suggests those choosing brick-and-mortar school tend to lean toward the Republican party while those choosing cyberschool lean toward the Democratic party. Finally, three, (40%), of the participants stated their ethnicity as Caucasian, one, (20%), as African American, and one, (20%), as “other”. Based on this study, there is no direct correlation in ethnicity between those choosing cyberschool and those choosing brick-and-mortar schools.

Participants with a school choice of brick-and-mortar share similarities but had a wider range of factors when deciding on their school choice. The noticeable factors included convenience of location, curriculum, school resources, and extracurricular activities. Three, (60%), of the five participants stated convenience of location was a deciding factor. This study suggests many parents find it more convenient to send their

child to a brick-and-mortar school than a cyberschool. Additionally, all five, (100%), participants noted there is not someone to sit in the home with their children during the school day. Four, (80%), of the participants chose curriculum as a school choice. The data from this study suggests parents or guardians who choose brick-and-mortar schools feel their school teaches a curriculum suitable for their children. Three, (40%), of the participants chose school resources as a deciding factor. This study suggests over half of parents or guardians feel brick-and-mortar schools offer resources to promote learning. Finally, three, (60%), of the participants chose extracurricular activities as a deciding factor. All three, (100%), of these participants mentioned their children are involved in sports. This study suggests parents or guardians that have children who are or wish to be involved in sports, choose brick-and-mortar as a school choice. The other factors chosen had minimal impact to the study. These include state testing scores (0), communication with teachers (1), student preference (1), parental involvement opportunities (1), and bullying (1).

The second question to this study that was analyzed is how enrollment changed over the past five years in the six highest enrolled cyberschools in Pennsylvania as of the 2017-2018 school year. The data collected demonstrates that cyberschool enrollment has increased each year over the past five years. The combined total enrollment of the six schools was 30,863 students during the 2017-2018 school year. The following school year, 2018-2019, combined student enrollment rose to 32,225 students. Then, during the 2019-2020 school year the combined student enrollment grew to 32,692. The largest growth in student enrollment happened during the 2020-2021 school year; the total

enrollment increased to 45,553 total students. Finally, during the 2021-2022 school year, cyberschool enrollment continued to grow, totaling 47,651 students.

There is one notable reason why cyberschool enrollment increased. Based on the participant survey five (50%) of the participants mentioned Covid-19 as a deciding factor on their school choice. Four (80%) of the five had a school choice of cyberschool. In addition, one (10%) of the 10 participants stated that they switched to a cyberschool when the Covid-19 pandemic began. During the 2020-2021 school year cyberschools saw the largest increase in enrollment. This school year began just months after Covid-19 was declared a pandemic. Therefore, this study suggests, but is not conclusive, that many parents and guardians enrolled their children in cyberschools to keep them safe from contracting Covid-19. Chapter Five will summarize the findings of this study, share implications, and offer recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Summary of Findings and Implications

Introduction to Findings

The purpose of this research is to determine why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children in kindergarten through 12th grade and how student enrollment in cyberschools has changed over the past five years. Specifically, this study addresses the following two research questions:

1. What are the reasons parents and guardians are choosing or are not choosing cyberschools?
2. How, and in what direction, have cyberschool student enrollment numbers changed over the past five years?

The researcher of the current study wanted to gather a rich and detailed understanding of the various reasons parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children. This investigation included 10 participants who are the parents or guardians of school-aged children that attend a kindergarten through 12th-grade school in Pennsylvania. This mixed method study allowed for probing questions through surveys and open-ended questions through interviews. The survey included 20 questions and the interview included five open-ended questions. This study also included enrollment data from six highest enrolled cyberschools in Pennsylvania over the past five years. A brief analysis of how enrollment data has changed and the possible reasons for these changes was investigated.

Summary of Findings

Why are parents and guardians choosing cyberschools for their children? This study focused on parental interests and ideologies when analyzing why parents and guardians are choosing or are not choosing cyberschools for their children. Results of the

study concluded that parents and guardians are choosing cyberschools because they tend to be safer than traditional brick-and-mortar schools. Participants mentioned that they do not have to worry about their children being involved in school violence, such as school shootings and physical bullying, if their children are enrolled in cyberschool. It was also mentioned that cyberschools are more convenient for them and/or their children, especially those with learning disabilities. This includes avoiding the typical morning routine that is involved with brick-and-mortar schools. Also, parents and guardians can sit with their children during live classes to assist them as needed.

All five participants that chose cyberschool as their school choice mentioned that they feel communicating with the teachers is a strong benefit. Teachers are quick to respond through e-mail, text messages, and phone calls. Parents and guardians are also able to communicate with the teacher during live sessions as needed. Finally, all five participants with cyberschool as a school choice mentioned that cyberschools are safe. It was mentioned there is no major concern with bullying in cyberschools. Other participants stated that children in brick-and-mortar schools may be exposed to drugs and alcohol while children in cyberschools do not experience that type of exposure. Finally, five participants, four of those had a school choice of cyberschool, mentioned the Covid-19 pandemic as one of their deciding factors on their school choice. One participant stated they unenrolled their child from a brick-and-mortar school and enrolled them in a cyberschool to keep them safe from Covid-19.

