SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSES TO PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE:
AN INDUCTIVE MULTICASE STUDY OF SCHOOL CHOICE POLICIES IN
MASSACHUSETTS

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Abstract

This qualitative case study interviewed four public school superintendents to explore their experiences and decision-making in the face of competition from charter schools and inter-district school choice. Legislation in Massachusetts in the early 1990’s provided parents the option to send their children to a charter school or another public school district outside of the family’s hometown. The study focused upon the leaders of four of the ten public school districts on Cape Cod between the years of 2005 and 2010. During this time, Cape school districts were losing students to charter schools and to neighboring districts through inter-district school choice. These enrollment losses were further magnified by a demographic decline in the school-aged population. All of the districts in this study tried to retain their resident students while actively recruiting choice students from other districts; some districts were more successful at maintaining and even augmenting enrollment than others. There were clear winners and losers in this melee of school choice competition. The district experiencing the least competitive pressure did not appear to innovate in the face of competition, whereas, the other three districts appeared to respond to the market dynamics and improved their program in hopes of retaining and recruiting more students. Each of the superintendents reported some benefits from school choice competition, but there was a darker side to this competition, including a diminished sense of community and disproportional loss of involved parents in some districts and a lack of collaboration amongst the region’s school districts.

Keywords: school choice, competition, leadership, decision-making, innovation
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the following individuals:

To my children, Rory and Darby, who throughout my doctoral program journey have been both inquisitive and patient. May watching your father go through this process and emerge on the other side inspire you to persevere in your own pursuits in life. My hope is you will always be life-long learners and follow your passions.
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My journey as an educator began in a biology classroom at Lexington High School in Lexington, Massachusetts. During my years in a classroom, I was blessed to work with Peg Bradley, who became my mentor and friend. I strived to capture the magic of her classroom in my own teaching, and as an administrator, strive to impart that same magic in the classrooms throughout my schools. I truly believe that every child deserves a Peg Bradley in their lives.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Research topic. In many states across the country, legislation and policies have been created to give parents freedom to choose the school that will provide their children a publicly funded education. In Massachusetts, legislation has provided all parents in the state two forms of public school options for their children beyond attending school in their local district: inter-district school choice and charter schools. This study focused on the strategies superintendents employed in response to the competitive pressures created when parents chose public school alternatives for their children.

Inter-district school choice. Massachusetts Governor William Weld initially signed inter-district school choice into Massachusetts law in 1991 (Armor & Peiser, 1997). This legislative act allowed parents to send their children to schools in communities other than the community in which the family resided. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 later required local school districts in the state to annually vote on whether to accept school choice students from other districts (Armor & Peiser, 1997). While the receiving school district can limit the number of seats available to inter-district school choice students, local school districts cannot restrict parent’s ability to send their children to school in another district. If there are more applicants than available choice seats, the available seats are randomly filled by lottery from the applicant pool.

Current Massachusetts legislation charges a sending district with tuition for each child attending another district through inter-district school choice. The tuition paid for each inter-
district school choice student is 75% of the receiving district’s per pupil cost, up to $5000 for regular education students, plus incremental costs for special education students to pay for provisions within their individual education plans (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MA DESE], 2014a). The incremental costs of adding a school choice student into a district may vary. By 2010, Massachusetts’ average per pupil costs was over $13,000 and rising (MA DESE, 2012), which is significantly more than the $5,000 inter-district school choice tuition limit. Because of the significant gap between average per pupil costs and the $5,000 inter-district school choice tuition limit, accepting inter-district school choice students might be considered a fiscally irrational decision for school districts. Despite the questionable economics of accepting inter-district school choice students, 55% of Massachusetts’ school committees have voted to receive new students through the inter-district school choice program (MA DESE, 2014b).

**Charter schools.** The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (Candal, 2009) authorized the formation of charter schools within the state. Charter schools provide parents an option to send their children to a school developed by a group of educators under a ‘charter’ that specifies how these educators will better educate children. Parents apply to have their child attend a charter school, and if the school has more applicants than seats, the school must hold a lottery to randomly select from the applicant pool.

Charter schools enjoy greater autonomy from certain regulations, including those protecting teachers with tenure, but in exchange these schools are held accountable for delivering improved student results. Charter schools are subject to periodic performance-related reviews that can lead to revocation of the charter if the school is not able demonstrate its ability to deliver improved student outcomes.
The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education accepts prospectuses from two types of charter schools: Horace Mann charter schools and Commonwealth charter schools (MA DESE, 2014c). Horace Mann charters are independently run, but must be approved by the local school committee and teachers’ union. The funding for Horace Mann charters comes from the local school district through a budget request submitted to the superintendent.

By contrast, Commonwealth charters are completely independent of local school committees and superintendents. Commonwealth charters, once approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, are funded by tuitions deducted from local school district budgets. Commonwealth charter schools receive tuition from sending districts equal to the average per pupil costs in the sending district plus a capital funding share equal to the state average of what districts pay per pupil for principal and interest on land and buildings (MA DESE, 2006).

Charter school tuitions paid by local school districts across Massachusetts in 2010 averaged in excess of $11,000 per pupil (MA DESE, 2010), over two times the inter-district school choice tuition limit. To offset the impact of new charter school tuitions on local school district budgets, the Massachusetts’ legislature provides aid to the local school district for the first year a pupil attends a charter school; the amount of this aid decreases in successive years (MA DESE, 2013). Because a charter school’s tuition is tied to the per pupil costs rather than being capped at $5,000, as with inter-district school choice tuition, losing students to charter schools can quickly create pronounced fiscal hardships for some local school districts. Charter school aid may only moderately offset this hardship. This study additionally explored how superintendents navigated within a landscape of school choice during the second half of the
2000s decade. It seeks to understand how superintendents strategically responded to the competitive pressures of losing students and funding to charter schools, potentially by using inter-district school choice to offset enrollment loses.

**Competition.** The measure of effectiveness of Massachusetts school choice policies should not be determined by whether choice provides families that exercise it better educational alternatives alone, but whether the competitive pressure from school choice also makes local school districts better. Market theory predicts that providing parents options to choose between schools will encourage healthy competition amongst public schools that better serves all families because competition between schools exerts market pressures that motivates all schools to improve. This market pressure is created by the potential loss of students and the funding that students bring.

Some have argued that competition-induced market pressure will motivate all schools to improve by producing “a rising tide that lifts all boats” (Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013, p. 29). School choice advocates believe that competition causes schools to more efficiently produce greater achievement per dollar spent and pressures schools to innovate to match students’ needs. Hoxby (2001) has long argued that the competitive pressures of potential loss of enrollment due to parents sending their children to alternative schools and the availability of charter schools causes an upward spiral in student achievement in local district schools; she found where competition was strongest, improvement in the local public schools was most pronounced. Hess (2010) advocated that schools will more meaningfully respond to competitive pressure if the pressure is actually felt – providing parents school choice may not create the competitive pressure necessary to lift all boats if other policies offset the competitive pressure. Massachusetts’ policy of providing charter aid to local school districts softens the fiscal impact
of tuitions paid when students from the district attend charter schools, and such a policy arguably reduces competitive pressure and the potential to improve local school districts.

Several recent studies have questioned whether the theorized benefits from competition are being realized to lift boats and improve achievement. In one Michigan study of school districts from 1994 to 2006, competition with charter schools had little impact on achievement in local school districts (Arsen & Yongmei, 2012). In another Michigan study of the impact of charter school and inter-district school choice, educators did not respond by improving school quality in the face of competition from these educational alternatives (Kim & Youngs, 2013). A study of the influence of charter school competition in California similarly demonstrated that competition was not improving the performance of local schools (Buddin & Zimmer, 2005).

Providing parents the option of school choice may provide some unintended effects. The option of school choice can lead to demographic segregation (Chisesi, 2012; Lacireno-Paqet & Brantly, 2008). Competitive pressures of school choice may cause school leaders to actively market their schools to prospective parents, thereby taking administrators away from focusing on learning and teaching (Richardson, 2013). Competitive pressure to maintain students and funding can also lead to obstructive and less healthy forms of competition (Williams, 2007).

This study explored how superintendents strategically responded to the competitive pressure of losing students and significant funding to area charter schools and neighboring school districts. By deeply understanding the context and ramifications of school choice in four representative cases on Cape Cod, this study provides insights into whether policies promoting competition between schools have been “lifting all boats” within this coastal region of Massachusetts.
**Research problem.** The purpose of this dissertation study was to understand superintendent’s strategic responses to competition from public school choice within a geographically restricted area of Massachusetts during the second half of the 2000s decade. The study explores how enrollment and budgetary pressure, created by parents exercising school choice, influenced superintendent’s decision-making to improve academic outcomes, to innovate, to increase efficiency, and to attract or maintain student enrollment within their school district.

As a region, Cape Cod experiences some of the highest school choice movement in Massachusetts (MA DESE, 2011). The unique geography of the region largely limited inter-district movement between just the eleven school districts on the Cape (listed from west to east): Falmouth, Bourne, Sandwich, Mashpee, Barnstable, Dennis-Yarmouth Regional, Monomoy Regional (formerly Harwich and Chatham), Nauset Regional, Truro and Provincetown (Figure 1). Barnstable, Falmouth, Sandwich, and Dennis-Yarmouth, in decreasing order of district enrollment, are medium-sized school districts with total PreK-12 student enrollment in 2010 of 3,000 to 5,500 students (Appendix A Table A1). Nauset with its affiliated towns, Bourne, Mashpee, Harwich, Chatham, Truro and Provincetown are small school districts with total PreK-12 student enrollment in 2010 of under 3,000 students.

Today there are three regional school districts on the Cape, bringing together students from relatively small Cape Cod towns. Dennis-Yarmouth is the oldest of the regional school district, with a regional high school that opened in 1957; today Dennis-Yarmouth operates as a fully regionalized system PreK-12. Nauset Regional High School opened in 1972 and operates in a district that is regionalized grades 6-12, with its four feeder towns (Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet) operating separate PreK-5 elementary schools under a shared superintendency with the Nauset Region. Beginning in July 2012, two of the smaller Cape Cod
towns, Harwich and Chatham, joined their schools to form Monomoy Regional School District; even united, Monomoy would be categorized, for purposes of this dissertation, as a small school district.

There are two Commonwealth charter schools and one Horace Mann Charter School on Cape Cod. Sturgis Charter Public School serves grades 9 through 12 within the village of Hyannis in Barnstable, approximately one mile from the Yarmouth town line. Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School enrolls students in grades 6 through 8 in the village of East Harwich, but during the late 2000s, this charter school was located in Orleans. Barnstable Community Horace Mann Charter Public School operates within the Barnstable Public School District as an option for students in kindergarten through Grade 3.

Figure 1. Cape Cod’s public school districts, vocational schools, and charter schools.
**Justification for the research problem.** While recent studies have shown that charter schools or inter-district school choice may not be creating competitive pressure to influence improvement in local school districts (Arsen & Yongmei, 2012; Kim & Youngs, 2013; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005), it is possible that these studies happened in settings without sufficient enrollment-driven competitive pressure. As a region, Cape Cod experienced significant population and school enrollment declines in the decade between 2000 and 2010. During this period, Cape Cod’s population declined by 3%, but the percent of the school-aged population under age 18 declined by 18.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Between 2000 and 2010, every Cape Cod town experienced a decrease in school-aged residents (Bailey, 2011). The decline in school-aged children potentially sparked a unique competition for students in all Cape Cod public schools, which may have magnified the effects of competition from inter-district school choice and charter school choice.

Statewide, only 55% of local school districts have opened their doors to accept students through the inter-district school choice program, but on Cape Cod, potentially to compensate for declining enrollment, all school districts accept students from other districts through the inter-district school choice program (MA DESE, 2014b). Given that inter-district school choice in Massachusetts has been little researched, McDermott, Bowles, and Churchill (2003) stated the need for policymakers to understand if inter-district school choice generates constructive competition resulting in innovation or improvement, and how inter-district school choice impacts districts financially. Former superintendents within the Cape Cod school districts collectively can provide an understanding to the unanswered questions raised by McDermott, Bowles, and Churchill in 2003.
While the Massachusetts inter-district school choice program has been in operation for over two decades, most of the research on the program happened in the initial years of its adoption by the Massachusetts legislature. An analysis of the first year of the program found inter-district school choice to expand educational options for families and to put pressure on schools to become more effective and more responsive (Glenn, 1991). A study of enrollment patterns from inter-district school choice in 1992 found that parents enrolled children in schools with higher indicators of performance than their home districts (Fossey, 1994). A case study of inter-district choice conducted on the program from 1995 to 1996 found that competitive market forces most affected sending districts with the largest student loses (Armor & Peiser, 1997). This study also found that the tuition received by districts accepting inter-district school choice students allowed the districts to improve the educational program, often at the expense of the sending district. A follow-up study conducted for the years 1997-1998 (Aud, 1999) found that sending districts implemented improvements to reduce the loss of children. Massachusetts’ policy of inter-district school choice has not been investigated since 1998 and has not been revisited to ascertain how, or if, outcomes of the policy are affected by population decline.

Recent research on charter schools in Massachusetts has largely focused on the educational gains of students in charters versus the academic gains of students in local school districts (Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2013; Abdulkadiroğlu, Angrist, Dynarski, Kane, & Pathak, 2011). The findings indicate students within Massachusetts’ charters schools are being lifted to attain, on average, significantly more learning gains in both reading and math (CREDO, 2013) compared to their counterparts in local school districts. By contrast, a nationwide meta-analysis of charter schools found great variability in learning gains, with local school districts out performing charters in some locations, grades, and subjects and charters out-
performing local schools in others (Betts & Tang, 2011). While some studies in other states have suggested that competition with charter schools is having little impact on achievement in local school districts (Arsen & Yongmei, 2012; Kim & Youngs, 2013; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005), it is possible that the intensity of competition for students brought about by Cape Cod’s declining population in the late 2000s created a scenario where enrollment-driven competition was significant enough to achieve the theorized benefit of having competition “lift all boats.”

Steedman (2014) researched how Massachusetts superintendents innovated in the face of charter school competition. In his study, 41% of the superintendents surveyed responded that no initiatives happened. Of those who responded that their schools were innovating in response to charter school competition, 81% indicated that competition was causing them to be innovative in the areas of marketing, communication, and promotion – each of which is a type of innovation that Ellison (2009) categorized as not directly impacting student learning. 45% of those responding that competition was causing their schools to innovate indicated that the district had designed specialized programs that were influenced by the presence of charter schools, 36% of those who had undertaken innovations responded that new curriculum and instruction was influenced by charter schools, and 36% indicated that the presence of charter schools led to capital improvements within the district.

While Steedman (2014) found examples of innovation, Cummins (2014) found that the changes influenced by charter schools did not benefit all learners. In her Massachusetts-based research, Cummins found that district initiatives focused on high performers because more engaged parents were making choice decisions, which left some populations underrepresented within the charter schools. Ricciardelli (2014) found in her study that superintendents’
perceptions of charter schools is that they appear to be fracturing communities into smaller, more homogenous groups.

Two other recent dissertations focused on the competitive landscape of school choice in Massachusetts. Ricciardelli (2014) researched the issue through the lens of Massachusetts’ superintendents and found that superintendents perceived parents as the consumers, making educational choices for their children. Funk’s (2015) research, supported Ricciardelli, in that parents were making decisions with regard to inter-district and charter school choice, but found parents greatly influenced by social networking in their education decisions for their children, relying heavily on word of mouth information rather than specific achievement data and facts. These two studies, juxtaposed, may explain why Steedman’s (2014) Massachusetts study found innovations in the area of marketing, communication, and promotion the most common influence of charter schools on school district innovations.

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** Previous studies on policies granting parents choice of schools for their children to attend have focused on the effects of competition on local school districts (Arsen & Ni, 2012; Aud, 1999; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005; Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013; Hoxby, 2001; Hoxby, 2003b), the segregation and outcome effects created when parents are given choice (Alexander, 2012; Chisesi, 2012; Cullen, Jacob, & Levitt, 2005; Fossey, 1994; Holme & Richards, 2009; Hoxby 2000a; Hoxby, 2003a), the academic success in the choice alternative versus the local school district (Abdulkadiroğlu et al., 2011; Betts & Tang, 2011; CREDO, 2013), the parent’s decision-making process when choosing schools (Bagley, 2006; Funk, 2015; Kennedy, 2012), and the impact of choice pressure on charter school innovation (Lubienski, 2003). While the inter-district school choice and charter school choice have been investigated through a variety of lenses, few studies have explored the topic through the lens of
educational leaders within the local school districts to understand how educational leaders strategically respond to enrollment-driven competitive pressure from school choice to innovate, improve, or to make schools more efficient. Until recently, the only research to include local school district leaders’ responses to school choice competition in Massachusetts were two national studies focused on the impact of charter schools on local school districts (Ericson, Silverman, Berman, Nelson, & Solomon, 2001; Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000).

The Ericson et al. (2001) study of the 49 local school districts, in five states, included eight school districts in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts sample selected in the Ericson et al. study does not reflect the typical level of charter competition in most Massachusetts school districts. The Massachusetts school districts in the Ericson et al. study had, on average, multiple charter schools within the district. Unlike the sample in Ericson et al., charter schools in Massachusetts are generally dispersed through the state, with most local school districts not having multiple charter schools within the geographic boundaries of the school district. Ericson et al. drew conclusions for Massachusetts based on a limited number of school districts, with most, if not all, of the sample from urban settings. Roughly half of the districts in this study reported no fiscal impact to the district due to competition from charter schools. The study concluded that local conditions, like district size and enrollment trends, could reinforce perceptions of charter schools as a competitive threat. Since the Ericson et al. study, the school-aged population, especially on Cape Cod, has declined precipitously and potentially set the stage for more significant impacts of charter school competition on local school districts than realized in the Ericson et al. study.

Like the Ericson et al. study, Teske, Schneider, Buckley, and Clark (2000) also explored whether competition with charter schools was improving local school districts. The Teske et al.
(2000) study included local school district leaders in Trenton and Jersey City, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and Worcester and Springfield, Massachusetts. Teske et al. focused exclusively on urban areas, including Massachusetts’ second and third largest cities, respectively. In this study, every local district reported being impacted by charter schools, leading to changes in the local district’s operations or educational program. Like the Ericson et al. study, the sample of Teske et al. does not reflect the urbanicity or number of charter schools within most Massachusetts communities, and the study occurred before the state’s population decline.

In 2014, Steedman, Ricciardelli, and Cummins each wrote collaborative dissertations with a focus on the influence of charter schools on local school districts and district leadership decisions. They recommended further study on the demographic impacts of those engaging in inter-district school choice. While Steedman’s (2014) research, in particular, focused upon superintendents’ reactions to charter school choice in Massachusetts, he also acknowledged that this choice happens in a landscape of choice options, including inter-district school choice.

There have been a few other studies on the responses of school leadership to the competitive pressure created by school choice. One involved interviews of 400 charter school leaders and conveyed the hostility of many local school board policies towards charter schools (William, 2007). One study surveyed school administrators in Michigan and found administrators not responding to inter-district and charter school competition by improving the quality of local schools (Kim & Youngs, 2013). Two studies investigated school choice from the perception of the principal. Kasman & Loeb (2013) surveyed Milwaukee principals and found some evidence that administrators attempted to respond to competition from inter-district choice and intra-district choice by improving schools. Richardson (2013) interviewed eight principals of
middle schools in a large Florida school district serving approximately 50,000 and demonstrated how school choice influences school leaders to become more market savvy.

This dissertation research was intended to fill a gap in school choice literature by providing a study investigating the historical impact of both inter-district school choice and charter school choice in a region of Massachusetts. This dissertation research addressed the paucity of literature on superintendents’ strategic responses to enrollment-driven competition that occurs when parents are given the option to choose public schools for their children. Finally, while some studies concluded that competition between schools will “lift all boats” (Hess, 2010; Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013, Hoxby, 2001), others refute this effect (Arsen & Yongmei, 2012; Kim & Youngs, 2013; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005); by focusing this dissertation research on a time and place with significant school-aged population decline, this study provides additional insights into when, or if, competition between schools “lifts all boats.”