Additionally, this study addressed why are parents and guardians are not choosing cyberschool for their children. Results suggest that socialization is a key factor. Four of the five participants with a school choice of brick-and-mortar, mentioned a lack of

socialization that may occur in a cyberschool setting. One participant, who has a child identified with a disability, specifically said that children with autism need the socialization that comes with a brick-and-mortar school and lacks in a cyberschool setting. Data from this study suggests that children are not able to build interpersonal relationships in cyberschools the same they would in person attending a brick-and-mortar school. Furthermore, results from the current study indicate that another one of the main reasons that parents and guardians are not choosing cyberschools are the extracurricular activities, such as sports, that many cyberschools are unable to offer. Three of the five participants, with a school choice of brick-and-mortar, mentioned that their children participate in sports. They believe that cyberschools do not offer the option to partake in team sports. This is due to cyberschools educating students across an entire state.

The next reason parents and guardians are not choosing cyberschools may be due to the curriculum that brick-and-mortar schools offer. Four of the five participants, with a school choice of brick-and-mortar, mentioned curriculum as a deciding factor. One participant stated that they experienced both a brick-and-mortar and cyberschool curriculum and believed the brick-and-mortar school curriculum was more challenging and engaging for their child. However, although no participants chose state testing scores as a deciding factor research suggests that brick-and-mortar schools typically have higher test scores than cyberschools. Higher scores in brick-and-mortar schools could potentially lead parents and guardians to believe that brick-and-mortar schools are educating students more effectively. Cordes (2019) states that brick-and-mortar schools typically have a positive effect on student test scores and post-secondary enrollment.

Furthermore, this study analyzed enrollment trends in six cyberschools in Pennsylvania over the past five years. Data from Pennsylvania's Department of Education and participant responses from the current study demonstrates that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused an increase in cyberschool enrollment. There is additional data that shows the Covid-19 pandemic has caused small, but significant enrollment declines at traditional public schools, while increasing the share of cyberschool students (Wolfman, 2020).

Additionally, this study examined enrollment trends over the past five years. Student enrollment increased each year from the 2017-2018 school year until the 2021-2021 school year. The largest increase came from the 2019-2020 to the 2020-2021 school year. Although individual school enrollment typically fluctuates the total number of students in cyberschool increased each year. In the survey, the 10 participants were asked if the Covid-19 pandemic played a role in their decision-making process. Of the 10 participants, five mentioned that Covid-19 was one of the deciding factors. Four of the five participants that stated Covid-19 was a factor in school choice enrolled their children in cyberschool. Since the Covid-19 pandemic was declared in the United States in March of 2020 (Johnson et al., 2020), it is speculated, yet inconclusive, to believe that the large increase in student enrollment, specifically during the 2020-2021 school year, in cyberschools was due to this.

Based on the previous five years of cyberschool enrollment increasing each year, using trend analysis, there is reason to believe that cyberschools will continue to grow. Since 2017, enrollment has continued to increase minimally until the Covid-19 pandemic came into effect. This is where we saw the largest growth in enrollment. Based on these

trends, there is significant data that forecasts total cyberschool enrollment will increase each year from approximately 200 students per year to 2,000 students per year. This implication is based on no widespread outside factors, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, that may affect enrollment.

Implications

Cyberschools and local public-school districts are not the only option for parents and guardians to enroll their children. However, although other schooling options are available, this study only focused on cyberschool and traditional brick-and-mortar school. In order for parents and guardians to make an informed decision on their children's education they must be educated on the differences between cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools. Furthermore, parents and guardians can gain an understanding of why people choose cyberschools or brick-and-mortar schools for their children in order to assist them in making their own decision regarding their children's education.

All five participants with a school choice of cyberschool mentioned that safety was one of the deciding factors when making their decision. One of the participants stated that they are concerned with school violence such as school shootings and bullying that happens in brick-and-mortar schools. Administrators from brick-and-mortar schools could use this data to increase safety measures in their schools. This could include metal detectors, armed security guards, a school wide positive behavioral support plan, and crisis training for all school staff. Improving school safety may encourage parents or guardians who send their children to cyberschools to consider their local public brick-and-mortar school for enrollment.

Again, all five participants with a school choice of cyberschool stated that communication with teachers was a deciding factor. It was mentioned that cyberschool teachers respond back via e-mail, text message, and phone calls in a very timely manner. This data could be used within a brick-and-mortar school to help develop a way to improve communication with parents. Brick-and-mortar teachers could use communication applications such as social media platforms or applications, such as Class Dojo to communicate with parents or guardians. Teachers could potentially set aside time during the day to respond to parental communication. In addition, teachers in brick-and-mortar schools could consider using their phone to text message parents. This would all depend on the school policies but could ultimately help improve communication between parents and teachers.

Finally, all five participants that chose cyberschools for their children mentioned that convenience of location was a deciding factor for their school choice. Two participants mentioned that it is helpful to be able to sit with their children during live sessions so they can support them and understand exactly what is being taught in class. One aspect brick-and-mortar schools could consider is offering virtual classes within their district. The students could still be enrolled in their local brick-and-mortar school, but they would be able to attend classes virtually. This could ultimately help enrollment increase in public brick-and-mortar schools.

During the interview with the participants that chose brick-and-mortar schools for their children, three participants mentioned that the biggest disadvantage of a cyberschool would be the lack of socialization and interpersonal relationships—students in a brick-and-mortar school are exposed to more in-person interactions. Since cyberschool is

conducted virtually and typically enrolls students across an entire state, students do not often have the opportunity to meet their teachers or their peers in person. This could be specifically detrimental for students who are struggling socially and/or have goals to develop social skills. Zaki (2022) states that many students in an online setting miss out on the social and physical interaction that comes with a brick-and-mortar school.

Cyberschool administrators could use this data to improve socialization. For example, administrators could set up optional meet and greets during the year. This could include school sponsored activities such as amusement park days or various other opportunities for teachers and students to meet in-person and participate in events. Although a cyberschool does not offer in-person instruction, these opportunities may sway some parents or guardians to consider enrolling their children in a cyberschool.

Another deciding factor for parents or guardians that chose brick-and-mortar schools are extracurricular activities, specifically sport programs. Three participants stated their children are involved in school sponsored sports. It was also mentioned that the one school policy states if a student has a grade of a C in an academic class, they are not able to participate in their activity until that student brings their grade to at least a B. One participant was fond of that policy as they believe it pushes students to work hard academically. It was also mentioned that this participant believes the sport programs are well developed and encourages strong bonds between peers and staff. Since cyberschools educate students across an entire state it may not be feasible for the school to sponsor their own sports teams, marching bands, and various other in-person extracurricular activities. However, Pennsylvania's Charter School Law does allow a public cyberschool student to participate in a school district's sports programs and extracurricular activities if

such activities are not offered by the charter school. Cyberschools could use this information to educate parents and guardians that their children can participate in their local school functions. Cyberschools could advertise the option for their students to enroll in local schools activities in order to inform parents and that there are extracurriculars available; therefore, potentially swaying some parents and guardians to consider enrolling their children in a cyberschool.

Finally, school resources, safety, and convenience of location was mentioned by participants that chose cyberschool and brick-and-mortar schools. This implies that these factors vary by each specific school district. In addition, data from this study suggests that no school district is perfect and can satisfy all student ideologies and interests; however, this study may help school districts identify specific areas that may deter parents and guardians from enrolling their children in the district.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study leave room for various questions that are related to school choice to be explored. Therefore, several follow-up studies are needed to continue to analyze why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children and to analyze how has enrollment changed in cyberschools over the past five years. First, it should be noted that 10 participants were used in this study. Five of them, or 50%, had a school choice of cyberschool while five of them, or 50%, had a school choice of brick-and-mortar school. Each of these participants have children that attend one of those types of schools in Pennsylvania. An additional study, including more participants across various states, should be completed to for a more developed understanding of why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools for

their children. Other states may offer different options and have various supports in place within their schools that Pennsylvania schools do not offer.

This study focused solely on parents and guardians who have children enrolled in a cyberschool or brick-and-mortar school. It did not consider the population of students who are homeschooled. An additional study should be conducted examining the reasons why parents and guardians chose to homeschool their children rather than enroll them in a cyberschool or brick-and-mortar school. This research should also include enrollment rates of students who are homeschooled in comparison to those in cyberschools and brick-and-mortar school.

Next, this study did not consider participant and children's mental health identifications as part of school choice. Nearly five million children in the U.S. have some type of serious mental illness—one that significantly interferes with daily life (Brennan, 2022). In order for an individual to be identified with a mental health disorder, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (2022), states that the individual must meet five criteria. The criteria include a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome associated with present distress must not be merely an expectable and culturally sanctioned response to an event, must not be a manifestation of behavioral, psychological, or biological dysfunction, and must not exhibit deviant behavior (DSM-5). Additional studies that include participants with children with mental health identifications or parents and guardians that are identified with a mental health identification themselves could be beneficial in identifying reasons for school choice.

Conclusion

Parents and guardians of school-aged children have options of which type of school they choose to enroll their children in. The of two most common choices are either to send students to a cyberschool or to a traditional brick-and-mortar school. With cyberschooling being a relatively new form of learning, many parents and guardians are not fully educated on the advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Parents and guardians may have personal biases and misconceptions that may deter them from considering cyberschools. This study researched the reasons why parents and guardians choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children.

Parents and guardians are expressing their interest for more individualized, holistic instruction based upon their needs (Connell, 2016). Both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools strive to meet student's needs, but they may not always succeed. Thus, it is important that parents and guardians are educated on what each type of school offers and determine what is the best fit for their children. The researcher hopes that the data collected from this study will help educate parents and guardians as to why parents and guardians choose cyberschools or brick-and-mortar schools for their children. Thus, parents and guardians can make the best decision based on their children's needs. This study also aims to educate administrators from both cyberschools and brick-and-mortar schools. Understanding why parents and guardians choose the schools that they do can allow administration to make the necessary adjustments to attract more students. Overall, the results of this study can inform and educate everyone involved in the education of children so that they can be successful in whatever path they choose.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”