**Intended audience.** This study on superintendent’s strategic responses to inter-district school choice and charter school choice was aimed at an audience of decision-makers for this Massachusetts policy. The intended audience for this study was superintendents and other school administrators, school committee members, legislators, and educators and researchers interested in policies that potentially promote competition and innovation in schools. This study may have the greatest potential to help school districts on Cape Cod to collectively assess the merits and cost of competition and policies brought about by inter-district school choice and charter school legislation.

**Significance of Research Problem**

This research is focused on policies resulting from two Massachusetts legislative acts: Massachusetts’ school choice law (General Laws Chapter 76, Section 12B) adopted in 1991 and
the establishment of charter schools through the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. Many states have similar provisions for some type of school choice that allows families to send their children to schools outside of their home district (inter-district school choice), to schools within their home district (intra-district school choice), or to area magnet schools providing specialized curricula. Forty-two states and the District of Columbia have adopted policies for charter schools; only Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia do not have laws allowing for charter school choice (Center for Education Reform, 2014). Since the early 1990s the existence of school choice and/or charter schools has progressively become the norm within the United States, so understanding how local school districts are impacted by school choice policies has applicability in both states that have enacted such legislation and those contemplating adoption of similar legislation.

Understanding how government regulations influence competition is an often-neglected area of research (Heil, Lehmann, & Stremersch, 2010). It is important to understand how Massachusetts’ policies on inter-district school choice and charter schools are promoting healthy market competition or leading to suboptimal outcomes for schools. A view of Cape Cod superintendents’ strategic responses to government-regulated school choice may shed light on whether these regulations have improved education for all students, and findings from this study are potentially applicable to similar regulations throughout the United States.

**Positionality Statement**

The scholar-practitioner in this study has been a Massachusetts superintendent for nine years in both a suburban school district west of Boston and, for the past five years, in a Cape Cod school district. While in the suburban superintendency there was a negligible loss of students in the district to charter schools. The school district did not accept inter-district school choice
students nor did the district lose students due to inter-district school choice. Virtually all suburban Boston school districts opt out of inter-district school choice (MA DESE, 2014b), there were few charter schools in the western suburbs, and most homeowners in the suburbs bought into the communities because of the perceived quality of the local school district.

By contrast, Cape Cod districts have generally voted to be part of the inter-district school choice program (MA DESE, 2014b). Most Cape Cod school districts both receive and lose students due to inter-district school choice. Cape Cod also has both a long history with charter schools, and finds Sturgis Charter Public School one of the top-ranked high schools in the country (Boston Globe, 2012) centrally located on the Cape.

As a superintendent in the Boston suburbs, the scholar-practitioner would have justified opting out of inter-district school choice because the per pupil expenditure in the district significantly exceeded the $5,000 school choice tuition cap, yet as a superintendent in the Boston suburbs, the scholar-practitioner led a school district that participated in the METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity) program. METCO is a voluntary inter-district desegregation program that allows minority parents from Boston to elect for school choice into a suburban school, thereby providing needed diversity for predominantly-white suburban schools and an alternative educational option for minority children (Eaton & Chirchigno, 2011). The state of Massachusetts provides suburban districts a per pupil reimbursement comparable to the inter-district school choice tuition cap for each METCO student. While the state’s reimbursement per METCO student was far less than the district’s per pupil expenditure, the scholar-practitioner saw the benefits of added diversity into his school system as “priceless.” The scholar-practitioner entered a superintendency on Cape Cod in 2013 into a district with per pupil expenditures equivalent to those in the suburbs and a pre-established
history of participation with inter-district school choice. This dissertation research is, in part, an effort for this scholar-practitioner to understand why Cape Cod school districts began, and continue, to accept $5,000 tuition reimbursements, without the “priceless” diversity benefit of a METCO program.

The scholar-practitioner is also a father, who moved his two school-aged children with him to Cape Cod. As a father, he watched his children make new acquaintances and friendships in a community where many of the children attended schools outside of the local school district. The superintendent-father scholar-practitioner entered this study with two beliefs about community: the sense of community is stronger when virtually all children attend the local schools, and a strong sense of community is imperative to adequately fund strong schools when local taxpayers ultimately determine school budgets at town meetings and at the polls.

This study is entered with a presumption that there are historical and contextual differences on Cape Cod that have led to the proliferation of school choice in the area. This study aims to understand the competitive pressures and economics of school choice, and the impact on schools and communities when parents are given the freedom to send their children to other school districts or charter schools.

This study finds the scholar-practitioner, as a sitting superintendent in a Cape Cod school district, interviewing superintendents who predated his tenure on Cape Cod to understand their strategic responses to competitive pressures created by inter-district school choice and charter schools between the years of 2005 and 2010. Participating superintendents had the autonomy to voluntarily consent to interviews for this study or to not partake in this research. As a superintendent interviewing other Massachusetts superintendents, there should not be a power differential from the researcher’s position as a practitioner; if anything, the scholar-practitioner
will likely be perceived as the neophyte attempting to understand the history and context of school choice facing him today. Each of the superintendents in this study has significantly more experience leading school districts in the context of inter-district school choice and charter schools than the scholar-practitioner; therefore, the scholar-practitioner intends to draw upon the collective experience of his predecessors by extensively member checking to ensure validity of data collected, themes extracted, and conclusions reached.

Before the scholar-practitioner was a superintendent, he was biologist who started his career in education within a biology classroom. The argument that competition from school choice is capable of “lifting all boats” initially piqued the scholar-practitioner’s interest in this topic because a biologist views the word ‘competition’ differently. In biology, ‘competition’ is a negative interaction between organisms that inevitably lowers the fitness of one of the competitors. In biology, competition has a dark side. There are winners, but there are also losers, so it does not “lift all boats.” By contrast, free-market competition is the basis of United States’ economic policy, and is believed to yield better quality, more efficiency, and greater innovation (Stucke, 2013). This dissertation explores the perspectives of largely retired former superintendents on Cape Cod to understand if legislative policies providing parents school choice “lifted all boats” or if it had a dark side, “lifting some boats” at the expense of others.

**Research Questions**

The study explored the extent to which enrollment changes related to school choice were manifesting in competition between individual local school districts, and between local school districts and charter schools. This study researched superintendents’ strategic responses to school choice in a geographically restricted area of Massachusetts during the second half of the 2000s decade. Given significant school-aged population declines during this period, the study
looked at competition using a framework of responses Cape Cod superintendents used to manage an ever-increasingly scarce resource. Students, in this study, were the limiting resource impacting school operations on Cape Cod.

Michael Klare (2008) has written extensively on the topic of resource competition in the 21st century, specifically with regard to nations competing for limited resources. As resources become scarcer, the competitive pressure increases. Klare’s perspective on global competition may be applicable to schools on Cape Cod. In the world of public education, if school-age population declines, the necessary resource for schools becomes increasingly scarce, potentially also impacting the fiscal resources available to run and maintain school districts. According to Klare, government leaders competing over a scarce resource will either engage in direct conflict with competitors or will seek initiatives to constructively avert conflict over scarce resources.

Three types of direct conflicts are territorial disputes, access conflicts, and fiscal disputes (Klare, 2008). Territorial disputes could arise if other districts or charter schools actively solicit parents or students within a local school district’s boundaries or if school buses cross local district lines. Access conflicts could occur if a local district protects its student resource or territory by limiting other districts or charter schools access to students or facilities; Holley, Egalite, and Lueken (2013) refer to these actions as obstructive responses to competition. Fiscal disputes could also occur between school districts and state legislatures over a finite educational funding source from the state that supports the local districts and charter schools, and disputes over finite fiscal resources could also extend to the local level with town governance.

Rather than direct conflict, the initiatives that local school districts can employ to mitigate conflict over declining resources are innovation, cooperation, or increasing efficiency (Klare, 2012). Collectively, these could be called constructive responses (Holley, Egalite, &
Lueken, 2013). Local school districts could innovate by creating and improving their educational program to retain students within their district and to draw students from other districts. A few local school districts could also cooperate, creating or sharing programs or services, to enhance both districts’ competitiveness for students. The local school districts could also respond to declining student enrollment by becoming more efficient, potentially closing under-enrolled schools, cutting programs, and reducing the district’s operating costs.

The three research questions addressed by this study focused upon how superintendents responded to school choice competition and the impact of this competition on school districts:

1. To what extent did inter-district school choice and charter school choice impact the district’s enrollment, demographics, and budget?

2. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents negatively responding with direct conflict over students or obstruction of choice (e.g. territorial disputes, obstructive responses, and fiscal disputes)?

3. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents responding with constructive initiatives to mitigate enrollment losses (e.g. innovation, cooperation, or increasing efficiency)?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study on school choice is rooted within the discipline of economics. School choice should operate within the parameters of economic theory and market dynamics (Armor & Peiser, 1997). Friedman (1955) asserted that there should be competition and choice within the educational system, and that this competition should come in the form of parental choice of schools for their children. Becker (1999, p. 2) advocated that providing such competition and choice “would induce a more rapid rate of innovation into
curriculum and teaching” in our public school system. The competitive pressure for school to innovate would come from families “voting with one’s feet” (Tiebout, 1956, p. 417), where families dissatisfied with the outcomes of the local school system would seek out better educational alternatives for their children.

School districts impacted the most by combined effects of inter-district school choice and charter school choice would be pressured by market forces to improve or risk losing more students. Superintendents in school districts experiencing the most competitive pressure, losing the most students to school choice, should strategically respond by improving programs, adjusting policies, or improving efficiency in order to maintain or attract students from other districts. Superintendents in school districts experiencing less competitive pressure, losing fewer students to school choice, should not respond by adjusting programs, policies, or staffing to maintain enrollment.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Market dynamics of school choice. Proponents of school choice often reference the competitive pressure power of market dynamics as the driving force to push public schools towards improvement (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Aud, 1999; Hoxby, 2001; Hoxby, 2003b). Market dynamics models are applied to entities producing goods or services for consumers, like restaurants providing a service for patrons. The unanswered question is how well do the theoretical assumptions of market dynamics apply to parental choice of public schools (Lubienski, 2003).

A neoclassical economics theoretical framework was used in one study of parental choice in Michigan public schools (Kim & Youngs, 2013). If parental choice of schools operated according to neoclassical economics theory, parents would make rational decisions on schools for their children based solely on factors related to school quality. According to a neoclassical economics model, parents would have a perfect knowledge of the variables leading to a school’s quality and would make decisions based on these factors to best support their child’s success. Likewise, administrators would fully understand what quality factors parents are using to choose schools, and in turn, administrators would respond to decreases in enrollment by improving the academic program, quality of teaching, and parent relationships to mitigate the further student loss. A neoclassical economics perspective predicts that inter-district school choice and charter school choice will lead to improvements in local school districts.

In the face of competition, not all school districts appear to be responding to competition as predicted by market dynamics (Arsen, 2012; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005; Kim & Youngs, 2013).
It is possible that parents could be making irrational decisions by choosing schools based on factors other than quality or the pressure of market dynamics may be insufficient to force administrators to respond to competition with innovation and improvement. It is also possible that a market dynamics model that applies to service-sector businesses may not be applicable to a public service like education.

Two recent studies demonstrate how both parents and superintendents may not be responding to the market to make decisions focused on improving children’s learning. Funk’s (2015) dissertation would indicate that social media driven parents are not always responding accurately to variables of school quality. Steedman’s (2014) dissertation would indicate that district leaders more often respond to choice with innovation (like marketing) not directly impacting student learning.

If market dynamics apply to public schools as they do for other service-sector businesses, then schools that under-perform, are inefficient, or that have poor customer service should cease to operate, and the threat of closure should be the ultimate motivating force for school administrators. In a study in 2000 of how local school districts in the Detroit metropolitan area were responding to competition from charter schools, the researchers questioned whether competition may put some schools “out of business”; they focused much of their discussion on Inkster Public Schools, a predominantly African-American suburb located fourteen miles west of the city (Lander & Brouillete, 2000, p. 19). Inkster Public Schools was an under-performing district that found six charter schools open right on the district’s borders, enticing roughly 20% of Inkster’s enrollment out of the district. Competition may have left Inkster in dire financial straights, but there was also time for the school district to innovate, improve, or become more efficient. Thirteen years after that prognostication, Inkster became the first Michigan school
district to be dissolved (Smith, 2013). A review of the literature finds the case of Inkster Public
Schools to be the exception rather than the norm; therefore, local school districts may not
generally face the ultimate fate of market dynamics for entities that fail to compete.

School choice in Massachusetts. Studies of Massachusetts’ inter-district school choice
programs were limited to the early years of this two-decade old program. At the onset of this
twenty-two year old program in Massachusetts, Glenn (1991) found that school choice expanded
options to poor families and put pressure on schools to become more effective and more
responsive. It is this type of rhetoric that justified this program for state legislatures. Two
studies (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Aud, 1999) have quantitatively reported upon enrollment shifts
due to school choice, which could impact the racial balance of districts. Parent decision-making
is fueling the racial imbalance. In one Massachusetts study, parents enrolled their children in
school districts with higher socio-economic status, better educated parent populations, higher per
pupil spending, and higher student performance (Fossey, 1994). Finally in one Cape Cod study
of inter-district school choice, Funk (2015) found that parents base a great deal of their education
decision-making based on the perspectives of friends and acquaintances rather than factual data.

By contrast, much of the literature on school choice in Massachusetts since the year 2000
has focused on charter school choice. CREDO (2013) found the charter schools in
Massachusetts were generally sound alternatives to local school districts. Although nearly 20%
of Massachusetts charter school have below-average growth in math and reading, this is offset by
the proportion of charters with students achieving at high levels. Before the adoption of charter
schools with the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, there were few high-performing
schools in high-poverty areas of Massachusetts, but charter school choice provide families
options so that social class and the community in which a family resides do not have to dictate
the quality of schools and the educational outcomes for children (Candal, 2009).

While most Massachusetts charter schools appear to have positive impacts for the
children that attend the charter school, the evidence is inconclusive that competition from charter
schools is pressuring Massachusetts’ local school districts to improve and thereby positively
impact all children. Two national studies, which included a few urban school districts in
Massachusetts, had mixed findings on charter schools’ impact on local school districts (Ericson,
Silverman, Berman, Nelson, & Solomon, 2001; Teske, Schneider, Buckley, & Clark, 2000).
Ericson et al. found that competition with charter schools has affected local school district
budgets, leading to changes in district operations or educational offerings. By contrast, the
Teske et al. study surmised that local school districts are not implementing large changes in
response to competition with charter schools. Steedman (2015) in his dissertation found
evidence that many superintendents respond to charter school competition with innovation.

**School choice effects on demographics.** While Aud (1999) found that school choice did
not have adverse racial impacts to Massachusetts school districts, numerous other studies have
demonstrated that when parents are given the ability to choose public schools for their children,
parental choice has segregating effects (Cullen, 2005; Fossey, 1994; Holme & Richards, 2009;
Hoxby, 2000a). It could be generalized that when parents exercise school choice, there is a
potential to increase the ethnic, racial, or socio-economic diversity of the schools receiving
choice students, but there can also be a cream-skimming effect when a local school district loses
students due to school choice to a higher-performing school district. In a study of school choice
in North Carolina, higher performing schools disproportionately attract high achievers through
school choice (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2008). By contrast, Hoxby (2003a) argued there is not
cream skimming impact from charter schools because in her study, charter schools disproportionately attracted students who had performed badly in the local school districts.

More affluent parents (Holme & Richards, 2009) or better educated parents (Kennedy, 2012) are more likely to take advantage of school choice programs for their children. White parents avoid sending their children to districts with high minority populations, while minority parents avoid sending their children to districts with high numbers of low-income students (Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008). Parents choose schools with fewer high needs students (Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008) or schools that have more socio-economic and ethnic homogeneity (Chisesi, 2012). Parents of students with high needs, special education needs, economically disadvantaged, or English as a second language are less likely to partake in school choice (Kennedy, 2012), so their children are more likely to remain behind in the local districts.

If parents are using as their determining factors racial or ethnic composition of schools, the socio-economics of the families in a district, or convenience rather than true measures of the school quality, the parents are not behaving in a rational manner consistent with a neoclassical economics reasoning (Kim & Youngs, 2013). Funk’s (2015) dissertation would indicate that this may be occurring on Cape Cod. Such behavior could result in enrollment-driven competition not following market dynamics, and administrators not knowing how to or being unable to change schools, based on the factors valued by parents, in order to attract more students.

School choice may most benefit low-income students by opening up better school options outside of their under-performing local school district. When many school choice programs place the burden of responsibility for transportation to and from school on parents, the option of school choice may be financially unavailable to low-income families that lack the means to transport their child to a higher-performing school. In a study of inter-district school choice in
metropolitan Denver, school choice students did not have free transportation, so Holmes and Richards (2009) found it unsurprising that low income families were largely unable to take advantage of available school choice options. Belfield (2002) recommends that true measures of success for school choice must consider who is able to take advantage of the choice (Belfield, 2002).

**Administrative decision-making regarding school choice.** Public education theoretically operates within a market economy when parents are given choice. When faced with enrollment-driven competition, research has demonstrated that school administrators develop a consumer-oriented mindset, having a clear and accurate picture of parental views of local schools, and their responses are in line with parental views (Bagley, 2006).

A study of Milwaukee area school administrators found that they were very aware of how parent views influenced school choice (Kassman & Loeb, 2013). In this study, there was a great deal of variation in how these administrators responded to school choice. Ideally, competition is a motivating force for administrators to improve their schools through changes in the curriculum or instruction. Unfortunately, the most common response of administrators in the Kassman and Loeb (2013) study was to use outreach to parents and advertisement as a means of mitigating the loss of enrollment. In a study of the influence of charter schools in Massachusetts, Steedman (2014) found that marketing and promotion are often the response school districts provide as innovations added in response to this competitive pressure.

**Conflict and obstructive responses to competition.** There may be other ways superintendents respond to competition that are not focused on improving the educational program. Michael Klare (2008), a nationally recognized authority on global resource competition, described a variety of ways that governmental entities engage in or avoid conflict
when faced with competition over diminishing resources. The types of conflict over resources that Klare characterizes on a global scale readily apply to competition at the local level in school districts: territorial disputes, access conflicts, and fiscal disputes. Of these types of conflict, the only one present in this literature review was an access conflict where local school districts and their allies were obstructing charter school operators and charter school expansion. Local school districts may engage in organized campaigns against the launch of new charter schools in the area, and local school committees may enact policies that make it inconvenient for students to be transported to charter school on local buses, potentially impeding families’ ability to access their school of choice. (Williams, 2007). One of the most pervasive obstructive responses to charter schools was limiting access or not sharing public facilities or local school resources, like denying a charter school athletic team time in a local gymnasium (Holley et al., 2013). Local school districts may also withhold information, such as student addresses, from charter schools wishing to market to students within the local district (Holley et al., 2013).

Absent in the literature review was any mention of territorial conflicts between competing schools. In one study of school choice, principals actively marketed their schools to attract or retain the most academically talented students (Richardson, 2013). Marketing campaigns over the radio, on television, or in print ads cross local school district lines and likely heighten the competitive tension. Providing transportation for students living within other school districts may also lead to territorial tensions. With examples of each existing in the competitive landscape of school choice on Cape Cod today (Cape Cod Regional Technical High School, 2012; Nauset Public Schools, 2014, respectively), the absence of territorial responses to competition in the literature is conspicuous. The case studies in this dissertation will shed light
on the extent of access conflicts and territorial disputes on Cape Cod, in addition to conflicts that local school districts have over funding related to school choice.

**Constructive responses to competition.** Contrary to antagonistic conflict, more frequently the literature reviewed describes ways schools constructively respond to competition in order to improve the educational program. Klare (2008) discussed how governmental entities avoid conflict when faced with competition over diminishing resources by innovating, cooperating, or increasing efficiency.