– Nelson Mandela

References

- Admiraal, W., Louws, M., Lockhorst, D., Paas, T., Buynsters, M., Cviko, A., Janssen, C., De Jonge, M., Nouwens, S., Post, L., Van der Ven, F., & Kester, L. (2017). Teachers in school-based technology innovations: A typology of their beliefs on teaching and technology. *Computers & Education, 114*, 57-68.
- Agora Cyber Charter School. (2022). *About Agora*. <https://agora.org/about-agora/>
- Agora Cyber Charter School. (2022). *Act 158*. <https://agora.org/act-158/>
- Agostinelli, M. D. (2019). *From Distance Education to online education: A review of the literature*. University of Montana, Missoula.
- Ahn, J., & McEachin, A. (2017). Student enrollment patterns and achievement in Ohio's online charter schools. *Educational Researcher, 46*(1), 44–57.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17692999>
- Ali, W. (2020). Online and remote learning in higher education institutes: A necessity in light of COVID-19 Pandemic. *Higher Education Studies, 10*(3), 16–25.
[10.5539/hes.v10n3p16](https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n3p16)
- Allen, M. (2017, April 12). Limitations of Research. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. SAGE Publication.
- Almazova, N., Krylova, E., Rubtsova, A., & Odinokaya, M. (2020). Challenges and opportunities for Russian higher education amid Covid-19: Teachers' perspective. *Education Sciences, 10*(12), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10120368>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.,(2) text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>

- Atmojo, E. P. A., & Nugroho, A. (2020). EFL classes must go online! Teaching activities and challenges during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *Register Journal*, 13(1), 49-76. 10.18326/rgt.v13i1.49-76
- Barbour, M. K., Hodges, C., Trust, T., LaBonte, R., Moore, S., Bond, A., Kelly, K., Lockee, B., & Hill, P. (2020). Understanding pandemic pedagogy: Differences between emergency remote, remote, and online teaching. *State of the Nation: K-12 E-Learning in Canada*. <https://k12sotn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/understanding-pandemic-pedagogy.pdf>
- Beasley, J. G., & Beck, D. E. (2017). Defining differentiation in cyber schools: What online teachers say. *TechTrends*, 61(6), 550–559. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-017-0189-x>
- Beck, D., & Beasley, J. (2020). Identifying the differentiation practices of virtual school teachers. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(2), 2191–2205. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10332-y>
- Betebenner, D. W. ., Howe, K. R. ., & Foster, S. S. . (2005). On school choice and test-based accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13, 41. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v13n41.2005>
- Boothe, D. (2020). Redefining education during a global pandemic. *The Future of Education*. <https://conference.pixel-online.net/FOE/files/foe/ed0010/FP/0475-ICT4698-FP-FOE10.pdf>
- Borup, J. (2016). Teacher perceptions of parent engagement at a cyber high school. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 48(2), 67–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2016.1146560>

- Brandt, E. (2022). Pennsylvania cyber charter schools see double-digit growth. *GovTech*.
<https://www.govtech.com/education/k-12/pennsylvania-cyber-charter-schools-see-double-digit-growth>
- Branon, R. F., & Essex, C. (2001). Synchronous and asynchronous communication tools in distance education. *TechTrends*, 45(1), 36–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02763377>
- Brennan, D. (2022). Mental health: Mental illness in children. *WebMD*.
<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-illness-children#:~:text=Nearly%205%20million%20children%20in,diagnosed%20with%20a%20mental%20illness.>
- Buckley, J., & Schneider, M. (2007). *Charter schools: Hope or hype?* Princeton University Press.
- Burdina, G. M., Krapotkina, I. E., & Nasyrova, L. G. (2019). Distance learning in elementary school classrooms: An emerging framework for contemporary practice. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(1), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.1211a>
- Cambridge University Press. (2021). Cyberschool. In *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cyberschool>
- Cambridge University Press. (2022). Student. In *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/student>
- Casey, D. (2008). A Journey to legitimacy: The historical development of distance education through technology. *TechTrends*, 52(2), 45-51.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, August 16). *CDC Museum Covid-19 timeline*.<https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html#:~:text=March%201%2C%202020,declares%20COVID%2D19%20a%20pandemic>
- Chamberlain, K. (2000). Methodolatry and qualitative health research. *Journal of Health Psychology, 5*, 285–296.
- Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (2014). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research, 1-2*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406>
- Connell, S. (2016). *Why parents, in the Penns Valley Area School District, choose cyber charter or charter schools over the local public school district* [Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University]. Penn State University Libraries.
- Cordes, S. A. (2019). *The effects of charter schools on student outcomes in Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania Department of Education.
<https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Data%20and%20Statistics/Research%20and%20Evaluation/PA%20-%20The%20Effects%20of%20Charter%20Schools%20on%20Student%20Outcomes%20in%20Pennsylvania%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>.
- Coulson, A. J. (1999). *Market education: The unknown history* (Vol. 21). Transaction Publishers.
- CREDO. (2019). *Charter School Performance in Pennsylvania*. Stanford University.
https://credo.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2019_pa_state_report_final_06052019.pdf
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