Ericson, Silverman, Berman, Nelson, & Solomon (2001) categorized local school district innovations in response to charter schools as being either operational or educational. Local school districts may improve operationally by enhancing the quality or efficiency of quality or efficiency of central office services, decreasing class sizes, increasing accountability, and emphasizing parent satisfaction and communication. Educational innovations would be the addition of new curricular programs or improvements to pedagogy, like emphasizing hands-on learning. Lubinski (2003) described the school administrators’ responses to pressure from charter schools similarly, defining them as either administrative or educational. Steedman (2014) found that over a third of the Massachusetts districts in his study that responded to charter school competition with innovations added new curriculum and instruction, while a third indicated that they innovated by making capital improvements.

In a review of urban public school responses to charter competition, the most common constructive response to competition observed in three-quarters of the urban locations studied was local school districts actively cooperating or collaborating with charters (Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013). This study did not elaborate upon the details of this collaboration. Collaboration
between either inter-district or charter competitors was not found in other sources within the literature review for this dissertation.

Small districts, particularly in locations with declining school enrollment, may experience the most negative budgetary impact from competition (Ericson et al., 2001), creating to fiscal stress and financial pressure leading to operational and educational innovation. Operational efficiency does not necessarily mean improvement of the educational program. For example, districts with the largest loses to charter schools may have significantly larger class sizes (Arsen, 2012) or competition with charter schools may lead to staffing reductions (Ericson et al., 2001). Superintendent’s responses to competition may require reducing teachers and increasing class size to balance school budgets, but such a strategy is unlikely to result in an improved educational program.

**Lifting all boats.** Proponents of market dynamics believe that school choice will lead to competition between schools that will generate “a rising tide that lifts all boats” (Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013, p. 29). Market dynamics theoretically finds families who exercise school choice for their children having access to better schools while pressuring districts to improve, thereby ensuring better the educational outcomes of students left behind in the local school districts. Some of the studies of school choice supported the market dynamics theoretical outcome (Aud, 1999; Ericson et al., 2001; Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013; Hoxby, 2001; Hoxby, 2003b).

Others studies refute the theoretical possibilities of school choice (Arsen & Ni, 2012; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005; Kim & Youngs, 2013; Teske et al., 2000), finding that the “rising tide” is not lifting academic experiences of students in local school districts. Rising enrollments in some areas of the country from the baby boom echo may reduce competitive pressure and the possible impact of competition (Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000). Competition may
spark innovation in local districts, but find these initiatives focused on high performers, rather than all learners (Cummins, 2014). Local policies and state charter school laws that buffer the financial impact of competition may reduce the financial pressure for local school districts to improve (Ericson et al., 2001; Teske et al., 2000).

Belfield and Levin (2002) questioned the efficacy of using competition from school choice as the lever to improve schools. They found that competition from school choice, whether inter-district or from charter schools, may raise effectiveness, efficiency, and educational objectives, but the effects of the competition need to be substantively significant to realize merely modest gains. Because significant competition must be present in order to realize theorized market dynamics gains, they advocated that policy makers must take into consideration the cost implications of policies and weigh these against realistic benefits.

In a study of California charter schools’ impact on local school districts, Buddin & Zimmer (2005) found that charter schools may benefit the 2% of the California population attending the schools, but there was no evidence that charter schools are lifting the boats of the 98% of students attending the local school districts. Given the segregating effect of school choice (Chisesi, 2012; Holme & Richards, 2009; Kennedy, 2012; Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008), equity concerns of inter-district school choice and charter schools are further magnified, particularly if these programs only serve a small percentage of the population and are disproportionately exercised by more affluent, more educated, more academically successful students from the ethnic majority.

**Summary of Literature**

Over a decade ago, McDermott et al. (2003) identified a number of questions regarding school choice in Massachusetts that still needed to be addressed: Why do towns opt for inter-
district school choice? How does school choice affect districts financially? Does school choice generate constructive competition, resulting in innovation or improvement? How does school choice impact diversity in schools? This dissertation addresses these unanswered questions in hopes of informing Massachusetts’ policymakers and educational leaders on the impact of inter-district school choice and charter schools on local school districts and the students left behind. Competition invariably leads to winners and losers, even in the competition for students and educational funding. This dissertation moves beyond the data and delves deeply into four specific cases, including both of districts winning and those losing in the school choice melee on Cape Cod, by understanding how superintendents responded to school choice at a time of intense competition for students during the late 2000s.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

Choice of Methodology

This study researched superintendents’ strategic responses to school choice on Cape Cod, a geographically restricted area of Massachusetts, focusing on the decision-making of superintendents during the years of 2005-2010. As a region, Cape Cod experiences some of the highest school choice student movement in the state of Massachusetts between districts and to charter schools (MA DESE, 2011). The unique geography of the region limits movement of students through school choice movement to the eleven contiguous districts: Falmouth, Bourne, Sandwich, Mashpee, Barnstable, Dennis-Yarmouth Regional, Monomoy Regional (formerly Harwich and Chatham), Nauset Regional and its affiliated towns, Truro, and Provincetown.

As a region, Cape Cod experienced a significant school-aged population decline during the decade between 2000 and 2010. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the percentage of the population on Cape Cod under the age of 18 declined by 18.5% during the 2000s decade, and every town in the region experienced a decrease in school-aged residents (Bailey, 2011). Interviews of a subset of school superintendents, who led school districts on Cape Cod during the late 2000s, provides needed context to understand the magnitude of enrollment-driven school choice competition and how the superintendents strategically responded to this competitive pressure. This study provides insights into the extent to which the legislation that gave rise to inter-district school choice and charter schools was and currently is impacting local school districts in a region of Massachusetts.

This study was guided by the following research questions:
1. How did inter-district school choice and charter school choice impact local school districts’ enrollment, demographics, and budget?

2. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents negatively responding with direct conflict over students and funding or obstruction of choice (e.g. territorial disputes, obstructive responses, and fiscal disputes)?

3. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents responding with constructive initiatives to mitigate enrollment and revenue losses (e.g. innovation, cooperation, or increasing efficiency)?

This is a collective case study (Creswell, 2012) or what Stake (2013) refers to as a multicase study, where multiple similar cases are studied to better understand an issue. In this collective case study, the impact of school choice and superintendent’s responses to school choice was investigated from a sample of four Cape Cod school districts. A better understanding of the effects of these Massachusetts policies regulating inter-district school choice and charter schools was reached by exploring how school choice impacted each of these four school districts.

The case study approach was chosen to provide an understanding of the complex issue of school choice from the perspective of superintendents in local school districts, who ultimately were responsible for their district’s response to the competitive pressure. The study focused on the impact and responses to school choice on Cape Cod between the years of 2005 and 2010, creating a bounded system to study a phenomenon in a geographically restricted area during a specified timeframe (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Not only was the study bounded in time and place, it was focused on a contextually rich real-world phenomenon (Barratt, Choi, and Mei, 2011). The research questions of this study sought to understand the operation of the phenomenon within its context, where the scholar-practitioner had no control over concurrent
behavioral events in the study (Yin, 2009). Investigating how Cape Cod superintendents perceived school choice to impact their districts and exploring the strategic responses of these superintendents to competitive pressure from school choice fits the criteria of a case study approach as defined by Barratt, Choi, and Mei (2011), Merriam and Simpson (2000), and Yin (2009). This study provided detailed contextual analysis of the phenomenon of school choice using archival data and interviews appropriate for a case study (Yin, 2009), in the form of publicly assessable enrollment and financial data for school districts from the internet, coupled with in-depth interviews with four superintendents who concurrently led nearly half of Cape Cod’s school districts during the last half of the 2000s decade.

There has not previously been a deep contextual case study of Massachusetts school superintendents’ responses to school choice competition that included both inter-district school choice and charter school choice. To date, only five studies explored Massachusetts superintendents’ responses to school choice, and each exclusively focused on the impact of charter school choice on local districts (Cummins, 2014; Ericson, Silverman, Berman, Nelson, & Solomon, 2001; Ricciardelli, 2014; Steedman, 2014; Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000). Ericson et al. (2001), conducted hour long phone interviews with 49 district leaders, including eight mostly urban Massachusetts superintendents, and coded the data to reflect effects and impacts of charter schools as a contributing reason for change within the local school districts. Teske et al. (2000) interviewed superintendents in two urban Massachusetts districts, in addition to the District of Columbia and two other urban districts in New Jersey, and surveyed 88 principals within these five school districts to ascertain whether charter school competition was improving district schools. Both of these national studies presented interview and survey data in a quantitative manner, and the size of these studies did not permit the researchers to drill down in
any particular school district to better understand the complexities of school choice competition within Massachusetts. The collaborative dissertations by Cummins (2014), Riccardelli (2014), and Steedman (2014) each focused on aspects of Massachusetts school districts’ responses to only charter school competition. The case study approach employed in this dissertation looks at the entire landscape of choice, including both inter-district and charter school choice. In doing so, this dissertation sought to understand school choice from the perspective of local school district superintendents responsible for developing and implementing their district’s response to the competitive pressure, and provided a novel and richer understanding of the complexities of school choice and enrollment-driven competition.

**Research Design**

This study was a qualitative inductive analysis (Thomas, 2003) of school choice in Massachusetts. Unlike the quantitative emphasis of the Ericson et al. (2001) and Teske et al. (2000) studies which did not convey the underlying story of any individual district in their studies, rather provided only aggregate summaries, by using a case study approach this dissertation delved deeply into understanding the impacts of school choice and the reasoning behind the superintendents’ responses to school choice in four Cape Cod school districts. While it is possible to conduct a purely quantitative study of student movement between these districts and the budgetary impacts of school choice on Cape Cod schools using publicly accessible data on the school districts, such a study would not contextualize whether the districts are competing for students and how the superintendents are responding to the competitive pressure.

This thesis combined both a qualitative case study approach with an inductive approach to understand the phenomenon of inter-district school choice on Cape Cod. A case study is not a specific methodology, rather it is a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2005). Inductive
qualitative research is phenomenon-driven, exploring context in depth, to build upon theory (Zaremba & Moritz, 2011). An inductive case study is one where existing theory is extended using data to fill a gap in the literature (Barratt, Choi, & Mei, 2011). The inductive approach condenses and summarizes data, establishes connections between research questions and the data summary, and uses this to develop an understanding of the underlying context of the data (Thomas, 2003). Both of these research approaches were employed in this dissertation in what can best be described as an inductive case study.

Research Tradition

Two key theorists, Stake (1995) and Yin (2002), influenced the case study approach used for this dissertation. Collectively their approaches to case studies have been cited over 80,000 times in Google Scholar. Their seminal works outline sound procedures for designing, conducting, analyzing, and reporting case studies.

A single instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995), to investigate school choice within only a single school district, may provide an in depth understanding of a particular school district, but may offer limited insight about school choice within a geographic region or across a spectrum of competitive pressure. By adopting a multicase study approach (Stake, 2013), this dissertation study produced a deep contextual understanding to factors that both lead to losing and gaining students through school choice, while also illuminating the impact of enrollment-driven competition and superintendents’ responses to school choice.

The multicase study approach used for this thesis provided an ideal means of understanding the phenomenon of school choice for Cape Cod’s geographically isolated school districts. The context underlying cases typically differs, so researchers are often hesitant to generalize from one case to another (Creswell, 2013). It is possible that the drastic decline in
school-age population on Cape Cod during the 2000s provides a very unique context underlying the phenomenon of school choice. Given that Cape Cod districts experienced substantial school-aged population declines, it is likely that each district represents a microcosm of the whole. By replicating procedures in the study of each individual case, a logic of replication can be seen using a multicase study approach (Yin, 2009), which should allow for generalization between the impact of school choice for Cape Cod districts and other school systems facing declining enrollments.

**Participants**

The population studied in this dissertation is superintendents, who led school districts from the geographically restricted area of Cape Cod within Massachusetts between the years of 2005 to 2010. Using a criterion based sampling method (Creswell, 2013), only superintendents who met the criteria of being the superintendent of a Cape Cod school district during the school years from 2005 to 2010 were considered for this study. A criterion based sample aided in quality assurance (Creswell, 2013), since all superintendents in the sample meet identical criteria, the sample was more homogeneous, and the themes that were revealed in the study are more likely to represent reality.

A subsample of four of the eleven Cape Cod superintendents meeting the study’s criteria was used in this dissertation. Creswell (2013) recommends not using more than five cases within a study, and Wolcott (2008) warns that inclusion of additional cases dilutes the detail that can be provided for each case. By subsampling four of the eleven superintendents meeting the criteria, this study was manageable, provided in-depth detail of each case, and provided a level of anonymity for individual superintendents and school districts because of the subsample taken.
The rationale for sampling this population of eleven superintendents and their school
districts is that Cape Cod, as a region, has more participation in school choice than any other
region within Massachusetts (DESE, 2013). It is also possible that recent studies finding that
local school districts are not pressured to improve by competition (Arsen & Yongmei, 2012; Kim
& Youngs, 2013; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005) did not have sufficient enrollment competition.
Given the school-aged population declines seen on Cape Cod during the decade between 2000
and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), the competitive landscape of this region of Massachusetts
provides a unique comparison to the findings of these other recent studies. Being water-bound
by Cape Cod Bay to the north, Nantucket Sound to the south, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, and
the Cape Cod canal to the west, inter-district and charter school student movement was generally
restricted to just these eleven districts. This geographic isolation provides for a uniquely
bounded and focused region in which to study the effects of school choice.

A subsample of four Cape Cod school superintendents, who led school districts between
2005 and 2010, was made for this study. Purposeful sampling is used to select cases that
potentially show different perspectives on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The purposeful
subsample of school districts and superintendents on Cape Cod includes districts of varying size
and varying estimates of competitive pressure exerted by school choice. The subsample
ultimately selected includes four superintendents who have remained connected to Cape Cod and
education, despite most being in varied states of retirement.

To determine that the purposeful subsample covered a representative breadth of districts
on Cape Cod, district size at the end of the 2000s decade was researched (Appendix A Table A1).
The relative pressure of enrollment-driven competition was also calculated for each district. It is
important to note that the year indicated in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and
Secondary Education databases in which the enrollment and financial data was extracted refers to a fiscal year, running July 1 to June 30; therefore, the fiscal year 2010 includes December 31, 2009, the end of the 2000s decade.

The purposeful sample for this dissertation strategically selected superintendents from districts of varied PreK-12 total enrollments and varied competitive pressure from school choice. The districts in this study were identified as medium-sized or small, with medium-sized school districts defined as having PreK-12 enrollment of 3,000 to 5,500 and small districts with PreK-12 enrollment under 3,000 students, based on their 2010 enrollments (Appendix A Table A1). The estimated competitive impact from school choice is a regionally relative estimate calculated from both the percent enrollment change due to choice and percent district expenditures paid in school choice tuitions. Enrollment changes were calculated by the students gained through inter-district choice minus those lost to inter-district choice and charter school choice – this was then reflected as a percentage loss or gain based on the district’s total PreK-12 enrollment. Tuition paid was calculated by the tuition lost from both inter-district school choice and charter school choice offset by the tuition gained from inter-district school choice – again this was reflected as a percentage of tuition dollars spent relative to the district’s total expenditures. The estimate of competitive impact of school choice was calculated as a sum of percent enrollment change and percent district expenditures paid in choice tuition, where a strong competitive impact was >10%, a moderate competitive impact was >5%-10%, a mild competitive impact was >1%-5%, and minimal competitive impact <1%. The specific competitive impact calculations are not provided to give the focal districts in this study a level of anonymity.

A couple of Cape districts realized minimal competitive impact, because the district had a net gain of students through inter-district school choice, along with the accompanying tuition dollars. The majority of the districts realized some negative impact due to competition that
impacted the district’s net student enrollment and district budget in the form of tuition paid for charter school or inter-district school tuitions. During the timeframe of this study, some Cape Cod school districts realized a net loss of student population due to choice of over 15% of the district’s enrollment. The loss of students was then coupled to a loss of district funding, as some districts were paying up to 4.6% of their total expenditures on tuition for students leaving due to inter-district school choice or exiting to a charter school.

While the superintendents in this purposeful sample were largely retired, each continues to be involved in education, even during retirement, and continue to be connected to the educational dynamics on Cape Cod. The superintendents and their school districts focused upon in this dissertation were each given pseudonyms for purposes of anonymity and protection of research subjects and settings. Table 1 provides a list of the districts, superintendents, the district size, and the competitive pressure from school choice estimated from 2010 data.

Table 1

*Cape Cod School District’s and Superintendents Used in the Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent Pseudonym</th>
<th>District Pseudonym</th>
<th>2010 PreK-12 Enrollment</th>
<th>2010 Estimated Competitive Impact from School Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Terrance</td>
<td>Sea Crest Public Schools</td>
<td>&lt;3000 students</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey Newton</td>
<td>Sandy Neck Public Schools</td>
<td>3000-5500 students</td>
<td>Mild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyd Kimball</td>
<td>Shoreline Public Schools</td>
<td>&lt;3000 students</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Moss</td>
<td>Mariner’s Point</td>
<td>3000-5500 students</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recruitment and Access

The scholar-practitioner in this study is a superintendent who knew in his professional life each of the four superintendents in this study. The four superintendents were contacted by a recruitment email from his Northeastern University account. The email (included in Appendix B) briefly described the study, the scope of their commitment if they wished to participate, and provided each superintendent an opportunity to opt out of this study by responding to the email. All study participants responded back quickly, and there was not a need for a follow-up recruitment phone call. One of the superintendents in the initial purposeful sample was unable to participate in the study, and a pre-determined alternate was used who equally added to the purposeful sample.

Given the scholar-practitioner is a current school superintendent on Cape Cod, this peer connection may have allowed the researcher a greater ability to recruit participants for this study. While the scholar-practitioner did not temporally overlap with the superintendents on Cape Cod in the years 2005 through 2010, the interviewees and researcher have been members of role-alike peer groups. While superintendents in this study may be retired, they remain active within the educational field and collectively exercise their voices to support education on Cape Cod and throughout the state. Ideally, the findings of this study will be informative to Cape Cod school districts and to legislatures and policy makers determining how inter-district choice and charter school legislation is implemented. Because of this, participation in this study appeared to be of interest to those superintendents included in this subsample.

The interviews of each superintendent in this study were approximately 90 minutes in duration, and the length of the interview did not appear to be an obstacle for participation. To mitigate possible concerns about participation, superintendents were told in advance that they
and their districts would be protected through the use of pseudonyms. Every effort is made in writing this dissertation to not have the four superintendents or their districts readily identifiable by either the statistics or narrative of the research findings or discussion thereof.

**Data Collection**

The four former superintendents of Cape Cod school districts invited to participate in this study were interviewed by the scholar-practitioner. A standardized, open-ended interview approach (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) was used, where the same open-ended questions were asked of each interviewee. By asking each interviewee the same main questions there was greater assurance that each research question would be addressed by each interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Follow-up questions were occasionally used to clarify understanding and to provide elaboration on key concepts. The interview questions asked of each participating superintendent are provided in Appendix C.

One-on-one interviews are ideal for subjects who are comfortable with speaking and articulate (Creswell, 2012). Superintendents are the target group studied for this dissertation, and their public roles required them to be both articulate and comfortable talking about educational issues. To ensure comfort, transparency, and openness, interviewees were each provided the interview questions in advance, and the interviews were conducted, face-to-face, at a conducive location determined by the interviewee.

The interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes each. With the permission of each interviewee, the interviews were digitally recorded using an iPhone and the Rev Voice Recorder app (2017). The audio files from these recordings were each initially digitally transcribed using Temi.com (2017), which offers a complimentary online digital speech to text transcription, then each transcript was meticulously compared to the initial audio file for accuracy by the researcher.
The digital recordings were only accessed by the researcher. Each interviewee was provided a copy of their interview transcript to member check (Creswell, 2012) for accuracy to ensure validity of the transcript.

**Data Storage**

Transcripts and digital recordings have been stored on a secure computer used only by the scholar-practitioner. These recordings have also been digitally backed up on a thumb drive kept in a locked file cabinet and will be maintained for three years after the completion of the dissertation. Only the scholar-practitioner has access to the raw transcripts and recordings in order to ensure confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the superintendents and their districts.

**Data Analysis**

A six-step methodology for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data was followed (Creswell, 2012). First, the data was organized into readily accessible computer files. The files were composed of transcripts provided from the original digital audio files from interviews, along with data tables of each district’s school choice, enrollment, and financial information.

Second, the transcripts were read through several times by the researcher to obtain a general sense of the data, and an emergent coding scheme was developed. A framework of the transcript was developed by “lean coding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184) the data into eight emergent categories, which were expanded, as the transcripts were further reviewed. These emergent codes would become the building blocks upon which the transcripts were organized.

Transcript files would be loaded into QSR’s NVIVO software (QSR, 2017). Use of QSR’s robust software tools for qualitative analysis is an established approach and has been used in many other case study doctoral dissertations (Carmona, 2007; Deaton, 2009; Goddard, 2009).
The verbatim text transcripts were imported into the NVIVO software and a framework tree emerged as the transcripts were coded.

Third, the codes were organized into themes. NVIVO allows for organization of observations and quotes, which can be linked back to specific points within the transcript. NVIVO can also be used for organizing these observations and quotes to broad theme interpretations. Creswell (2013) emphasizes that codes are typically collapsed back into five or six themes when developing the narrative. In this dissertation, the codes collapsed back into five distinct broad themes.

Fourth, the findings were represented visually. NVIVO was used to organize the data, unifying the four school district cases into one synthesis of the impact of school choice on Cape Cod. Themes identified from the transcripts were compared to tabular data (Appendix A) indicating the actual movement of money and students through school choice on Cape Cod.

Fifth, the findings were interpreted. Themes identified from the interviews were used to provide context to the student flow documented between school districts. Views of superintendents interviewed were compared, the findings of this study compared to the literature, and limitations and areas for future research identified.

Sixth, accuracy of the scholar-practitioner’s interpretation of findings was validated. In addition to providing the interviewees copies of their transcript, each interviewee was also provided a summary of findings to allow for further member checking (Creswell, 2012) to ensure the scholar-practitioner’s interpretation of the impact of school choice and the superintendent’s responses to competition were consistent with the perceptions of the superintendents interviewed.

**Trustworthiness**

Internal validity of the data was promoted by asking the same main questions of all
participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview transcript was shared with each interviewee to allow for member checking (Creswell, 2012) of the viability of the transcript and to support trust between the interviewer and interviewee regarding the trustworthiness of the transcript and validity of the study. The scholar-practitioner also member checked his interpretation of findings with each interviewee. Follow-up questions during the interview process, providing interviewees copies of the transcripts to review, and member checking themes and summary findings with each interviewee allowed for prolonged engagement (Creswell, 2012) with each superintendent, thereby providing a deeper, more accurate, understanding of school choice within each district. Interviewing four of the eleven superintendents within a confined geographical area also provided for a natural triangulation of themes, which should resolve any misinterpretations of the data and improve data validity (Yin, 2009).

The scholar-practitioner conducting the research is a superintendent within Massachusetts, who is actively involved in making decisions regarding school choice each year as dictated by Massachusetts statutes. The researcher’s biases towards school choice are provided in a positionality statement at the beginning of the dissertation to apprise readers of the researcher’s perspective (Creswell, 2012). Given the scholar-practitioner’s positionality, there is the potential for bias to threaten the study’s internal validity. To mitigate possible researcher bias, both themes identified in this regional look at school choice and summary findings were shared by email with the superintendents interviewed as a secondary member-checking step.

Protection of Human Subjects

Regulations for protecting human research participants were followed. The scholar-practitioner conducting this study requested panel review and approval by Northeastern University’s Office of Human Subject Research Protection and the school’s Institutional Review Board. The scholar-practitioner completed the National Institutes of Health human subject
protection training on April 13, 2013. His certificate (#1162630) was submitted to and is on file with Northeastern University’s Director of Human Subject Research Protection.

An informed consent disclosure, provided in Appendix D, was provided to each of the four superintendents. The intent of this disclosure was to be transparent in both process and protections. Informed consent was obtained from the four superintendents prior to conducting interviews. The study was thoroughly explained to each participant prior to obtaining his or her consent to participate. The Informed Consent Form used in this study is provided in Appendix E. Each of the superintendents participating in this study signed and dated the Informed Consent Form. Per Northeastern University’s Human Subjects Research Protection protocols, the scholar-practitioner will retain the original signed consent forms, the digital recordings, and transcripts for three years after the completion of the dissertation research.

As the scholar-practitioner is a Massachusetts superintendent interviewing mostly retired Massachusetts superintendents, there did not appear to be a power differential from the researcher’s position as a practitioner. Interviewee’s autonomy to voluntarily consent to participate in this study did not appear to be affected by the scholar-practitioner’s position as a superintendent, and there was no inherent incentive for the superintendents interviewed to participate.

Interviews were digitally recorded and the recordings transcribed. The digital files and transcripts are maintained on the researcher-practitioner’s secure personal computer. A single hard copy of each transcript is maintained in a locked file. A draft copy of each transcript has been provided to each interviewee for review, both as a means of ensuring fidelity of the transcript and to respectfully share and receive feedback on the raw data from which themes were extracted.
While this study is of superintendents and school districts within the geographically confined boundaries of Cape Cod, the dissertation and any subsequent publication will not specifically reference any particular superintendent or school district in this study by name. Superintendents and their school districts discussed in this study have been given pseudonyms. Every effort has been made to not have the former districts of the superintendents in this study readily identifiable within the findings or discussion thereof.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Focusing on a geographically restricted area of Massachusetts during the years of 2005-2010, this chapter provides a detailed report and discussion of research findings from four interviews of former superintendents on Cape Cod in light of the actual data on how students and funding were flowing into and out of these school districts because of school choice. The interviews explored superintendents’ thoughts, decision-making, and strategic responses to competition from public school choice during the second half of the 2000s decade. The study explored how enrollment and budgetary pressure, created by parents exercising school choice, influenced superintendent’s decision-making to improve academic outcomes and to attract or maintain student enrollment within their school district.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the real enrollment, financial, and demographic impacts of school choice competition on Cape Cod by reviewing the archived state data for each of the eleven Cape Cod school districts. The chapter is next divided into four sections, focusing on each of the four superintendents interviewed. Within these four sections, the researcher illuminates themes and findings based on each superintendent’s perspective and decisions made in the district in response to the competitive pressures of school choice. The chapter culminates with an analysis of prominent themes from across the four separate interviews, specifically looking at how superintendent’s strategic responses to school choice are influenced by enrollment, budgetary, and programmatic concerns, and how each is impacted by various sources of competitive pressure, the magnitude and proximity of these competitive pressures, the extent to which this competitive pressure is impacting each district, and decisions being made to counter this competition.
Context of Study

This study focused on superintendents’ strategic responses to school choice competition on Cape Cod in the late 2000s in order for each district to maintain enrollment, funding, and programs. The three research questions addressed by this study focused upon how superintendents responded to school choice competition and the impact of this competition on school districts:

1. To what extent did inter-district school choice and charter school choice impact the district’s enrollment, demographics, and budget?

2. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents negatively responding with direct conflict over students or obstruction of choice (e.g. territorial disputes, obstructive responses, and fiscal disputes)?

3. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents responding with constructive initiatives to mitigate enrollment losses (e.g. innovation, cooperation, or increasing efficiency)?

The questions asked of each of the superintendents in this study (Appendix C) explore the various sources of school choice competition, and establish inter-district school choice and charter school competition as major factors in each district. The impact of competitors on each district’s enrollment, demographics, and budget were explored, first within a summary of each interview, and later comparisons and contrasts were made across all interviews. Similarly, the interview questions explored how each district responded to competition, through conflict and obstruction, as well as through innovation, cooperation, and efficiencies. Again, the responses are first shared in a summary of each superintendent’s interview, and later viewed across all interviews.
The Massachusetts Legislature passed into law the Education Reform Act of 1993, mandating the development of charter schools in the state. Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School, serving grades 6 through 8, was one of the original fourteen charter schools approved in the state. It opened its doors to students in 1995 in a rented space in a strip mall in Orleans. Sturgis Charter Public School, a grades 9-12 high school, received its charter and began educating students in September, 1998 in a facility in downtown Hyannis, near the town’s border with Yarmouth.

Within the Education Reform Act of 1993 was also a provision that required school committees overseeing public school districts to annually vote on whether the district would open its doors and accept inter-district school choice students from other towns. Conceptually, this allowed districts with vacant seats to potentially fill the free seats within a classroom and receive a tuition payment of $5,000 for every school choice student the district enrolled. This legislation gave parents choice of school district; the parents could send their child to their local school district or choose to send their child to another school district that had opened its doors to inter-district school choice (MA DESE, 2018). Public school districts cannot control whether families “choice out”\(^1\) of their district; rather, they can only control whether families have the option to “choice into”\(^2\) the school district.


\(^1\) “Choice out” occurs when a family from one community opts to send their child to a school in a community in which they do not reside. The parents are choosing to have their child leave their local school district, and the receiving school district becomes responsible for educating that child until he or she graduates or ages out of the district.

\(^2\) “Choice in” occurs when a family from outside a school district opts to send their child to a school in a community, in which they do not reside. In this case the local school district’s school committee has voted to accept inter-district school choice students, and the administration has deemed that the school can accommodate students in particular schools and grade levels.
choice landscape,” where legislation created market dynamics leading to schools competing for students. This dissertation describes how school choice competition, both from charter schools and inter-district choice, has impacted enrollment, demographics, and budgets in local school districts. The narratives provided by the interviewed superintendents provide a lens of how resource competition (Klare, 2008) sometimes manifests itself in darker conflicts and how sometimes it can lead to more constructive approaches to manage resources. Opponents of granting parents school choice have expressed concern about the potential for choice to lead to inequities, creating winners and losers (Glenn, 1991), and the narratives in this study uncover how some systems and students are advantaged at the expense of students in the school systems on the losing end of this competitive landscape.

The Beginnings of School Choice: The First Domino Falls

In the interviews conducted for this study, each superintendent was very aware of the history and domino effect of school choice competition on Cape Cod, which was fueled by a regional decline in student enrollment and the state legislature opening the door to inter-district school choice. As the Cape, and particularly the town of Chatham became a haven for retirees, the town of Chatham began to see a demographic shift towards an older population. The high price of real estate in this scenic costal community further priced many young families out of the town’s housing market. This began to create an enrollment decline in the Chatham Public Schools. By 1993, Chatham Public Schools had a graduating class of only 34 students (Town of Chatham, 1993), with no sign of a significantly larger cohort in sight. To maintain viable education services for the town’s children, the Chatham School Committee sent letters to Harwich, Brewster (a town affiliated with the Nauset Regional system), and Nauset Regional to inquire if any of these municipalities were interested in exploring regionalizing their schools
with Chatham. Harwich was the only community to express interest. In January 1993, the Chatham School Committee and Harwich School Committee separately voted to participate in a study to explore the creation of a Chatham-Harwich Regional School System (Town of Chatham, 1993). While Chatham Town Meeting approved supporting a study on regionalization with Harwich, the Education Reform Act of 1993 eliminated a financial incentive for schools to regionalize, so the Harwich School Committee changed their position and rejected regionalization with Chatham (Town of Chatham, 1993).

Without hope for regionalization with another town, Chatham needed to adopt another strategy in order to maintain programs and services. Using a provision within the Education Reform Act of 1993, Chatham became the first school district on Cape Cod to take advantage of the new inter-district school choice option. By a vote of its school committee in 1994, Chatham Public Schools accepted its first school choice students, 29 students from neighboring school districts (Town of Chatham, 1994); this became the first domino to fall. The number of school choice students entering Chatham slowly increased to 147 by 2005, when the timeframe for this dissertation study picks up. In 2005, 20% of Chatham’s PreK-12 enrollment was from students residing outside of Chatham (Appendix A Tables A1 and A4). By 2010, school choice students represented 25% of Chatham’s enrollment.

Chatham’s inter-district school choice students came from neighboring school districts, which were then left with empty seats in their classrooms and a need to equally maintain programs, services, and staffing. So, Chatham’s neighbors opened their doors to school choice, robbing students from their neighbors, in what could be paralleled to a cascade of falling dominos, falling from east to west across the Cape. Three years after Chatham opened its doors to school choice, the districts enveloping Chatham to the north and west, including Harwich
Public Schools, Dennis-Yarmouth Regional, and Nauset Regional, responded by opening their doors to accept inter-district school choice students. Two years later, inter-district school choice moved one more town to the west when Barnstable Public Schools began accepting school choice student. By 2005, only Mashpee, Sandwich, and Bourne, three of the western-most towns on the Cape, had not yet begun to accept school choice students. In 2006 Bourne opened its doors to inter-district school choice, in 2010 Sandwich did as well, and in 2011 Mashpee, the Cape’s last hold-out, followed suit.

**Enrollment, Financial, and Demographic Changes Connected to Cape Cod School Choice**

What appears to be absent in a quantitative study of both charter school and inter-district school choice in Massachusetts (Aud, 1999) is enough contextual information to allow the reader to ascertain the magnitude of the competitive challenge faced by individual local school districts, the reasoning behind each school district’s responses to competition, and the outcome of these responses. Three other studies have drilled down to provide context for the competitive impact, but included only charter school competition, not inter-district school choice (Stedman, Cummins & Ricciardelli, 2014; Ericson, Silverman, Berman, Nelson, & Solomon, 2001; Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000). In order to provide context to this study of school choice on Cape Cod, data was extracted from publicly assessable information located on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website and compiled in tables in Appendix A – this included both charter school and inter-district school choice data. Outside of this review of publicly assessable data, the school districts focused upon in this dissertation will only be reference with pseudonyms.

**Enrollment: Declining in Cape local districts, increasing in charters.** Between 2005 and 2010, public school enrollment in Massachusetts was slowly declining, from 975,911
students in 2005 to 957,053 students in 2010 – a 2% decline over this six-year period (MA DESE, 2017). On Cape Cod, where the demographics have progressively shifted because of the region’s allure as a retirement destination, the decline of school-aged children was much more pronounced. The Cape lost an average of 2.3% of its student population each year between 2005 and 2010, resulting in a cumulative 10.6% drop in public school enrollment across the Cape over this six year period (Appendix A Table A1).

From Falmouth at the base of Cape Cod to Provincetown at the peninsula’s tip, enrollment declined in every school district except one – Truro, the smallest school district on the Cape. While Truro realized an increase of 31 students, a 27% increase in enrollment, during this time period, its enrollment increase was directly related to inter-district school choice, as more and more Provincetown families opted to send their children to Truro, and subsequently to the Nauset Regional High School. Between 2005 and 2010, enrollment in Provincetown Public Schools declined by 36.5% (Appendix A Table A1). By 2010, the graduating class at Provincetown High School had shrunk to only 16 students, and the Provincetown School Committee unanimously decided to close the town’s high school, opting to tuition its students to other public high schools on the Cape (Oakes & Tobin, 2010).

While Cape Cod’s local school districts saw a 10.5% enrollment decline between 2005 and 2010, the two commonwealth charter schools on Cape Cod saw their enrollments increase during this time period. Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter saw a 26.8% enrollment increase and Sturgis Charter Public a 13.1% enrollment increase during the same six-year period (Appendix A Table A1). Despite the declining school-aged population on Cape Cod during this timeframe, in 2009, Sturgis’ request to expand from 425 students to 800 students, an additional 88% increase in enrollment, was approved the Board of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and
Secondary Education. Sturgis’ expansion into a second facility in Hyannis did not happen until September 2012 (Connors, 2011), which is outside of the 2005 to 2010 time parameter of this dissertation. In 2010, Lighthouse Charter purchased a former movie theater in East Harwich and made plans to relocate the facility from Orleans to Harwich (Eldred, 2010). When Lighthouse Charter moved into its new facility in September 2012 (Fraser, 2012), which is again outside of the focal time period of this study, it too expanded enrollment from 228 to 282, an additional 19% increase in student population, further pulling students from the local school districts.

**Choice in to local school districts: Directional movement.** In the face of declining school-aged population throughout the region and parents electing to send their children to charter schools or other school districts through inter-district school choice, school districts on Cape Cod attempted to mitigate the loss of students, programs, and services by accepting school choice students into their schools. Superintendents guided their schools to fill vacant seats in classrooms with inter-district school choice students from other Cape Cod towns through an annual school choice vote to be a receiving district. Each receiving district could then determine at which grades they would accept students and how many free seats they had available.

In 2005, every Cape Cod PreK-12 school district accepted school choice students, except for Bourne, Sandwich, and Mashpee. In 2010, Sandwich opened its doors to school choice, leaving Mashpee as the last remaining PreK-12 district on the Cape to have not opened its doors to school choice students (MA DESE, 2017b).

In 2005, Chatham took in the most school choice students, with 147 of its 716 students, or 20% of its enrollment, entering through the inter-district school choice program. In 2009, Nauset eclipsed Chatham and began taking in the most school choice students of Cape Cod schools. Nauset nearly tripled the number of school choice students it accepted over the six-year
timeframe of this study. Between 2005 and 2010, Barnstable realized the greatest percent increase in school choice students entering its district, a 354% percent increase; however, given the large size of Barnstable Public Schools, a 67 student enrollment increase by accepting more inter-district school choice students amounted to only a 1.5% increase in the district’s enrollment. (Appendix A Table A4)

Chatham Public Schools and Nauset Regional were both receiving over $1 million from other school districts as tuition for the inter-district school choice students electing to attend their schools. Between 2005 and 2010, Truro Public Schools saw the largest percent increase in tuition dollars received for inter-district school choice students; whereas both Provincetown Public School and Dennis-Yarmouth Regional experienced a slight reduction in the tuition received for school choice students during the same time period. (Appendix A Table A4)

By 2010, there was a general eastward movement of school choice students across Cape Cod, from Sandwich to Barnstable, Barnstable to Dennis-Yarmouth, Dennis-Yarmouth to Harwich, Harwich to Chatham, and Chatham to Nauset. At the western edge of this continuum, Sandwich Public Schools, which was newly accepting inter-district school choice students, accepted 15 students into its schools, while Nauset Regional to the far east of this range was taking in 202 students.

By 2010, two relatively small Cape Cod school districts, Chatham and Nauset, were enrolling students beyond a “free seat” model and were using inter-district school choice to create an enrollment larger than the school-aged population within their towns (Appendix A Table A4), and this was happening at a time when the school-aged population on Cape Cod was in decline. Chatham Public, which enrolled school choice students in kindergarten through senior year, was accepting on average over 13 students per grade. Nauset, which enrolled school
choice students only in grades 6 through 12, took an even more aggressive approach and
accepted on average over 28 students across these grades.

**Choice out to other school districts: Mixed impact.** Because the Education Reform
Act of 1993 provided parents with the option to elect to send their children to any school district
opening its doors to school choice, school districts on the Cape and elsewhere in the state have
no direct ability to regulate the number of students electing to leave their district through inter-
district school choice. If the market dynamics act as theorized, school districts will be affected
by the loss of students and tuition dollars to other school districts and will improve programs,
services, and outcomes to encourage families to keep their children within their home district’s
schools (Armor & Peiser, 1997).

Four districts experienced school choice out of the district in excess of fifty students each
year from 2005 to 2010 (Appendix A Table A3): Barnstable, Dennis-Yarmouth, Harwich, and
Nauset. Of these, Nauset slowly began to lower its inter-district school choice out during this
period, Barnstable remained fairly steady, but the number of Dennis-Yarmouth and Harwich
students exiting their district increased dramatically. Harwich students largely migrated by inter-
district school choice to Chatham Public Schools, causing Harwich to enroll increasing numbers
of Dennis-Yarmouth students to mitigate its enrollment loss to Chatham Public. By 2010, both
Harwich and Dennis-Yarmouth were each paying out in excess of $1 million in tuition to the
respective receiving districts (Appendix A Table A3).