- Crosley, J., & Jansen, D. (2020, December). *Qualitative data coding: Explained simply (with examples)*. Grad Coach. <https://gradcoach.com/qualitative-data-coding-101/>
- Crouch, M., & McKenzie, H. (2006). The logic of small samples in interview-based qualitative research. *Social Science Information*, 45(4), 483–499.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018406069584>
- Crowcroft, J. (1998, December 3). *Hierarchical coding*.
<https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~jac22/books/mm/book/node119.html#:~:text=Hierarchical%20coding%20is%20based%20on,increasing%20quality%20to%20the%20scheme>
- Dingeldein, A. (2021, February 12). *A typical day for a synchronous cyber school student [a student's perspective]*. PA Virtual School Newsroom.
<https://blog.pavcsk12.org/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-synchronouscyber-school-student-a-students-perspective>
- Ellis, K. (2021, November 5). *What is cyber school? The classroom: Empowering students in their college journey*. <https://www.theclassroom.com/cyber-school-5040601.html>
- Evişen, N., Akyılmaz, Ö., & Torun, Y. (2020). A case study of university EFL preparatory class students' attitudes towards online learning during COVID-19 in Turkey. *Gaziantep Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 4(2), 73-93.
- Fiedler, K., & Kareev, Y. (2006). Does decision quality (always) increase with the size of information samples? Some vicissitudes in applying the law of large numbers. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 32, 884. doi:10.1037/0278-7393.32.4.883

- Finol, M. O. (2020, March 26). *Asynchronous vs. synchronous learning: A quick overview*. Bryn Mawr College. <https://www.brynmawr.edu/news/asynchronous-vs-synchronous-learning-quick-overview>
- Foleno, F. (2021, April 30). *What makes a family a good fit for cyber school?* PA Virtual School Newsroom. <https://blog.pavcsk12.org/what-makes-a-family-a-good-fit-for-cyber-school>
- Fredig, R. E., & Kennedy, K. (2018). *Handbook of research on K-12 online and blending learning*. (2nd edition). Carnegie Mellon University.
- Ghory, S., & Ghafory, H. (2021). The impact of modern technology in the teaching and learning process. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*. <http://www.ijirss.com/index.php/ijirss/article/view/73>
- GirikAllo, M. D. (2020). Is the online learning good in the midst of COVID-19 Pandemic? The case of EFL learners. *Journal Sinesthesia*, 10(1), 1–10.
- Greenway, R., & Vanourek, G. (2006). The Virtual Revolution: Understanding Online Schools. *Education Next*, 6, 34–41.
- Guo, S. (2021). Moderating effects of delinquent peer association, Social Control, and negative emotion on cyberbullying and delinquency: Gender differences. *School Psychology*, 36(6), 445–454. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000449>
- Hacke, S. (2017, August 15). The charter effect: Cyber charters don't get passing grades but parents choose them for other reasons. *PublicSource*. <https://projects.publicsource.org/chartereffect/stories/cyber-charters-dont-get-passing-grades-but-parents-choose-them-for-other-reasons.html>

- Hakim, B. M. (2020). EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences on Incorporating Blackboard Applications in the Learning Process with Modular System at ELI. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 12(2), 392–405.
- Hasan, N., & Bao, Y. (2020). Impact of “e-learning crack-up” perception on psychological distress among college students during COVID-19 pandemic: A mediating role of “Fear of academic year loss.” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 118(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105355>
- Hertwig, R., & Pleskac, T. J. (2008) The game of life: How small samples render choice simpler. In N. Chater & M. Oaksford (Eds.), *The probabilistic mind* (pp. 209-136). Oxford.
- Hijazi, D., & AlNatour, A. (2021) Online learning challenges affecting students of English in an EFL context during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(2), 379-395.
- Johnson, C. C., Walton, J. B., Strickler, L., & Elliott, J. B. (2022). Online teaching in K-12 education in the United States: A systematic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 93(3), 353–411. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543221105550>
- Kemp, S. (2022, March 14). *Digital 2022: The United States of America - DataReportal – global digital insights*. DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-united-states-of-america>
- Kentnor, H. (2015). Distance education and the evolution of online learning in the United States. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 17(1-2), 21-24.
https://digitalcommons.du.edu/law_facpub/24

- Küçüksüleymanoğlu, R. (2019). Cyberbullying among secondary school teachers by parents. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 8(1), 151–157. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v8i1.16549>
- Law Insider. (2022). *Supplemental curriculum definition*.
<https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/traditional-education>
- Law Insider. (n.d.). *Traditional education definition*.
<https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/traditional-education>
- Liu, F., Black, E., Algina, J., Cavanaugh, C., & Dawson, K. (2010). The validation of one parental involvement measurement in virtual schooling. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 9(2), 105–132.
- Lubienski, C., & Weitzel, P. C. (2010). *The charter school experiment: Expectations, evidence, and implications*. Harvard Education Press.
- Mahyoob, M. (2020). Challenges of e-Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic Experienced by EFL Learners. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(4) 351-362.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no4.23>
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Manoharan, S. R., Hua, T. K., & Sultan, F. M. (2022). A comparison of online learning challenges between young learners and adult learners in ESL classes during the COVID-19 pandemic: A critical review. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(1), 28–35. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tppls.1201.04>