In 2005, Chatham Public Schools was the bringing in the most inter-district school choice
students on the Cape Cod (Appendix A Table A3). Chatham continued to gradually increase the
number of school choice students between 2005 and 2010. By 2010, Nauset Regional School
District surpassed Chatham as the district taking in the most students through inter-district school
choice, increasing the number of students brought into the district by over 180% between the years of 2005 and 2010. By 2010, both Chatham and Nauset were offsetting their district budgets by over $1 million each with tuition received from neighboring districts (Appendix A Table A3).

The school district experiencing the greatest percentage increase in students and tuition dollars leaving due to inter-district school choice was Sandwich Public Schools. The number of students lost to school choice by Sandwich increased from four students in 2005 to 37 students in 2009, and the tuition dollars expended increased from $31,000 to over $200,000 (Appendix A Table A3). Initially the loss of students and tuition dollars may not have impacted Sandwich’s enrollment or budget appreciably, but by 2009, Sandwich Public Schools was finally compelled to begin offsetting school choice attrition by accepting school choice students into its district.

Choice out to charter schools: Not a heterogeneous movement. With the passage of Massachusetts’ Education Reform Act of 1993, charter schools began to open throughout the state. Only two Commonwealth charter schools opened on Cape Cod. Sturgis Charter Public School is located in Hyannis, a village within the Town of Barnstable, less than a mile from the Yarmouth border. In 2004, Sturgis became recognized for its International Baccalaureate program and began to gain prestige and national recognition. During the timeframe of this study, Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School was located in Orleans, one of the towns affiliated with the Nauset Regional School District, and enrolled students in grades 6-8.

In 2005, three Cape Cod school districts, Dennis-Yarmouth, Barnstable, and Nauset, lost over 100 students each to area charter schools (Appendix A Table A5). Each of these three districts had charter schools within their district or near their district’s border. Between 2005 and 2010, Nauset and Barnstable realized a slight reduction in the number of their students opting for
a charter school experience, while the enrollment of students at charter schools remained relatively consistent for Dennis-Yarmouth across this timespan. Falmouth Public Schools, Sandwich Public Schools, and Dennis-Yarmouth each experienced over a quarter of a million dollar increase in charter school tuitions over this six-year period (Appendix A Table A5).

**Demographic effects.** The Cape Cod region was going through demographic changes during the late 2000s that became magnified by the attrition of students due to school choice, particularly with the loss of students to the region’s Commonwealth charter schools. Admission to the Cape’s two Commonwealth charter schools happened by a lottery amongst students applying for admittance, which should result in a heterogeneous population of students from the region’s school districts, but the data indicates that the students attending Sturgis Charter Public and Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter were far more homogeneous than what was seen in the area school districts.

Between 2005 and 2010, the PreK-12 school-aged population in the local school districts became populated with 4.9% more economically disadvantaged students (Appendix A Table A6), a slight increase in English language learners and students with learning disabilities (Appendix A Table A6), and had 5.9% less Caucasian students (Appendix A Table A7). During this timeframe, charter school enrollment reflected a mere fraction of these demographic changes, leaving the charter schools with a very different demographic composition than those found in the Cape’s local school districts. In 2010, charter school enrollment was 91% Caucasian versus 85.5% Caucasian in the local school districts, and only 6.7% of charter school students were classified as being low income versus 22.5% in the local school districts. The local school districts on the Cape were beginning to see an increase in limited English proficient students during the late 2000s, and by 2010 English language learners represented 2.1% of the student
population in the Cape’s local school districts; by contrast, there was not a single English language learner enrolled at a Cape Cod charter school between 2005 and 2010. Finally, there was a slightly smaller percentage of students with special education needs at charter schools compared to the local school districts.

Socio-economics may be linked to some of the school choice outflow seen on Cape Cod. During the timeframe of this study, Dennis-Yarmouth was experiencing some of the largest losses of students both to charter schools and to neighboring school districts through inter-district school choice; connected to this is the fact that the towns of Dennis and Yarmouth have the highest poverty levels on Cape Cod and the lowest median household incomes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

This review of the Massachusetts’ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education archived data demographic data for student enrollment at charter school and local school districts reveals unforeseen inequities of choice. These inequities have socio-economic implications favoring movement toward more affluent communities, as well as school choice movement of more affluent students. There are also undertones within the data that suggest that the school choice movement of students is not racially balanced nor ethnically balanced, with some level of flight of white, English-speaking, students from local districts to charter schools. This finding runs counter to a report (Aud, 1999) from two decades ago, which is albeit the most recent study, of the racial impact of school choice on Massachusetts’ school districts. In her study, Aud (1999) found a negligible racial impact on districts losing school choice students; whereas, the districts receiving school choice students became more diverse. To opposite appears to have been occurring on Cape Cod during the late 2000s.
Anonymity of Superintendents and Districts

The superintendents in this study are largely retired today, but each maintains strong connections to the educational community and to Cape Cod. For this reason, the superintendents in this study and their former school districts were each given pseudonyms to provide anonymity for both the superintendent and their district (the pseudonyms are previously listed in Table 1).

The purposeful sample used for this study strategically selected superintendents from districts of varied PreK-12 enrollments and varied competitive pressure from school choice. The districts in this study were identified as medium-sized or small, based on their 2006-2010 enrollments. The impact of school choice competition was estimated by calculating the sum of the percent enrollment change due to choice and the percent of district expenditures paid out for school choice tuitions – the larger the sum, the larger the competitive pressure.

In order to help provide a level of anonymity for each district, the actual data from the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education online archives are not provided or specifically referenced when describing each of the four districts in this study or when discussing the data. The data for each district in the study has been transformed into to provide a high-level overview of the enrollment changes, changes in district expenditures spent on school choice tuitions, and an estimate of competitive impact from school choice between 2005 and 2010 (Table 2).

Table 2 provides Sea Crest and Shoreline Public Schools were both relatively small school districts, while Sandy Neck and Mariner’s Point, were larger, but relatively speaking, only medium-sized school districts. Between the years 2005 and 2010, Sandy Neck, the largest district in this study, experienced relatively mild competitive impacts from school choice compared to the other three districts in the study; size may have been a mitigating factor in
Table 2

*District Percent Enrollment Change Due to Choice, Percent District Expenditures Paid in Choice Tuitions and Competitive Impact in 2005 versus 2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Pseudonym</th>
<th>2005 PreK-12 Enrollment</th>
<th>2005 Percent Enrollment Change Due to Choice</th>
<th>2005 Percent District Expenditures Paid in Choice Tuition</th>
<th>2005 Estimated Competitive Impact from School Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sea Crest Public Schools</td>
<td>Small &lt;3000 students</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Neck Public Schools</td>
<td>Medium-sized 3000-5500 students</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>-1.5%</td>
<td>Mild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoreline Public Schools</td>
<td>Small &lt;3000 students</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>-3.5%</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariner’s Point</td>
<td>Medium-sized 3000-5500 students</td>
<td>-3.5%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Pseudonym</th>
<th>2010 PreK-12 Enrollment</th>
<th>2010 Percent Enrollment Change Due to Choice</th>
<th>2010 Percent District Expenditures Paid in Choice Tuition</th>
<th>2010 Estimated Competitive Impact from School Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sea Crest Public Schools</td>
<td>Small &lt;3000 students</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Neck Public Schools</td>
<td>Medium-sized 3000-5500 students</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>Mild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoreline Public Schools</td>
<td>Small &lt;3000 students</td>
<td>-5.5%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariner’s Point</td>
<td>Medium-sized 3000-5500 students</td>
<td>-9.5%</td>
<td>-4.5%</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Note:
- Enrollment change equals the students gained through inter-district choice minus those lost to inter-district choice and charter school choice.
- Tuition paid equals tuition lost from both inter-district school choice and charter school choice offset by the tuition gained from inter-district school choice.
- Competitive impact determined by the sum of percent enrollment change and percent district expenditures paid in choice tuition: strong competitive impact >10%, moderate competitive impact >5%-10%, mild competitive impact >1%-5%, and minimal competitive impact <1%.
lessening the impact of this competition. Sea Crest, Shoreline, and Mariner’s Point all began in 2005 with relatively moderate impacts of school choice on the district’s enrollment and budget. By 2010, one of these school districts, Sea Crest, had made adjustments and largely negated the impact of competition from school choice; whereas, Mariner’s Point Public School’s fate was quite different, and during this six-year timespan school choice competition began to have a strong negative impact on both student enrollment and the district’s finances. This is an indication that, within the competitive landscape of school choice, there were clear winners and clear losers. How each school district adjusted to or managed within this competitive landscape is captured in the following narratives of the former superintendents.

**Superintendent Interviews**

**Common Themes Explored and Seen in the Superintendent Interviews**

Each superintendent interviewed was asked about the various point sources of enrollment loss for their district and asked how each impacted the district’s student population, budget, and interactions with peer educational leaders. The perceived dominant source of school choice competition faced differed from district to district, and even years later, many of the superintendents still harbored visceral feelings about some of the more negative competitors.

The decision-making of each superintendent was explored. This study probed the various ways that each organization responded negatively to competition, through conflict and obstruction, along with more positive ways each district responded to competition, through innovation, cooperation, and efforts to increase efficiency. While there were positive examples of administrative responses to school choice competition, often the negative aspects of competition seemed more readily recalled by the superintendents.
The superintendents were each asked whether giving parents choice had improved education for the district’s students. Giving parents choice and creating such an intense competitive landscape did not appear to be clearly “lifting all boats,” creating a scenario where all students benefitted from the presence of school choice. Each superintendent could see positive and negative impacts of school choice competition on their district or the Cape region as a whole, but each would have preferred to never have entered into this competitive melee. They all shared a vision of how to end some of the competitiveness by ending inter-district school choice for the region, but also opined that regional solutions become more challenging when the leaders who need to cooperate are so deeply embroiled in a competitive melee with one another.

**Sea Crest Superintendent Interview**

John Terrance was the former Superintendent of Sea Crest School District. Sea Crest is a relatively small-sized school district, and compared to most school districts on the Cape has found ways to mitigate much of the impact of school choice. Between 2005 and 2010, the Sea Crest School District, under Terrance’s leadership, was able to reduce the impact of school choice competition on both the district’s enrollment and budget. Of the superintendents interviewed, Terrance’s school district was the only one that appeared to be winning in the competitive landscape of school choice.

In 2005, Terrance was already a veteran superintendent. He had spent years working in schools on Cape Cod, and he had developed both a good understanding of the school choice dynamics at play and political connections. Both of these traits benefited the Sea Crest School District as school choice competition began to increase in the region.

**Ruling out other potential sources of competition.** Sea Crest Schools did not see parochial schools or private schools on the Cape as a source of competition for students. If Sea
Crest families opted for a parochial or private school experience for their child, the parents would have to transport their children several miles outside of the district’s lines to access these options. Home schooling was also relatively uncommon. According to Terrance, “Homeschooling we just ignored. Those parents weren’t interested in us in the first place, and they didn’t cost us any money.”

**Technical schools viewed as better option for some students.** There are two technical high schools on Cape Cod, each serving a geographic region of the Cape’s peninsula. After eighth grade, all students on Cape Cod have the option to either attend high school at one of the technical high schools or in their home district’s high school. Terrance was a firm believer that the region’s technical high school and Sea Crest High School were both good options for students, each providing a full range of activities. He stated that his staff encouraged students to consider the technical high school if his staff felt the student would be better served by this experience. Terrance was also very aware that two of his local school district superintendent colleagues harbored resentment for the region’s technical high school because of what they perceived as its actively recruiting students from the local school districts, but Terrance didn’t have any sense that the technical high school was actively recruiting Sea Crest’s students. To the contrary, he felt that Sea Crest High School had some students who would have been better served by the technical high school, but oftentimes parents were sending children to the high school they had once gone to rather than the high school that might best match their child’s interests.

**Distain for charter school, yet improvement through competition.** One of the Cape’s Commonwealth charter schools had the biggest impact on Sea Crest School’s enrollment. As Terrance put it, “they were just around the corner.” Families opting out of Sea Crest Schools
were often looking for smaller class sizes at the charter school, and according to Terrance, a “crunchy” feel at a school that gave kids a chance to explore their interests.

Terrance recounted that the charter school “stole our best kids, period, end of story.” According to Terrance, half of the district’s academically strongest students ended up at the charter school. He said that when they looked at the scores on the state’s MCAS achievement tests of the students leaving for the charter, “They had exactly one student whose achievement scores were at the 50th percentile or below. There was nobody in Special Ed. There were lots of stories about the charter counseling more challenging kids out, telling their parents they’d be better served by Sea Crest.” Terrance felt the charter was creating “an elite school” and “was a really egregious example of selection. First of all, the whole system is skewed. You tend to get the kids of parents who care enough to investigate alternatives, then the charter actively counsels out kids with special needs.” Terrance also shared that there were repeated rumors about the fairness of the charter’s lottery process. According to Terrance, it was, “an absolutely poisoned relationship,” between Sea Crest and the charter school.

The charter was rapidly changing the face of Sea Crest Schools as parents fled from what was perceived to be a mediocre alternative offered by the local school district. Terrance described walking into a Sea Crest administrator’s meeting, arriving late for dramatic effect, with a copy of David Halberstam’s *The Reckoning* in hand – a book chronicling the story of the American and Japanese automobile industries. He dropped the book with a loud thud on the table and asked, “Are we going to be Pontiac or are we going to be Toyota?” From that point, and Terrance says it took years, Sea Crest’s focus was on turning the academic program around. Terrance hated to admit it, but in hindsight, the competitive pressure from the charter school motivated Sea Crest to improve. Speaking specifically about turning around the district’s middle
school, he said Sea Crest “never would have done it on their own. Left to their own devices we were mediocre on a good day.”

**Reluctant entry of a strong inter-district choice competitor.** It began as a negligible loss of students through inter-district school choice to a nearby school district, but after a few years the number of students lost to inter-district school choice increased and Sea Crest began to take note. As Terrance noted, “We were losing enough kids that it was a noteworthy trend…we had to do something about it.” What they did was open their doors to students from other districts. Terrance commented that if the nearby school district had not begun to take Sea Crest’s students, “I’m confident we would have stayed out of choice.”

Sea Crest families who opted for inter-district school choice, largely to a nearby town, were seeking out smaller schools at the middle school and high school level. At times, smaller schools actually meant more opportunity. Terrance described a situation where Sea Crest’s second-string goalie, who faced little prospect of seeing playing time for Sea Crest, left to be a starter on the smaller district’s varsity hockey team. Terrance said, “I would’ve done the same under those circumstances.”

Families opted into Sea Crest Schools for both their academic program and their extra-curricular and athletic opportunities. Sea Crest had begun to improve its MCAS performance, and some parents saw Sea Crest as a better academic alternative to their local school district. Other parents saw opportunities, like a strong performing arts program or a robust athletic program. Sea Crest offered more Advanced Placement courses than some neighboring districts, and because of the breadth of their AP offerings, as Terrance put it, “If you wanted your kid to go to Dartmouth, it wasn’t a difficult choice.”
During Terrance’s tenure, Sea Crest didn’t advertise in newspaper or on the radio in hopes of attracting students. The district largely let its results sell its schools. “We just opened our doors and let word of mouth carry the day,” Terrance boasted. Sea Crest aligned their transitional activities to mirror the Cape’s Grades 6-8 Commonwealth charter school’s schedule to give charter school parents the opportunity to view Sea Crest High School as a viable option for their child. Sea Crest’s outreach to the charter school was not just to bring its own town’s students to Sea Crest High School; it was, in reality, an inter-district school choice recruiting effort, hoping to not just attract Sea Crest residents to their high school, but also these children’s friends from other towns. Terrance noted that they had people knocking at the door saying, “My kid wants to go to Sea Crest to stay with his friends.”

Terrance commented that if Sea Crest had been recruiting athletes from other school districts, it didn’t come to his attention while he was superintendent, but shortly after retiring as superintendent from Sea Crest, he had heard enough credible stories that he had to give credence to the rumors.

**Enrollment impact: building a district with “choice in.”** Terrance described doing some enrollment projections during the late 2000s, projecting that the declining school-aged population on the Cape would cause the high school enrollment to drop to by over 20% from its 2005 enrollment. A smaller high school enrollment was a threat to programs and staff jobs, and Sea Crest’s success in attracting and accepting inter-district school choice students had, as Terrance put it, “kept that wolf away from the door.” School choice students represented 4% of Sea Crest’s enrollment in 2005 and by 2010 this had ballooned to 13%. As of the writing of this dissertation, Sea Crest has managed to maintain its high school enrollment, despite there being even fewer high school aged children on Cape Cod, by drawing students from the region’s local
school districts; today, over 20% of Sea Crest’s high school enrollment comes from school choice students, with each school choice student basically bringing in $5,000 in tuition.

**Budget impact: high MCAS scores justify “choice in” costs.** In the late 2000s, Sea Crest was accepting $5,000 a piece for inter-district school choice students, but its per pupil expenditures were at least double, approaching triple, this amount. Terrance said that town Finance Committee members would question the fiscal wisdom of accepting school choice students. Terrance indicated that it was fiscally responsible to accept four additional school choice students, at $5,000 each, bringing the class size from 17 to 21 because “we were going to pay for that teacher’s salary anyway.” He stated that the School Committee never questioned this decision on school choice, “above other things, because we were on a roll and weren’t about to fix something that was working better than it use to. Choice was part of the package. It was evidence that what we were doing was working, because people wanted to come here.” He could have never foreseen that over 20% of Sea Crest High School’s enrollment would come from inter-district school choice, as it does roughly a decade later.

By 2010, Sea Crest was spending upwards of $2,000 more per pupil than many other school districts, including all of their abutting neighbors. Arguably some of this added per pupil spending was to subsidize the cost of carrying so many school choice students at $5,000 each, but the taxpayers in the Town of Sea Crest didn’t balk at the per pupil expenditures, largely because of the educational results the district was producing. Two thousand dollars multiplied by Sea Crest’s enrollment meant that it had well over $4 million dollars in funding, equivalent to about 10% more fiscal resources, to support staff and educational programs above and beyond the funding available to most districts on the Cape.
Constructive responses to competition: improved educational program. Three years after the charter school opened its doors, Sea Crest began to focus on improving its MCAS scores. As Terrance put it, “We bid our money on MCAS scores,” figuring that Sea Crest needed to position itself to produce higher MCAS scores than the charter schools if it was to turn the tide. Sea Crest negotiated an incentive in the teacher’s contract, incentivizing improvement on the state MCAS exams. A 5% increase in the district’s MCAS scores would be rewarded with an additional 1% increase in the pay for its teachers. The district exceeded this contractually negotiated benchmark over the next two years, and soon the Cape Cod Times was touting on the front page that Sea Crest had MCAS scores that were in the top 10% of the state.

Beyond the performance incentive, the negotiated contract provided teachers significantly more professional development time, adding multiple days onto the teacher’s work year to provide time for, “teachers to get talking to one another, rather than closing the classroom doors and doing their own thing.” They tried to create a collaborative culture, which Terrance believe paid off. Outside organizations began to also recognize Sea Crest for its academic achievements. This external validation and praise in the regional newspapers only fueled parent’s desires to choose Sea Crest as the inter-district placement for their children.

They thoughtfully focused on attracting and maintaining all types of kids. Terrance offered as an example, when a new AP Marine Biology course was proposed that probably contributed to attracting school choice kids, Sea Crest also ensured that another more-vocational class was created and offered for “the other kids, who are going to drop out and go fishing as soon as they turned 16.”

Terrance believed that giving parents choice improved the education for Sea Crest students, but only because a nearby charter school motivated the district to improve. He didn’t
think inter-district school choice alone would have done it, largely because the competitive pressure from inter-district choice didn’t provide a direct existential threat to make Sea Crest better like the charter school did. He concluded by saying “I hate to admit it, because philosophically I don’t like the idea of school choice, but if it delivers results for kids, it’s hard to say it’s bad.”