- Mathew, V. N., & Chung, E. (2020). University students' perspectives on open and distance learning (ODL) implementation amidst COVID-19. *Asian Journal of University Education (AJUE)*, 16(4), 152-160.
- McAlvage, K., & Rice, M. (2018). Access and accessibility in online learning: Issues in higher education and K-12 contexts. *OLC Research Center for Digital Learning & Leadership*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593920.pdf>
- McFarlane, D. (2011). A comparison of organizational structure and pedagogical approach: Online versus face-to-face. *The Journal of Educators Online*, 8(1).
<https://doi.org/10.9743/jeo.2011.1.1>
- McQuaide, T. J. (2020). *BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HOME THROUGH HOME VISITS IN THE CYBER SCHOOL MODEL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY* (dissertation).
- Medelyan, A. (2021, September 23). *Coding qualitative data: How to code qualitative research*. Learn to Code Qualitative Data. <https://getthematic.com/insights/coding-qualitativatedata/#:~:text=Hierarchical%20framing%20supports%20a%20larger,code%20frames%20should%20be%20flexible>
- Milliman, S., & Maranto, R. (2009). Educational renegades: Dissatisfied teachers as drivers of charter school formation. *Journal of School Choice*, 3(2), 138-162.
- Miron G., & Gulosino, C. (2016). *Virtual schools report 2016*. National Education Policy Center.

- Miron, G., Shank, C., & Davidson, C. (2018, April 30). *Full-time virtual and blended schools: Enrollment, student characteristics, and performance*. National Education Policy Center. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED591990>
- Molnar, A. (2019, May). *Virtual schools in the U.S. 2019 - ed*. National Education Policy Center.
- Murphy, J. (2019, October 2). *Pennsylvania governor closes cyber charter school*. GovTech. <https://www.govtech.com/education/pennsylvania-governor-closes-cyber-charter-school.html>
- Muzamil, M., & Shah, G. (2016). Cyberbullying and self-perceptions of students associated with their academic performance. *International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology*, 11(3), 79–92.
- National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). (2020). *Common Core of Data (CCD)*. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/201920_Virtual_Schools_table_3.asp
- NCSL. (n.d). *Definitions of "parent" and related variations in child welfare*. https://www.ncsl.org/documents/cyf/definitions_of_parent.pdf
- Neelamegam, P., & Muthusubramanian, B. (2022). A classic critique on concrete adsorbing pollutants emitted by automobiles and statistical envision using trend analysis. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 29(57), 85969–85987. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-021-15962-4>
- Nogales-Delgado, S., Román Suero, S., & Martín, J. M. (2020). Covid-19 outbreak: Insights about teaching tasks in a chemical engineering laboratory. *Education Sciences*, 10(9), 5. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090226>

- Ozdamli, F., & Karagozlu, D. (2022). Online education during the pandemic: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 17(16), 167–193. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v17i16.32287>
- PA virtual academic programs: K12 curriculum: K-12 online academics. PA Virtual Cyber School. (2022). <https://www.pavcsk12.org/pa-virtual-charter-school/academics>
- Paul, A. M. (2012, April 13). *Do students really have different learning styles?* KQED. <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/20491/do-students-have-different-learning-styles>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2022). *Charter School Funding*. Department of Education. <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Charter%20Schools/Pages/Charter-School-Funding.aspx>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2022a). *Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)*. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. <https://www.education.pa.gov/K12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Pages/default.aspx>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2022b). *Public school enrollment reports*. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. <https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Enrollment/Pages/PublicSchEnrReports.aspx>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (n.d). *Charter schools*. <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Charter%20Schools/Pages/default.aspx>
- Protheroe, N. (2010). Charter Schools. *Principal's Research Review*, 5(4), 1–7.

- Rasiah, R., Kaur, H., & Guptan, V. (2020). Business continuity plan in the Higher Education Industry: University Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of academic continuity
- Rieber, L. P. (2020). Q methodology in learning, design, and technology: An introduction. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 68(5), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09777-2>
- Roberts, C., & Hyatt, L. (2018). *The dissertation journey* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/books/9781506373331>
- Rogers, P. L. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning, Second Edition*. Idea Group Inc (IGI).
- Ruiz, J. G., Mintzer, M. J., & Leipzig, R. M. (2006). The impact of e-learning in medical education. *Academic Medicine*, 81(3), 207–212. doi:10.1097/00001888-200603000-00002
- Saha, S. M., Pranty, S. A., Rana, Md. J., Islam, Md. J., & Hossain, Md. E. (2022). Teaching during a pandemic: Do university teachers prefer online teaching? *Heliyon*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08663>
- Sanetti, L., Kratochwill, T., Collier-Meek, M., & Long, A. (2014). *PRIME: Planning realistic maintenance and maintenance by educators*. https://implementationscience.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1115/2014/12/PRIME_guide1.pdf
- Schrauf, R. W. (2016). *Mixed methods interviews, surveys, and cross-cultural comparisons*. Cambridge University Press.