**The darker side of competition: lack of collaboration.** School choice competition definitely did not facilitate cooperative exchanges between Sea Crest and other Cape school districts or charter schools. As Terrance put it, “The fact is the state set us in competition with one another. That wasn’t our choice. Having done that, to expect that we see collaboration as the light at the end of the tunnel is silly. This is some politician’s naïve dream.” As for the charters, Terrance emphasized that Sea Crest got better because of the proximity of the charter school, “but that was cutthroat competition. We didn’t learn anything from them, and I don’t think they learned anything from us.”

He emphasized that he “didn’t recommend Sea Crest get into inter-district school choice until it became impossible to explain why we allowed however many of our kids to leave the district and not participate in the school choice program ourselves.” He would have been happier if Sea Crest just educated its “homegrown kids.”

**Sandy Neck Superintendent Interview**

Lindsey Newton was the former Superintendent of the Sandy Neck Public Schools. Sandy Neck is the largest school district in this study, but relative to many school districts off of Cape Cod, with a PreK-12 enrollment significantly less than 5,500, it would be considered a medium-sized district. While Sandy Neck Public Schools generally lost more students each year than Sea Crest, the size of Sandy Neck lessened the enrollment and budgetary impact of school
choice on the district. Between 2005 and 2010, under Newton’s leadership, Sandy Neck Public Schools was able to keep the overall impact of school choice on the district at a relatively mild level and relatively low throughout this time period. Sandy Neck was neither a winner nor loser within the competitive landscape of school choice on Cape Cod; it was holding its own, and had decreased the net flow of students out of the district by a third between 2005 and 2010.

Newton was an experienced superintendent from off Cape Cod, generally unfamiliar with school choice in her previous districts, and described herself as “new to the game of school choice.” She recalled that in her suburban Boston prior experience, “There was a gentlemen’s agreement to not take kids from one another. It was talked about. It was decided. It was supported by school committees, but when I came to Sandy Neck, I was quite taken aback with the competitive nature.”

Ruling out other potential sources of competition. Newton saw home schooling and private schools as having a negligible impact on Sandy Neck’s enrollment, despite having a private high school roughly a ten-minute drive the Sandy Neck High School. During her tenure, a parochial school in the area was expanding and pulling more students from Sandy Neck’s enrollment. To Newton, this “was more a family issue, choosing a religious education.” While the growth of the parochial school drew from Sandy Neck’s enrollment, it did not have an overt budgetary impact on the district.

Technical school viewed as better option for some students. The technical high school, which was located a few towns away, did not seem to be perceived as being in competition with Sandy Neck High School. The Sandy Neck School Committee and Newton were very supportive of vocational education and the technical school serving their town. Newton commented that the technical high school “lends itself to a particular student with a particular set
of skills and interests. And, I did see the vocational school as sort of an arm of the public school system.”

**Heterogeneous recruitment of nearby charter, but no apparent innovation.** While the expanding parochial school had an impact on Sandy Neck’s enrollment, but not its budget, a nearby charter school was having an equivalent impact on the district’s enrollment, but because of how charter schools are funded, it was having a significant impact on Sandy Neck’s budget. The charter was in the midst of a strong academic evolution during the late 2010s, with increasing accolades from national publications ranking public school quality. The charter had changed its public perception from what Terrance saw as “a weak alternative to the local school district,” and away from “a school for kids who didn’t fit in,” according to Newton. The charter was evolving to be seen as a very mainstream, highly academic school.

Given the size and offerings available within the Sandy Neck School system, Newton knew that Sandy Neck offered something for everybody. If students “wanted to avail themselves to what Sandy Neck had to offer, they would find success in many different ways.” Initially, it was the disenfranchised students that left, who couldn’t find their niche in Sandy Neck but found it at the charter. During Newton’s tenure as Sandy Neck’s superintendent, the charter was on a solidly upward trajectory. Despite the charter’s proximity to Sandy Neck and its increasingly mainstream popularity, Sandy Neck was one of the few school districts on the Cape to see rather minimal changes in the enrollment and tuition dollars lost to the charter between 2005 and 2010. When the charter school expanded, doubling in size, in 2012 the number of Sandy Neck’s students leaving to the charter doubled, and its tuition costs lost to the charter nearly tripled.

“If you really look at the data for the students the charter is servicing, they’re not comparative,” emphasized Newton, yet the charter was gaining accolades for its academic
program from national publications. “Whenever a parent chooses a school, there’s some measure of greater support and greater investment, so I don’t know that you can ever compare apples to apples.”

Newton recounts that the charter took only Sandy Neck’s “best and brightest, so those were the hardworking kids, and if you broke a rule, they would coach you out.” She said that the practice of counseling students out of the charter was under the surface and never really validated, but Sandy Neck’s administrators and guidance counselors claimed that the charter did not play by the same rules. Newton pointed out that clearly the charter’s English Language Learner population and their Special Education populations didn’t mirror the frequency of these students in either Sandy Neck or the region, but the charter’s response would simply be, “that those populations didn’t apply.”

According to Newton, neither she nor Sandy Neck Schools ever succumbed to the competition with the nearby charter. “So did Sandy Neck create an International Baccalaureate program so we could attract more kids? No, we didn’t; however I think the culture of competition was underneath the surface, and I would say it was slightly healthy, just to keep in the back of our minds that we could lose kids if we weren’t performing well.” Newton was confident that this motivated Sandy Neck Schools to be the best district it could.

**Inter-district choice: minimal impact, negligible response.** The impact of inter-district school choice out on Sandy Neck became virtually neutral. In 2005, the number of students entering Sandy Neck through inter-district school choice was a quarter of the number entering six years later. By 2010, the district was gaining as many students as it was losing to choice, largely gaining students from the west and losing them to the east.
Newton believed there were four categories of students that were moving into or out of districts through school choice. The first and largest group were the students whose needs were not being met, either academically, behaviorally, or socially; they were kids that Newton felt needed a “fresh start,” and she emphasized that she believed in providing fresh starts for any child. Second were the athletes moving to either a more athletically competitive program or second-string players moving to districts for a better opportunity to play. Third were the families opting for choice out because of some measure of convenience, like the school might be close to a parent’s place of work. The fourth group were those who believed their child was moving to a school to receive a better educational experience.

Newton considered the competition created by inter-district school choice to be, “slightly negative because it built a culture of lack of collegiality,” when it didn’t need to be there. She described how a demographer made a very audacious fifteen-year projection on the loss of students and enrollment facing Cape Cod school districts. Newton described how she recommended that there be a Cape-wide committee established to look at the potential enrollment trends; however, “No one could get out of their own school district mentality to see that maybe it would be worthwhile to investigate.” Newton emphasized that there are models of large county school districts elsewhere in the country, and the Cape could benefit by sending a multi-district committee to investigate the potential, but it’s not something familiar to Massachusetts or Cape Cod. The lack of collegiality, compounded by the fear of losing local control or money, limited the ability of districts to think differently.

During Newton’s tenure at Sandy Neck she recalled making one very controversial recommendation to her school committee to not participate in school choice. At the time of her recommendation, Sandy Neck was taking in about thirty students through school choice, along
with approximately $150,000 in school choice tuition from other districts. The School Committee, which believed strongly in school choice, went against her recommendation. According to Newton, there was “a real distinct population of the School Committee who felt competition was healthy.” While each of the superintendents interviewed for this dissertation opined about wanting to educate only their own town’s students, Newton was the only superintendent interviewed who actively attempted to reverse the course and remove her district as a school choice destination.

**Buffered inter-district choice enrollment impact.** The size of Sandy Neck School District greatly buffered any negative impact of school choice on the district. Sandy Neck had more students leaving its district to both inter-district school choice and to the charter schools than most districts on the Cape, but relative to the size of Sandy Neck’s total student enrollment, these loses were rather negligible.

Students coming into Sandy Neck through inter-district school choice represented, at most only 1.5% of the district’s enrollment between 2005 and 2010. By the end of the late 2000s, the district was gaining as many inter-district school choice students as it was losing. Its loss of students to the charter school was greater, but still this only represented a loss of less than 2.5% of the district’s enrollment.

**Buffered inter-district choice budget impact.** Similarly, because of Sandy Neck’s size, its budget was large enough to buffer much of the school choice losses. The fiscal impact of inter-district school choice was negligible, since the district largely had the same number of students coming in as it had leaving due to inter-district school choice. While Sandy Neck lost more students to the charter school than most districts, the net tuition costs for these students still represented only about 1% of Sandy Neck’s large district budget. Despite Sandy Neck’s per
pupil expenditures being over twice as much as the $5,000 the district received for inter-district school choice tuitions, Newton stated that the town’s Finance Committee never raised this discrepancy as an issue in her tenure as Superintendent, perhaps “because the financial impact was so marginal.”

**Limited competitive pressure, no constructive responses.** When asked about innovations, cooperation, or even efficiencies realized by Sandy Neck in response to school choice competition, Newton provided no tangible examples of any of these potential constructive responses to competition, which could be a factor of how little competitive pressure school choice was having on the district. The only example that Newton provided of a program that might be retaining students that might otherwise leave for the charter or choice appeared to be a gifted and talented program, which seemed to predate the legislation bringing about school choice and charter schools. She indicated that Sandy Neck fostered and even highlighted the availability of this gifted and talented program because it was something not every district had, but she ended by saying, in terms of school choice competition, “Did we add programs? I don’t think so.”

**The darker side of competition: lack of regional vision and collaboration.** Newton felt that competition has gotten in the way of the local school districts engaging collaboratively in some “audacious visioning.” Instead she believed that the Cape school districts were trying to stay close enough to compete without taking too many risks, because they were afraid to fail. She stated, “I don’t love the competitiveness. I like opportunity for kids, if they need a different place. There were good kids who left Sandy Neck and went to other districts, and they were more successful and vice versa.”
Newton concluded her interview by saying, “My bias is that if the Cape districts don’t start seeing themselves as more collaborative in fighting for this small pocket of limited resources, being our kids, somebody’s going to get seriously hurt. When competition becomes too negative, because it will be Darwinian, there will be survival of the fittest.” She felt that some towns, particularly the smaller ones, will lose, and the people who will really lose will be the children. “Collaboration is more of an answer than competition, especially given the demographics and enrollment,” she stated.

**Shoreline Superintendent Interview**

Boyd Kimball was the former Superintendent of the Shoreline Public Schools. Shoreline Public is a small district, with K-12 enrollment less than half that of the other districts in this study. Like Sandy Neck, Shoreline Public Schools under Kimball’s leadership was able to hold its own within the competitive landscape of school choice on Cape Cod between 2005 and 2010 – it was neither a winner nor loser in this competitive melee.

Shoreline Public lost an appreciable number of students to inter-district school choice, with the vast majority of these students opting out for two more eastern school districts. Because of Shoreline’s relatively small district size, it needed to offset this enrollment loss by opening its doors to school choice, and brought inter-district school choice students into its schools, largely from the towns to its west.

When taking the job as Superintendent of Shoreline Public Schools, Kimball was what they call a “wash-ashore,” an outsider new to Cape Cod. His administrative experience off Cape Cod had been in districts where class sizes were typically larger than what exists in many Cape school districts, including Shoreline Schools. Because of the larger class sizes off Cape Cod, these superintendents could readily justify not engaging in school choice – the class sizes were
already large, so it didn’t make sense to accept additional students. Regarding inter-district school choice, he noted, “Once the door is open, that all bets are off…You get an insidious behavior that, bottom-line, doesn’t really benefit anybody.”

While he hadn’t experienced school choice competition in either his teaching or administrative roles off Cape Cod, Kimball recalled first being challenged with this competitive landscape during his interview for the position as Shoreline’s Superintendent. In that interview, a School Committee member asked, “How would I deal with students who chose other places to go for their education?” At the time, Kimball thought it to be an odd question, but that question became his focus for the rest of his career at Shoreline. According to Kimball, “You have to be in it [experiencing school choice competition] for a while to recognize what’s going on that you’re seeing, and that takes a few years.” He points out that superintendent positions turnover so frequently that most superintendents aren’t in their roles long enough to understand or respond to the school choice dynamics impacting their districts.

**Ruling out other potential sources of competition.** While Shoreline had nearby parochial schools, Kimball did not see the district’s loses to the parochial schools as significant. Families electing for private schools were few as well, and homeschooling represented only a handful of children. Collectively, these potential sources of competition were not viewed by Kimball as significant, and each had no impact on Shoreline’s budget.

**Visceral reaction to technical school recruiting practices.** Shoreline High School was situated only a few miles away from one of the Cape’s technical high schools. Kimball viewed competition with the technical high school as significant, largely from what he perceived as inappropriate recruiting of Shoreline’s students by the technical school. Kimball had taught vocational students long ago, and he didn’t consider eighth graders the best decision makers on
significant life choices, particularly if they were being recruited by the technical school under pressure. The technical school would offer tours of the building, free food, t-shirts and a hard sell to every student, even if a technical high school experience wasn’t in many students’ best interests long-term. While Kimball considered this recruitment unethical, he also understood some of the dynamics that appear to be fueling it.

Kimball recounted that the nearby technical high school once had waiting lists for students to get into it, but the population of high school students on Cape Cod was, and had been, in decline. Suddenly the technical school “didn’t have a waiting list or as long of a waiting list, and was anxious to fill all of its spots,” Kimball recalled. This created considerable stress in the relationship between the technical school and Shoreline Public School administrators. He concluded by emphasizing that it was “an unhealthy tension, exacerbated by the decline in the student population.” If ten percent of Shoreline’s students headed to the technical school, that seemed reasonable to Kimball, but, “When you go beyond that number, then I think you really need to consider whether you’re serving the needs of those kids or the needs of an institution that wants to plug people into spaces.” In response, Shoreline Public Schools began to limit the technical high school’s access to its eighth graders, an act which may have bolstered Shoreline’s enrollment, limited the technical school’s enrollment, and would have reduced the exposure of many Shoreline students to an educational alternative for high school.

Innovation in response to charter heightened when proximity decreased. Compared to Shoreline Public School’s significant exodus from inter-district school choice, the district lost a mere fraction of this number to a charter school located in a neighboring town. Kimball believed that it was human nature for people to seek out something they perceive to be better than their current position. “The grass is always greener is a cliché, because it’s such a common
belief.” He saw families electing for the charter school as heading to what they perceived as a greener pasture. The families generally considered the academic rigor of the charter school to be superior to what was offered by Shoreline. When the charter school relocated and moved closer to Shoreline’s schools, there became a sense of urgency in the district to make sure their schools were in a more competitive place, relative to the charter school.

**Stabilizing enrollment using inter-district choice.** As Kimball’s tenure as Shoreline’s Superintendent extended and he became more clear on the dynamics driving inter-district school choice in the region, it was clear that Shoreline was losing millions of dollars a year to one neighboring school district. According to Kimball, the neighboring district was, “financing and managing its unique situation through school choice, in a way that was unsustainable, but appeared at the time to be just fine.” The neighboring school district was operating like a small private school even though it was a public school district, and was perceived as a better educational option by many of Shoreline’s families.

Shoreline Public Schools faced a public relations challenge. Kimball sadly remembered that there “was a lot of angst about Shoreline being so terrible that all of our families want to go someplace else.” Being perceived as terrible was costing Shoreline millions of dollars in tuition, and this perception was so publically discussed that these public discussions only exacerbated the problem. Kimball recalled saying to a parent, “Shoreline reminds me of an anorexic, who looks in a mirror and sees someone who’s fat, and who clearly in a devastating way is just the opposite. Shoreline looks in the mirror and sees a place that nobody wants to be, instead of this lovely place than any sane person would want to be.” But, perception is reality, and Kimball saw his mission as Superintendent as improving Shoreline’s poor perception of itself and its schools.
When Shoreline surveyed families leaving the district due to inter-district school choice and those coming to the district through this program, the answers from both families exiting and entering were the same. Shoreline families left their district in search of higher academic programs and smaller schools. Families opting for Shoreline reported coming to the district to avail their children to Shoreline’s better academic programs and smaller school size. “It’s all in the eye of the beholder,” Kimball commented. There were also students who left for greener pastures, only to be disillusioned and returned to Shoreline’s schools to be back with their friends. As Kimball put it, “There is almost an elemental desire to be a part of your community, with the friends that you grew up with.” Shoreline was a small supportive community that seemed somewhat fractured by school choice.

Kimball recalls telling the neighboring superintendent who was receiving so many of his students, “I’m taking them back. That’s my mission.” He described how he had no desire to take anybody else’s students; he “just wanted Shoreline kids to be happy enough in Shoreline to stay home.” Kimball described “stabilizing” Shoreline schools. A review of the state data suggests that he clearly stabilized Shoreline’s enrollment, but may have fell short of his ultimate mission, at least during the timeframe between 2005 and 2010. Shoreline never reduced its number of students being happy enough to stay home; rather, this number progressively ticked up across this time period. What Shoreline became increasing better at was attracting students from primarily the school district to its west to offset the students leaving for the school district to its east. This is what ultimately stabilized Shoreline’s enrollment.

**Net neutral inter-district choice enrollment impact.** While the size of Sandy Neck Public Schools allowed the district to buffer the negative impact of school choice on the district, the small size of Shoreline Public Schools made it more vulnerable to enrollment and budget
impacts. Shoreline had some of the most significant outflow of students due to inter-district school choice on the Cape, but offset much of this enrollment loss by accepting into Shoreline Schools more school choice students than most of its peer school districts.

By the end of the late 2000s, about 10% of Shoreline’s enrollment came from outside of its district, replacing the loss of just over 10% of its resident students that had left to attend school in other districts. A much smaller percentage of students left to attend a charter school in a nearby town.

By maintaining its enrollment by accepting school choice students, Shoreline was able to maintain programs and services within what would otherwise be considered a small school district. To bring in students from other districts became a source of pride for Shoreline Schools; it was perceived as positive news that others were seeking out their schools. Kimball described the negative side of this influx of choice students as being “like a drug,” because if Shoreline or other districts were to give up the school choice student population, they would also have to forfeit some of the programs that were making their district appealing.

**Net neutral inter-district choice budget impact.** By accepting roughly an equivalent number of inter-district school choice students as it was losing, Shoreline was able to largely buffer its budget from the impact of inter-district school choice. At a time when charter school enrollment was slowly expanding, between 2005 and 2010, the growth in Shoreline Public Schools’ loss of funding to charter school tuitions was significantly lower than what was faced by most Cape Cod school districts.

Shoreline’s 2010 per pupil expenditures were close to the Cape average and about three times as much as the $5,000 the district received for inter-district school choice tuitions. Kimball commented that some town leaders had continuing difficulty with school choice tuitions
and why the district would be offering its education resources to others for half or less than what the district was taking in in tuition. He explained that he encouraged town leaders to imagine a classroom that could have 20 students, but there is a teacher, ten students, and ten empty desks. “You have a choice that on each of those [empty] desks you can have dust or you can have a check for $5,000. Which do you want?”

There were times when some on the town’s Finance Committee would take the logic of paying only $5,000 for school choice tuitions out for students attending school in other districts to an extreme. Kimball recounts a couple members were advocating to “just choice them all out; that’s cheaper than funding the full per pupil.”

**Constructive responses to competition: marketing and innovation.** Kimball saw competition with the charters and other school districts as primarily negative, given the enrollment loss and budgetary impact, but also acknowledged that the competition had a positive side. “The market place mentality does inspire some positive things. You have to up your game.” In some cases it gets the community, School Committee, Selectmen, and Finance Committee to roll the dice a little with money to hopefully see a positive outcome and students being pulled back into the district.

The most tangible artifact of this market place mentality was a brochure Shoreline Public Schools developed to put into the local newspaper the week before its Town Meeting. The brochure was also put into real estate offices to educate prospective home buyers about the town’s school system. The purpose of the brochure was to raise awareness of the district and to encourage residents of the Town of Shoreline to support the school budget. The brochure did not denigrate other districts or schools and was not developed to steal another district’s students. It simply communicated district pride. Kimball wanted families to be happy that their children
Kimball considered competition for students to be the driver in allowing Shoreline Schools to bring K-12 world language instruction to the district. Competition gave Shoreline a, “focus on academic achievement,” he said. Competitive pressure allowed the district to acquire and maintain the fiscal resources needed to provide staffing to expand this world language instruction beyond middle school and high school by pushing it into all elementary grades where Kimball noted, “The literature says they learn [languages] better at an earlier stage.”