- Sengil Akar, S., & Kurtoglu Erden, M. (2021). Distance education experiences of secondary school math teachers during the pandemic: A narrative study. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 22(2), 19–39.
<https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.961809>
- Sevy-Biloon, J. (2021). Virtual or face to face classes: Ecuadorian university students' perceptions during the pandemic. *English language teaching educational journal*, 4(1), 15- 24. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v4i1.3935>
- Shoaf, L. M., & Shoaf, M. G. (2006). The hidden advantages of focus group interviews in educational research. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 27(3), 342–354.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/jspr.27.3.342>
- Simkus, J. (2022, January 30). *Convenience sampling: Definition, method and examples*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/convenience-sampling.html>
- Susilowati, R. (2020). The challenges of online learning in listening class during COVID-19 pandemic. *Edukasi Lingua Sastra*, 18(2), 56-72.
- Tenny, S., Brannan, J. M., & Brannon, G.D. (2022). *Qualitative study*. StatPearls Publishing LLC. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/>
- Tomei, L. (2008). *Encyclopedia of information technology curriculum integration*. IGI Global.
- Whalley, R., & Barbour, M. K. (2020). Collaboration and virtual learning in New Zealand rural primary schools: A review of the literature. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 21(2), 102–125. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.727983>

- Weiss, C. (1995). The Four “I’s” of school reform: How interests, ideology, information, and institution affect teachers and principals. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(4), 571–593. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.65.4.05530845t676w50h>
- Wilder, S. (2014). Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: A meta-synthesis. *Educational Review*, 66(3), 377–397.
- Wolfman, A. (2020, December 9). *New Pa. Data shows how the pandemic gave a big boost to cyber charter schools*. WHY.org.
<https://why.org/articles/new-pa-data-shows-how-the-pandemic-gave-a-big-boost-to-cyber-charter-schools/#:~:text=One%20type%20of%20public%20school,That's%20a%2059%25%20enrollment%20spike>.
- Zaki, M. S. (2022). Advantages and disadvantages of online learning. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 15(92), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.17719>

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER



Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is David Furka, and I am a Doctoral student at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. I am working with Dr. Richael Barger-Anderson, a faculty member at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, on conducting a research study on why parents choose or do not choose cyberschools for their children. I am looking for participants who are the parent or legal guardian of students in grades K-12 who attend school in Pennsylvania. This study includes a 20-question survey which will be done online using Survey Monkey. The survey will include questions regarding the reasons you chose they type of school you did, for your child or children. This study also includes a five-question interview, which will be conducted in person or via a phone call. If you agree to participate in this study, please e-mail me and I will send you a consent to participate form for you to sign and return. If you have any questions, please reach out to Dr. Richael Barger-Anderson at richael.barger.ander@sru.edu or 724-738-2873. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

David Furka

Dfurka84@gmail.com

724-712-1055

APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Why Parent choose or do not choose Cyberschools: A Qualitative/Quantitative Study

Dr. Richael Barger-Anderson

Richael.barger.ander@sru.edu

724-738-2873

David J. Furka

(e) Djf9592@sru.edu

(p) 724-712-1055

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research. At the end of this form, you may sign it acknowledging that you would like to participate in the study.

1. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate the parent or legal guardian of a student enrolled in a K-12 Pennsylvania School

2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to analyze and understand the perceptions and perspectives parents have of cyberschool and why or why not they choose to send their child to a cyberschool. The second purpose is to examine student enrollment of a cyberschool of the span of five years.

3. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will take place via phone calls, e-mail and/or in person. You may participate in the format that is your preference. You will be asked to answer up to 20 questions using Survey Monkey and partake in an in-person or phone interview. The survey will take no more than one hour and the interview may take up to one hour depending on the length of responses. You will not be contacted again unless a clarification to a response is needed.

4. WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer questions regarding the reasons you chose or did not choose to send your child to a cyberschool. First, you will be asked if you are the parent or legal guardian of a K-12 student in Pennsylvania. Then, you will be asked to complete a 20-question survey via Survey Monkey. You will be asked to participate in a 5-question interview which will allow you to clarify your responses. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

5. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may help others eliminate personal biases and understand misconceptions of cyberschools. This may help school districts make adjustments to ensure they are meeting parent and student needs.

6. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

There are no major risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the survey and interview. safeguards will be put in place to ensure confidentiality.

7. HOW WILL YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records. A password protected cellular phone will be used to record the interview if you choose to participate. The researchers will keep all study records, including any codes to your data, in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet as well as within a password protected Gmail account that can only be accessed by a locked MacBook or a locked iPhone. Research records will be labeled with a code. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and audio recordings will be destroyed 3 years after the close of the study. All electronic files (recording files.) containing identifiable information will be on a password protected laptop computer in my locked office. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users.

Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format, and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY INCENTIVE OR COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

N/A

8. WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?

Take as much time as you like before you decide. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, David Furka, 724-

712-1055. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board of Slippery Rock University at (724)738-4846 or via e-mail at irb@srp.edu.

9. CAN YOU STOP BEING IN THE STUDY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

10. WHAT IF YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS RELATED TO BEING A RESEARCH SUBJECT?

Slippery Rock University does not have a program for compensating subjects for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.

11. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers.

I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

Participant Signature_____. Print Name_____
Date_____

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

David J. Furka _____

Signature of Person_____ Print Name_____
Date_____

Obtaining Consent

Dr. Richael Barger-Anderson
Richael.barger.ander@sru.edu
724-738-2873

APPENDIX C: SCHOOL CONSENT FORM

1018 West 8th Avenue King of Prussia, PA 19406 844.40.AGORA |844.402.4672
www.agora.org

February 21, 2022

Dear Mr. David Furka,

I have reviewed your IRB application and the methodology related to your dissertation study. Please accept this letter as permission to conduct your research using data from Agora Cyber Charter School, as long as there are no changes to the IRB application you presented to me, and only after submitting to me documentation your study has received IRB approval.

For the qualitative component of your study, in the event you interview families and/or students from Agora Cyber Charter School, this would need to be included in your IRB application and part of the IRB approval. Before conducting any interviews with Agora families/students, please provide signed consent forms to me before conducting the interviews.

I look forward to reading your completed study.

Best regards,

Rich Jensen, Ed.D. Chief Executive Officer rjensen@agora.org

APPENDIX D: ENROLLMENT CONSENT FORM



David Furka
302 Mary Beth Dr.
Butler, PA 16001

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is David Furka, and I am a doctoral student at Slippery Rock University. I am also an Autistic Support teacher with Agora Charter Cyber School. I am currently writing a dissertation on “Why Parents Choose or not Choose Cyberschools” for their students. I am using a qualitative/quantitative mixed methodology and am writing to you to ask permission to analyze the previous five years of enrollment rates within your school. The data will be analyzed to see trends in enrollment from the 2017-2018 school and ending during the 2021-2022 school year. This data will be used within my dissertation although, the specific name of your school will remain confidential. The only information released will be whether the school is a brick-and-mortar school or a cyberschool. If you consent to sharing this information with me, please sign the form below and return it to me at Dfurka84@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I consent to releasing my school’s enrollment data over the past five years

I do NOT consent to releasing my school’s enrollment data over the past five years

Thank you,

David Furka
DFurka84@gmail.com

APPENDIX E: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Does your child attend a cyberschool or brick-and-mortar school?
 - a. Cyberschool
 - b. Brick-and-mortar school
2. Does your child have a learning disability or is in any form of special education?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. How many students do you currently have enrolled in a K-12 school?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4 or more
4. Which best describes your household income?
 - a. < \$20,000
 - b. \$20,001 - \$40,000
 - c. \$40,001 - \$75,000
 - d. > \$75,000
 - e. Choose not to answer
5. Which political party do you most affiliate yourself with?
 - a. Republican
 - b. Democrat
 - c. Independent
 - d. I do not affiliate myself with any political party.
 - e. Choose not to answer
6. What best describes your ethnicity?
 - a. African American
 - b. Caucasian
 - c. Latino/Hispanic
 - d. Other
 - e. Choose not to answer
7. Does one or more of your children partake in extracurricular activities?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Is a parent or guardian available to sit with your child at home during school hours?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Has your child ever been bullied in their current school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. On a scale of 1-4, 4 being the most, how involved are you in your child's education?
 - a. 1

- b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
11. How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?
- a. Daily
 - b. 2-4 times per week
 - c. Once per week
 - d. Less than once per week
12. Does your school give you the opportunity to discuss your child's academic achievement?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
13. On a scale of 1-4, 4 being the most, how well does the school meet your child's learning needs?
- a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
14. When deciding on your child's school choice, which of the following were your deciding factors? (Circle all that apply)
- a. Safety
 - b. State testing scores
 - c. Convenience of location
 - d. Curriculum
 - e. Communication with teachers
 - f. Student preference
 - g. School resources
 - h. Parental involvement opportunities
 - i. Extracurricular activities/clubs/sports
 - j. Bullying
15. What is the most important deciding factor when choosing your students school setting?
- a. Safety
 - b. State testing scores
 - c. Convenience of location
 - d. Curriculum
 - e. Communication with teachers
 - f. Student preference
 - g. School resources
 - h. Parental involvement opportunities
 - i. Extracurricular activities/clubs/sports
 - j. Bullying
 - k. Other, please specify _____
16. Did the Covid-19 pandemic effect your choice of schooling?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

17. Are you overall happy with your students current educational setting?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 18. Do you feel that you have the knowledge of the differences between a cyber and traditional brick-and-mortar school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 19. Are you considering changing your current child's school placement?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 20. Please list any additional comments below
-

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Why Parents Choose or do not Choose Cyberschools: Interview Questions

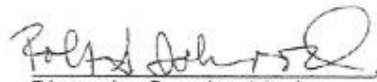
1. What do you believe the advantages of a brick-and-mortar school are?
2. What do you believe the disadvantages of a brick-and-mortar school are?
3. What do you believe the advantages of a cyberschool are?
4. What do you believe the disadvantages of a cyberschool are?
5. Moving forward, do you think you will keep your child enrolled in their current school or enroll them elsewhere? Why?


Slippery Rock University
Department of Special Education

A Dissertation written by
David Furka
Bachelor of Science in Education, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 2012
Master of Education, Slippery Rock University, 2017
Doctorate of Education, Slippery Rock University, 2023

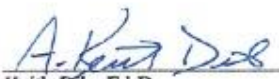
Approved by

 Title: Professor of Special Education
Dissertation Chair

 Title: Associate Professor of Special Education
Dissertation Committee Member

 Title: Chief Academic Officer, Agora Cyber Charter School
Dissertation Committee Member

Accepted by

 Title: Dean, College of Education, Slippery Rock A. University of Pennsylvania
Keith Ellis, Ed.D.