Not only did competitive pressure allow for this expansion of world language instruction across all grade levels, it allowed Kimball to protect things like Advanced Placement courses and multiple world languages at its small high school. Competition supported his ability to maintain small class sizes in the district and enhanced cultural aspects of the schools. For example, the need to have a strong athletic program led to the creation of a football program at Shoreline’s small high school. While their new football team struggled mightily in its fledgling years, as he put it, “When you’re out there for Friday Night Lights at a game, it almost doesn’t matter what the success level is.”

Competition was responsible for Shoreline Schools adding Naviance guidance and career planning software at both the middle school and high school levels. This was particularly important in helping the district retain students that might have made uninformed decisions and left the district for the technical high school after eighth grade. The Naviance software tool helped staff guide seventh and eighth graders through exercises to help the students determine what they might do with the rest of their lives. This made the students more enlightened
consumers when it came to making the decision at the end of eighth grade to attend a technical high school or the more college preparatory Shoreline High School.

**The darker side of competition: undermining core values of public education.** With the introduction of charter schools and inter-district school choice, there became a pervasive need for Cape school districts to market themselves, but one could question whether this only diverted time and resources away from the true educational mission of schools. Districts opted for a variety of different means to reach prospective families, including newspaper ads, radio spots, brochures, parent forums, and even television commercials. What Shoreline learned from the technical school, neighboring school districts, and the Cape’s Commonwealth charter schools was this need to market the district. In a moment of what Kimball called “brilliance” while understanding the competitive landscape impacting his district, he concluded, “If they’re going to market what they have to offer, why aren’t we doing the same?” Shoreline launched into the same expenditures of time and resources on marketing as their competitors. The district began “to look at the public school institution as a business that you promote to the community, and you are in competition with competing businesses,” recounted Kimball. “You are required to be entrepreneurial.”

Kimball expressed dismay at the offenses committed against Shoreline by a neighboring school district, vying for its students through inter-district school choice. He said that a lot of this neighboring district’s academic accolades were well earned, but there were a lot of unethical things that went under the radar, ranging from looping the other district’s buses through the town of Shoreline to transport its students to the rival district or actively recruiting some of Shoreline’s best athletes. These unethical things tended to “slither under the wire for a while and not rise to the level of an offense that gets addressed, and that’s a problem.”
Because Shoreline, too, was attracting students from neighboring districts, Kimball concurrently noted that, “It did not satisfy or gratify me to be undermining their programs, but once you open the door to choice, the doors are open. It’s insidious. On the surface it may look like a reasonable way to improve things, and underneath it’s corrupt, and it’s undermining a lot of the things that are core values of public education.”

**Mariner’s Point Superintendent Interview**

Patrick Moss was the former Superintendent of the Mariner’s Point School District. Like most of the superintendents in this study, Moss was a “wash-ashore” – he moved to Cape Cod to take on a new challenge as the Superintendent in a school district that was struggling to maintain community fiscal support for its schools and to subsequently retain its student enrollment and educational programs. He had previous administrative experience in Western Massachusetts.

Mariner’s Point is a medium-sized district with an enrollment between 3,000 and 5,500 students. Unlike the other school districts in this study, which either benefited or were holding their own within the context of school choice, Mariner’s Point progressively lost more students and more funding within the competitive landscape of school choice between 2005 and 2010. In the game of school choice, there are winners and losers – Mariner’s Point was unfortunately losing this game.

Of the districts in this study, Mariner’s Point experienced the greatest exodus of students out of its schools in favor of other school choice alternatives made possible by Massachusetts’ Education Reform Act of 1993. Mariner’s Point lost an appreciable number of students through inter-district school choice, with the majority of these students opting to attend school districts to its east. It also lost a sizeable number of students to the region’s two Commonwealth charter schools. Despite having its doors open to school choice and seeing more families opting into its
schools through school choice than most Cape Cod school districts, the influx of students only offset a fraction of the families fleeing the district.

When Moss arrived at Mariner’s Point, there were eight schools, partly because of the age and deferred upkeep of its school buildings, partly because of a declining school-aged enrollment on the Cape, and partly because of the continuing loss of students due to school choice. Mariner’s Point closed and consolidated schools under Moss’ tenure. By 2010, Mariner’s Point had become a district of only five schools.

Mariner’s Point faced some difficult budget years throughout this time period. Year after year, Moss found it challenging to put teachers or educational programs on the chopping block, and this fiscal uncertainty only fueled an exodus of students from the school district, which in turn fiscally compromised the school district even further because of the tuition dollars lost. Moss recalled that in a year where full-day kindergarten was on the chopping block unless increased funding was going to be supported by the voters in the town, his district lost an entire classroom’s worth of kindergarteners to a neighboring school district as families fled to provide more financial and educational certainty for their children. Likewise, Moss commented that all it takes is some sort of controversy with a staff member and parents will be looking elsewhere for their children’s education.

**Ruling out other potential sources of competition.** Moss did not view private schools, parochial schools, or homeschooling as competitively impacting the Mariner’s Point School District. Of these three sources of potential competition for students, Moss stated that the parochial schools drew a few more Mariner’s Point families. Moss did not see this family decision as an indictment of his schools, rather that the family was making the decision for religious reasons.
Concerns about recruitment and approach to technical schools education. The area’s technical high school was located just a few miles away from Mariner’s Point High School. Like Kimball, Moss perceived his district’s high school as being in competition with the area’s technical high school for students. Also like Kimball, Moss perceived this competition as being driven largely by the technical school’s recruiting practices. He saw technical high schools as serving particular vocationally-oriented students, but expressed concern that the technical high school was recruiting students broadly. Moss commented that technical high schools “had the glitz” that the local school districts’ high schools don’t have, so some students were making decisions based on glitz rather than based on the educational program best suited for them. He also expressed concern that there were entrance criteria at the technical schools, which meant some students who might need the program but who have had behavioral or academic challenges may not be accepted into the vocational program that is perhaps a much better fit for the student’s individual interests and future calling.

When it came to technical education, Moss was a proponent of an approach similar to New York State’s Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) vocational program, where students get a vocational experience at the technical high school and an academic experience at their local high school, spending part of each day at each institution. He felt a BOCES approach would give students more academic and extracurricular options, provide more vocational openings for students, and reduce some of the redundancies of the parallel high school system that was in place on Cape Cod. He also understood the challenge of implementing such a radically different model, when the region was so deeply entrenched in the vocational approach in place. He felt the competition with the area’s technical high school stopped the conversation
about how it might regionalize differently or provide its programing differently to better serve students who would benefit from a vocational experience.

**Unfair and elitist practices of charter schools.** During the late 2000s, roughly 3% of Mariner’s Point Public School’s potential enrollment had left for Cape Cod’s two Commonwealth charter schools. Moss noted that some families in his district had a misperception that Mariner’s Point High School was a “big scary place” and sought out the Cape’s charter high school for what they believed to be a more personalized education.

The exodus out of Mariner’s Point seemed “elitist,” and Moss felt that parents wanted a “private school education on public money.” The students leaving Mariner’s Point for the charter schools were some of the district’s most academically high-performing students. This homogeneous self-selection of high-performing students with involved parents was changing the both the academic diversity of the district and its complexion. Mariner’s Point Public Schools was becoming increasingly diverse, as the majority of students leaving were white.

Moss emphasized that with rare occasions, every student leaving for the Cape’s charter schools were leaving Mariner’s Point School District already scoring proficient or advanced on the state’s MCAS assessment. The state and public make judgements on districts like Mariner’s Point based on students’ MCAS assessment results. While Mariner’s Point provided the foundational K-8 experience for many students heading to the Cape’s charter high school, Mariner’s Point did not get credit for these students’ MCAS results. The district’s grade 10 MCAS results were based solely on the student population left, after nearly 10% of the district’s best students exited by grade 9 for choice opportunities elsewhere. Moss felt that it was unfair that his district was held responsible for its SPED out-of-district student’s MCAS scores, but not
credited for the performance of its former students attending public schools, and charter schools in particular, outside of its district.

Moss’ perception of how the charter schools actively counseled students out when they failed to perform, academically or behaviorally, as equally unfair. He shared a story of a parent who rebuked the charter’s counseling out of their child, but Moss emphasized that most parents would fold after realizing that the charter didn’t want their child. The local school districts do not have the option of counseling students out – they educate all who enter their doors.

**Losing at inter-district choice competition.** While Mariner’s Point lost more students and more money to the charter schools than any of the other school districts in this study, the losses of enrollment and tuition due to inter-district school choice was even more pronounced. Moss stated that, “School choice changes how parents feel about where they can get their services.” In Western Massachusetts, where school districts are more geographically spread out, he felt parents were less likely to elect for inter-district choice, particularly if they had to drive their children for an hour to reach the choice placement. The Cape’s compact geography and small towns promoted some of this school choice movement.

Moss felt that school choice unfortunately caused parents to just send their child to a neighboring school district, rather than staying and fighting for the quality of schools they wanted within their own town. Two small, more-eastern, districts had developed an aura, “that they were a place to go for high performing placements, and the rest of us were like chopped liver,” Moss recalled. Mariner’s Point’s was larger and could offer a broader range of opportunities than either of these smaller districts. Nonetheless, it continued to hemorrhage students to these districts despite their lack of the same breadth of academic and extracurricular options.
When asked why families would seek out other districts through inter-district school choice, the topics of academics and athletics came up. Moss stated that often he heard that families were seeking “greater rigor,” despite his district’s robust Advanced Placement program at Mariner’s Point High School. Moss also raised a perspective mentioned by other superintendents that inter-district school choice sometimes provides opportunities to play for students that are sitting on the bench for their home district’s athletic teams. The student may be second tier in their home district but a starter on the team in a choice district.

Moss recalled raising the issue of inter-district school choice with his peer Cape Cod superintendents at a meeting, asking, “Why are we doing this to each other?” When one of superintendents from a small district chimed in and said that she couldn’t stop or her district wouldn’t have any kids to maintain its programs, the brief conversation ended. School choice had already begun on the Cape by the time Moss started at Mariner’s Point, and inter-district school choice was not readily going to be reined in.

**Substantial enrollment impact.** While the size of Sandy Neck Schools greatly buffered any impact of school choice on the district, the magnitude of school choice occurring in Mariner’s Point was too great to buffer. Sandy Neck and Mariner’s Point lost a similar number of students to the Cape’s charter schools and gained similar numbers of students through inter-district school choice, but Mariner’s Point lost significantly more students to inter-district school choice and the net enrollment impact on the district was appreciable. In 2005, charter schools and neighboring school districts had siphoned off 3.5% of Mariner’s Point’s enrollment, and by 2010 this had grown to a loss of 9.5% of the district’s enrollment.

**Substantial budget impact.** Given the district’s magnitude of enrollment loss, Mariner’s Point experienced rather pronounced budget impacts from the lost tuition dollars paid out to
charter schools and other school districts. As the enrollment lost to school choice increased from 2005 to 2010, Mariner’s Point had to more than double the school resources spent on tuition. By 2010, this grew to nearly 4.5% of the district’s total school expenditures.

Despite Mariner’s Point’s per pupil expenditures being over twice the legislatively established $5,000 per student inter-district school choice tuition, Moss stated that few ever questioned the district’s decision to open its doors to school choice. Moss said, “Most feel like we have to be in the game.” He saw it as the district compensating for the students it had lost to the charters and other districts. Mariner’s Point was truly filling empty seats, and school choice allowed the district to replace some of the students that had exited the district.

**Constructive responses to competition: public relations and innovation.** With so many school districts on Cape Cod advertising to recruit inter-district school choice families, such advertisement and recruitment could be viewed as a negative response to competition. Moss brought up a very unique spin on advertising as it pertained to Mariner’s Point. He emphasized that “We’re not advertising to get more kids. We’re advertising to keep the ones we have. What we’ve discovered is it makes the people in our community feel good about their schools.” In his district, this advertisement, while it may have brought in some inter-district school choice students, was largely an effort in building community pride for the great things happening within Mariner’s Point Public Schools. It would be hard to characterize building pride as a negative response to competition.

Mariner’s Point had done some district reconfiguration that was at least partly driven by the competitive landscape of school choice on the Cape. The district historically lost a number of students to the Cape’s charter high school in the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. The district initially innovated by creating an Academic Academy at its high school, where
primarily high achieving and motivated students would apply to attend eighth grade at the high school rather than at the middle school. By getting students to see the wonderful possibilities at Mariner’s Point High School as eighth graders, these students and their families began to make more informed decisions on where to attend school for Grades 9-12. Ultimately, Mariner’s Point began to send all 8th graders to the high school. Charter school enrollment records from 2005 to 2010 support that this reconfiguration was correlated with Mariner’s Point not losing more students to the charters at a time when most Cape Cod school districts did experience greater losses of high school students to the charter high school.

**The darker side of competition: inequity and loss of community pride.** Moss raised concerns about inequities that school choice has created. In terms of inter-district school choice, he described what he considered to be an unfair and unethical practice where one of the Cape’s school districts actively recruited and bused students across district lines to bolster its enrollment at the expense of Mariner’s Point. Moss indicated that he, too, once considered sending a bus into the district to the west of Mariner’s Point to bring in more inter-district school choice students, but did not as “a professional courtesy” to the neighboring superintendent. From the perspective of charter school choice, his concerns were largely centered on the “brain drain” that the charter admissions process had on his district, where a disproportionate number of advanced and proficient students are applying to and being accepted by the charter, causing the charters not to reflect the academic diversity of children in the surrounding communities.

Moss explained that Mariner’s Point advertised to raise the awareness of its own families of the great things happening within its schools. He shared that the biggest challenge of school choice for his town was, “Choice dilutes the pride factor.” Pride is what Moss credits for having a community willing to support its schools, and with so many families opting out of the district
for charter schools or leaving through inter-district school choice, maintaining that pride was an ongoing challenge for Moss’ superintendency and his schools.

**Prominent Themes**

Coding and analysis of the four interviews of former Cape Cod superintendents, who led their districts between 2005 and 2010, allowed the researcher to identify specific themes within the information shared in each interview. There were common themes discussed earlier that appeared within each of the four interviews. These included strong feelings about negative competitors and the school choice system, as well as perceived benefits of school choice competition. Just as each interview was analyzed for common themes, the researcher reviewed the transcripts to identify prominent themes and commonalities that arise across the interviews. This analysis resulted in the identification of five prominent themes:

- Competition can be beneficial
- Student loss as a motivator for change
- Inequity of choice
- Loss of community
- Impediments to change

Each of these is further discussed below.

**Competition can be beneficial**

A theme across all four interviews was that the superintendents, often begrudgingly, viewed school choice competition has having at least some beneficial impact on their districts. Former Sea Crest Superintendent Terrance clearly believed that competition from a nearby charter school motivated his district to improve. He considered the charter as a “direct existential threat, and it made us better.” He was able to rally his staff behind the threat of
competition to improve Sea Crest’s educational program and outcomes for students. In the end Sea Crest was able to decrease the net number of students and funding leaving its district due to school choice.

Sandy Neck Superintendent Newton, whose district was the largest in this study and by virtue of its large size faced the least amount of competitive pressure (as calculated in Table 2), felt the culture of competition was “slightly healthy.” She said her district needed to “keep in the back of our minds that we could lose kids if we weren’t performing well.” Similarly, Shoreline Public Schools, the smallest district in this study, which faced a consistently moderate level of competitive pressure throughout the late 2000s, focused on improving its programs and educational services because its schools needed to be more competitive or would lose students to the charter, other districts, or the technical high school. Shoreline’s former superintendent recognized that giving parents choice “improved education because we had to be competitive.” Moss viewed giving parent’s choice as having improved education for students in Mariner’s Point because, “It encouraged the town to spend money on education.” It provided the School Committee strength and a focal point to guide town leaders and the voters to fiscally support the town’s schools. Historically, when there had been a lack of fiscal support for the Mariner’s Point schools, it sparked an increased exodus from the district. To keep its programs and students, the town needed to continue to maintain and enhance its level of funding for the school district. Student loss as a motivator for change

Theoretically school choice competition will motivate districts to improve, and the feedback from the superintendents tended to support some beneficial impacts of competition. This study also probed whether it was the loss of funding or loss of students that was driving administrative decisions made in four districts on Cape Cod during the late 2000s, at a time when
the region was experiencing a school-aged population decline. Across the four interviews, it appears that each superintendent was far more concerned about maintaining enrollment and educational programs than the financial implications of school choice competition.

**Students, not money, as the driver.** During the timeframe of this study, Sea Crest, Sandy Neck, and Mariner’s Point were collectively paying over $3 million in tuitions to support the operations of the two Cape Cod commonwealth charter schools. Shoreline and Mariner’s Point were also collectively paying out over $2.5 million in tuition to neighboring school districts for students that had left their home districts through the inter-district school choice program. Despite the fact that nearly $10 million dollars was moving out of Cape Cod school district budgets to pay for charter school and inter-district school choice tuitions, there was not anything that stood out in the interviews with former superintendents that indicated that they were making decisions regarding school choice that were specifically fiscally-driven. The decisions appeared to be far more student-driven or program-driven.

Each district in this study was participating in the state’s inter-district school choice program and was accepting students from other districts, and for each of these students was accepting $5,000 in tuition when the district’s per pupil expenditures were at least double, if not triple, this amount. The inter-district school choice is a program based on a “free seat” model, where districts get a modest $5,000 tuition for each student brought into the district to fill vacant seats in classrooms left with small class sizes. The $5,000 is meant to offset the district’s incremental cost for educating students occupying these free seats, where the teacher, facility, and the administrative costs have already been covered. Adding significantly more students than there are free seats creates a situation where the district begins to incur staffing costs in excess of $5,000, and begins to not make fiscal sense.
A review of the state’s inter-district school choice data (Appendix A Table A4) suggests that by 2010 both Nauset Regional Schools and Chatham Public Schools were operating outside the “free seat” model for inter-district school choice. Both districts were enrolling over 170 inter-district school choice students and were likely bolstering their enrollment to the point where they were adding staffing to meet some of the educational needs of these choice students. This would have allowed each district to have a larger educational program, and likely more opportunities for students, than if the district only filled the “free seats” that it had available. For these districts, their inter-district school choice students appeared to have a value in excess of the $5,000 tuition received.

When a legislative deal temporarily mitigated the fiscal cost of charter school tuitions on Sea Crest Public Schools, the district still responded to the loss of students by focusing on program improvement to retain the town’s children within its schools. While slightly before the temporal window of this study, the former Sea Crest superintendent described how the state budget was amended in a way to mitigate the fiscal impact of the loss of so many of Sea Crest’s students to the nearby charter school. As Terrance put it, this legislative act meant that the charter school “didn’t cost us money, it just cost us smart kids and prestige.” Despite charter school competition temporarily not costing Sea Crest fiscally for a period of time, the district did strategically respond to the loss of students. From 2005 to 2010, Sea Crest made more headway than any other district in this study to make its schools more competitive, attracting more students and losing fewer students. This raises the question as to whether districts like Sandy Neck, Shoreline, or Mariner’s Point could have been better positioned to retain students had they been fiscally held harmless for losses. These districts averaged an annual loss of in excess of half a million each to charter schools, which could have gone a long ways to developing programs or
improving curricula to ideally keep their town’s families and students within their local school districts.

**Size and proximity matter.** If students were the important commodity to the Cape Cod school districts at a time of declining school-aged population, the size of the district and the proximity of the competitor appeared to influence the intensity of the competition and the superintendent’s reaction to it. There is a difference when a large district loses 50 students to school choice versus the impact if a small district loses 50 students to school choice. In 2010, Shoreline Public Schools, the smallest district in this study, had a net loss of 5.5% of its enrollment due to students leaving for charter schools and other districts. This caused Shoreline to expend 3% of its budget on tuitions. By contrast, in 2010 Sandy Neck Public Schools, the largest district in this study, lost more students than Shoreline Public Schools, but this only represented a loss of 2% of its enrollment and only 1% of its budget spent on tuitions. As a result, Shoreline Public Schools appeared to undergo more initiatives to maintain its enrollment than the larger Sandy Neck system.

The proximity of point sources of school choice competition appeared to also drive some of the superintendent’s visceral responses. The closer the competitor to the local district’s schools, the more negative the relationship between the potentially competing parties. For Sea Crest and Sandy Neck, the two districts in this study most closely located to the Cape’s two Commonwealth charter schools, the former superintendents viewed the charters as their main source of competition, and described quite poor relations with this competitor. Shoreline High School, by contrast, is located close to one of the Cape’s two technical high schools, and former Shoreline Superintendent Kimball most viscerally reacted in his interview to the competitive pressure that came from the technical high school.
Sea Crest’s former superintendent discounted the competitive influence of inter-district school choice, compared to the nearby charter, because the competing school district “was too distant.” There was one scenario raised by Mariner’s Point Superintendent Moss, who perceived the encroachment within his town lines by another Cape Cod school district as unethical. The rival school district was sending busses into neighboring communities, including Mariner’s Point, to pick up students at select hub bus stops and was bussing school choice students out of their home districts and to its schools. In the case of Mariner’s Point, the encroachment put the distant rival squarely in too close proximity with its home territory and the students it hoped to keep.

Even years after the fact, these superintendents carried visceral feelings about the competitor in most close proximity to their district’s schools. While close proximity had the potential to set the stage for cooperation, more often in this study, proximity with a competitor led to strained relations. These strained relations coincided with the lack of cooperation and collaboration amongst the region’s districts.

**Inequity of Choice**

All four superintendents shared concerns that school choice opportunities were not equitable and equally accessed by all students. The policies underpinning both with the charter schools and inter-district school choice favored a particular type of family and a particular type of student. The demographic data of enrollment at charter schools versus the Cape’s local school districts (Appendix A, Table A6) shows that the charter enrollment skews to have fewer low income students and fewer students with Special Education needs. The Cape’s charters also had no English language learner students during the six year time period of this study and were more white than the local district schools from which their enrollment is pulled.

According to Sandy Neck’s Superintendent Newton, the research shows, “if you have
involved parents, if you have high-achieving parents, then your kids are potentially high
achieving.” She later added, “Whenever a parent chooses a school, there's some measure of
greater support and greater investment.” School choice was not equitably favoring all of Sandy
Neck’s students. Students with more involved, better educated, and more informed parents were
applying to the charter school. As a result, the students being admitted to the nearby charter
from Sandy Neck’s potential high school enrollment were heavily skewed toward the district’s
high-performing students. The charter “took only the best and the brightest. So those were really
interested hardworking kids.” Given that a “public school takes all kids and cannot discriminate,
subtly or overtly,” Newton felt that school choice was leading to an unhealthy non-normalized
competition, where the charters were operating with a disparate, hard-working, higher-
performing, more parentally-invested and involved student population.

Sea Crest’s superintendent asserted that the nearby charter “stole our best kids, period,
end of story.” He had analyzed the achievement test scores of the students who left for the
charter, and the charter had half of the district’s best students and only one former Sea Crest
student whose achievement scores were at the 50th percentile or below. Superintendent Terrance
viewed the charter as an “egregious example of selection.” He viewed the school choice system
as skewed to have only students whose parents care enough to investigate alternatives leaving a
district, and this created a dynamic pulling some of the best and brightest out of Sea Crest’s
schools.

Shoreline’s Superintendent Kimball had a similar recollection. The charters were
skimming “academically-inclined kids.” He saw the admissions process for the charters as
drawing “potential Honor Society kids,” even if the charters say that anyone can apply. He
stated skeptically that when the charters “innocently draw the winners of the [admissions lottery]
pool -- amazingly every time, come up with a high-achieving student population.”

Mariner’s Point had created an Academic Academy program to which students needed to apply, creating a school choice opportunity within the district. What Mariner’s Point learned is that when children and families need to apply and want something different that they perceive is better, they are willing to work a lot harder. The students had to write an essay to apply and get into the Academic Academy, but in doing so, this Academy was drawing a harder working, more high-achieving segment of the district’s student enrollment.

Superintendent Moss extended the lessons learned from this intra-district choice option to what was happening to Mariner’s Point as it faced the competitive landscape of school choice on the Cape. He considered the charters, in particular, to be creating an elitist system. The students leaving Mariner’s Point through choice were students that had been performing at the advanced or at least the proficient level on the state’s MCAS assessment. The outflow of students was mostly Caucasian, and with nearly 10% of Mariner’s Point students leaving the district through choice options, the complexion and diversity of the district was rapidly changing.

Perhaps his greatest concern is that school choice was pulling not only high-achieving students but also involved parents from his district’s schools. Rather than empowering parents to fight for what they wanted in their local schools, school choice policies simply made it easy for involved parents to leave the district rather than staying and fighting for better schools that ultimately would benefit all children. These involved parents, opting for choice and having the fiscal ability to access these choice options, have the luxury of potentially providing a better educational experience for their children, but the children left behind in the local district are not so lucky and are left in a school system where significant fiscal resources are being sucked out by these school choice parents in the form of tuition payments for their childrens’ choice
A review of the state’s archived data on charter school enrollment on Cape Cod versus enrollment within the local school districts (Appendix A, Table A6) reveals a discrepancy between the percentage of low income and limited English proficient students in the charter schools compared to the region’s local schools. Access to the charters, and also to school choice, requires an informed parent who can understand the literature and procedures for school choice applications, something households with limited English proficiency may not be able to access. Likewise, both charter and inter-district school choice placement likely requires the parent to provide the transportation to and from school, which requires the family to have access to transportation and a family employment situation where a parent is available to take their child to school each day. These factors again further select against particular types of families and their children.

Parents are required to provide the transportation to and from school for the Cape’s charter schools or for students attending school through inter-district choice. This selects for parents that are involved, have financial means, and who have employment situations that allow them to be present for their child to provide this transportation. Their parents tended to be more involved, better educated, and more informed about educational options. Their children were growing up in households with parental support and financial advantages that many children unfortunately don’t experience. These are the ones who are most able to articulately advocate for all children, the ones the Mariner’s Point Superintendent most hoped would stay with the district and fight for better schools, rather than sending their children to a choice option.

The loss of such involved parents from local school districts was paralleled with the loss of their children. Each superintendent described how the charters, in particular, were
disproportionately pulling the local school district’s highest-performing students. In districts most impacted by school choice pressure, like Mariner’s Point, not only was the academic performance of the remaining student body shifting because of choice, but the complexion and diversity of the district was changing, as it was inextricably linked to factors like immigration status and wealth.

In Massachusetts, districts are often judged, by parents and the media, based on the percentage of students performing at the Advanced or Proficient level on the state’s 10th grade English Language Arts and Mathematics MCAS assessment. During the timeframe of this study, one Cape district was losing nearly 10% of its high-achieving students to school choice, another Cape district was taking in nearly 20% of its enrollment from other district’s high-achievers, and the charters appeared to be admitting a disproportionate number of each district’s best students. This further fueled winners and losers within the competitive landscape of school choice, and ultimately those most losing were the students remaining behind in districts where the high-performing, model-peer, students and tuition dollars had been siphoned away.

Loss of Community

While school choice competition can be beneficial, for districts in this study that were losing a significant number of students to school choice, the impact on the sense of community was great. The greater the flow of students out of a school district, the greater the loss of community. Of the districts in this study, Sea Crest and Sandy Neck Schools experienced the least outflow of students from their district, and arguably had a greater community connection to their schools. For Shoreline and Mariner’s Point Schools, the two districts in this study with proportionately more outflow of students, both superintendents clearly described how school choice created a loss of the sense of community.
Kimball perhaps best summarized the dilemma of school choice when asked whether the legislative act giving parents school choice improved the education for students in Shoreline Public Schools. “The answer is both. It improved the education because we had to be competitive, and it undermined the education because it took out some of the heart and soul of public education, which is that sense of community.” For Mariner’s Point Schools, Moss emphasized that this loss of community played out as a lack of parental support for the schools, particularly when the schools needed this support the most. When the sense of community is strong, parents stay and fight for what they want in their schools. With school choice, too frequently Moss sees parents as acquiescing and enrolling their child in a charter school or another school district rather than putting in the energy to fight for what’s right for their child and their home district. “Why do I have to always fight for what I want, when I can go next door?” explained Moss, “It’s a different generation. They’re not willing to put in the time that it takes to get an override passed [to provide increased support for the school budget] or the legwork that it takes to be an activist.”

The superintendents in both Shoreline and Mariner’s Point invested energy and resources on building community pride in their schools. Superintendent Kimball made it his mission to have Shoreline students and families happy enough with the district’s schools to have them stay with their home schools, rather than opting for choice. He felt like he was constantly combating the cliché that the grass is always greener on the other side, when he knew that what Shoreline had to offer was of equal quality to the choice alternatives to which so many of his families flocked. Similarly, Superintendent Moss described how Mariner’s Point was using advertisement, not particularly to entice school choice students to his district, but to have his
town’s families hear the radio spots, describing the great things happening within the district, and feel pride for their schools.

The bulk of funding for Massachusetts’ local school districts comes from real estate property taxes. Massachusetts’ property taxes cannot increase more than 2.5% in a year without voter approval of a tax override. When times become fiscally challenging for a community, the school district may experience budget cuts that impact staffing and educational programs. If a family’s children are at a charter school or another school district, tuition for these children will be paid by the local school district no matter what. When a tax override is needed to support staffing and educational programming in the local school district, families living in the town who have left by school choice to charters or other districts have no vested interest in supporting their local community’s schools. If anything, supporting the tax override will potentially increase the family’s tax bill and provide no apparent educational gain for their children who are already attending schools elsewhere. Garnering support for property tax increases to enhance or maintain the district’s educational program becomes challenging when school choice has pulled involved parents from the local school district, leaving fewer vested parents to advocate for, and vote to support, the needs of the local schools. The challenge of getting fiscal support for the schools is further compounded because Cape Cod has become a retirement haven where the majority of the homes have no school-aged children.

**Impediments to Change**

School choice competition theoretically may motivate districts to improve. If there is not clear or bold change in the face of competitive pressure, it may be that there are impediments limiting the potential change. While each district was aware of the need to be competitive to maintain its student enrollment, there appeared to be a number of factors holding districts back
from making significant headway within the competitive landscape of school choice or boldly innovating to potentially improve the quality of education within a district or the region. This study revealed three factors that may be limiting the potential of school choice competition to effect change.

**Superintendent turnover.** Kimball recalled how a new superintendent at another Cape Cod school district had announced at a meeting after being in his position and on the Cape for only a few months that, “He had figured out how to deal with school choice.” Kimball pointed out to his new colleague that it takes much longer than a few months to understand the school choice phenomenon because so much of it lies beneath the surface, and it takes years to fully understand what lurks beneath the waterline. Part of the problem may be the high rate of turnover of superintendents. According to Kimball, “It takes you five years to really understand the problem, and in five years, most superintendents are going,” leaving the next superintendent to, “stumble through it long enough to finally figure it out,” but by the time they do, they are either retired or taking a job someplace else.

This high turnover of superintendents limits the effectiveness of superintendents to successfully navigate within this competitive landscape. Presuming Kimball was right, it takes a few years to understand the dynamics of the competition in order to begin guiding a district towards improvement within the context of school choice competition. Perhaps not coincidentally, of the superintendents in this study, former Sea Crest Superintendent Terrance’s district was the one that faired the best within the competitive landscape of school choice. Terrance was also the superintendent who had spent the longest time on Cape Cod and had the greatest longevity leading his school district.
**Perceived inequities with charters.** There appears to be significant resentment expressed by each of the former superintendents towards the region’s Commonwealth charter schools, which could be partly responsible for the negligible amount of cooperation seen between the local districts and the charters. Kimball emphasized, “I thought the intended purpose of the charters was to inspire us all, and I have yet to see that.” This sentiment was shared by each of the superintendents and was fueled by a feeling that the charters were able to play by different and inequitable rules that created an uneven playing field. Given that the playing field was perceived to be lopsided, the potential lessons that could be learned from the charters would be viewed with a negative bias by these superintendents, as potentially not being applicable because they viewed the charters as being able to operate under such disparate rules and regulations.

There was a shared perception raised from some of the superintendents that the charters would counsel out challenging students. The superintendents of both Sea Crest and Mariner’s Point shared stories of the charter’s counseling challenging students out, which potentially leaves a more homogeneous, less-challenging, student population for the charter to educate. On the contrary, the local school districts are responsible for educating all students, including welcoming back challenging students who may have been counseled out of the charters.

The charters are also more homogeneous when it comes to what Massachusetts refers to as high needs populations, which include students with special education needs, students that are economically disadvantaged, and students for whom English is a second language. The charters have fewer students with learning disabilities, fewer students that are low income, and fewer students with limited English proficiency (Appendix A Table A6). In the interview with the former Mariner’s Point superintendent, he emphasized that the free and reduced lunch population
and English language learner populations have risen significantly on the Cape since 2005. He noted that in 2005, his district had one ELL teacher, and a decade later they had thirteen ELL teachers. During this time, the charters didn’t have a single ELL student. Moss had very concrete ideas on how charter school admissions could be designed to ensure fairness and equity, but if charter admissions reflected the true heterogeneity of the local districts, the charters would likely not be able to tout such strong MCAS scores or other measures of academic outcomes.

Charters can move to avoid competition or seek untapped markets, but local school districts can’t. Both Terrance and Kimball raised in their interviews a belief that one of the charter schools moved away from a district that was becoming more academically competitive to an area with districts that had as yet to improve their academic programs.

When Shoreline Public Schools needed to build a new high school, the Massachusetts School Building Authority denied their request for a 400-student high school, stating that the state would no longer support the construction of small 400-student high schools and that Shoreline would need to seek regionalization with another district. This decision happened at the same moment in time when the state’s Board of Education voted to allow the Cape’s charter high school to expand and build a second 400-student high school in Hyannis. This charter expansion was also granted at a time when the school-aged population on the Cape was in decline.

Conceptually, the charters were to be models of innovation. Given that charter demographics do not reflect the student populations served in the local school districts, the local districts see the happenings in the “more homogeneous” charters as having limited applicability to the “more heterogeneous” local district schools. When practices of the charters enable them to counsel out students, when charters can move their school away from competitive pressures, or when charters are permitted to expand at a time of when the school-age population in the region
is in decline, it leads to resentment from leadership, and arguably staff, of the local school
districts. This ill will between the retired superintendents and the charters was palpable and
would have likely limited any potential cross-pollination of innovative ideas that may come from
the charters.

**Lack of regional thinking.** School choice undermined how school leaders looked at
other districts. Kimball reflected on school choice as causing other districts, with whom you
may otherwise be able to seek cooperative relationships, as “either taking your kids or a source
of kids – that’s unhealthy.”

Moss was familiar with New York State’s Boards of Cooperative Educational Services
(BOCES) vocational programming, where students went to the BOCES vocational program part-
time and attended their home school district part-time. Because it was a part-time program, the
students graduated from their home high schools, rather than having the technical schools pull
from the local district’s enrollment. While Moss raised this concept with the Superintendent of
the area’s technical high school, the conversation didn’t go anywhere. Moss ultimately felt that
competition between the local school districts and the nearby technical high school stopped the
conversation about how the technical high school might regionalize differently or provide its
programming differently to better serve students who would benefit from a vocational experience.

Three of the superintendents in this study raised the concept of greater regionalization on
Cape Cod as a potential solution to an ever-declining school-aged student population. Moss
momentarily suggested that a Barnstable County Regional School District might be one of the
only ways to end the challenges of school choice on the Cape, and discussed how he had
explored further regionalization with adjacent districts and talked about novel concepts like
magnet high schools. Given how small a number of districts are becoming on the Cape,
particularly in light of the ever-declining school-aged population, Newton emphasized that “Collaboration is more of an answer than competition, especially given the demographics and enrollment.” She, too, alluded to the potential need and benefit for Barnstable County schools to further regionalize. Kimball spent a significant portion of his superintendency guiding Shoreline Public Schools through an exploration of regionalization with neighboring towns’ schools.

In 2010, the Town of Shoreline voted to regionalize with a neighboring town. The interview with former Superintendent Kimball interestingly revealed that school choice competition had little to do with initiating this regionalization process. Shoreline Public Schools needed a new high school, and the Massachusetts School Building Authority refused to support the construction of a small 400-student high school, and instructed Shoreline Public to seek regionalization with a neighbor. By virtue of the Massachusetts School Building Authority’s demands, the wheels of progress towards regionalization began to turn again. Coincidently, because of declining student enrollment, Shoreline’s neighboring town had reached out to Shoreline in 1993 wanting to regionalize with them and was rejected by Shoreline. This further emphasizes how local autonomy and lack of regional thinking have long-standing roots on the Cape.

Lastly, each superintendent in this study expressed a want to not be involved in inter-district school choice, and preferred to focus on educating their own town’s students. The dynamics found each continuing the status quo, rather than working together to end what each saw as a practice that was regionally not ideal.

Summary of Findings

Each of the former superintendents in this study described how their district was impacted by and reacted to school choice competition brought about primarily by charter schools
and inter-district school choice. This study explored districts that spanned the spectrum from winning to losing in the competitive landscape of school choice competition. Through in-depth interviews it was clear that the former superintendents had very strong opinions about the competitive landscape and whether school choice ultimately benefited or detracted from the educational experience of students in their districts.

Each of the superintendents interviewed for this study indicated that giving parents school choice had pushed their district to become more competitive, ideally improving the schools and educational experiences for students in their district. The loss of students, rather than the loss of funding, appeared to be the motivator for districts to implement changes to improve their schools and programs. While school choice competition inspired some improvements at the local level, in every district there was a darker side of competition seen that was perhaps not the intent of the legislative acts bringing about inter-district school choice and charter schools.

In districts where student flow due to school choice is greatest, there was an erosion of the sense of community and school pride. School choice has made it easy for parents to send their children to other public education options, rather than sticking with their home district and fighting for what they want in their schools. These families, who have elected for choice options for their children, also lack a vested interest in fiscally supporting their local district’s schools. This lack of activism and lack of fiscal support fuels further exodus from districts and further erosion of pride.

While the competitive pressure of school choice has the potential to motivate local districts to improve schools and educational programs to better serve students, there also appear to be impediments to the ability of school choice to influence change. There was significant
resentment from the local districts towards the charter schools, which were seen as being
demographically different from the populations left in the local districts – this resentment limited
potential collaboration with the charters and the flow of any innovative ideas. High
superintendent turnover limited district improvement within Cape Cod’s competitive school
choice landscape. Lack of collegiality, largely created by the region’s intense school choice
competition, limited the ability of district administrators to productively seek out bold regional
alternatives that may improve educational experiences for students.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Throughout the country, states have enacted legislation and policies to give parents freedom to choose the school that will provide their children a publicly funded education. In Massachusetts, two legislative acts opened some of these choice options to parents. First, in 1991, inter-district school choice was authorized, allowing parents to send their child to a school district outside of the community in which the family lives, so long as the receiving school district has elected to open itself to school choice students and has space available. Second, in 1993, the Massachusetts Education Reform act authorized the formation of charter schools within the state. A third choice option that became highlighted based on the interviews of superintendents in this study was the option of attending a technical high school versus the local school district’s more college-preparatory high school. In this case, students attend the technical high school full-time, getting both their academic and vocational education at these schools, rather than splitting their day between the local high school and the region’s vocational program.

The presumption is that market pressure, created by the potential loss of students and funding, would exert pressure on local school districts. Market theory predicts that providing parents the option of school choice encourages a healthy competition amongst public schools that will ultimately better serve all students because competition between schools exerts market pressures that motivates all schools to improve. Ideally, the measure of effectiveness of school choice policies should be measured on whether this market pressure improves the educational experiences for all children, and not just the children from families who elect or have the ability to avail themselves to school choice.
Some authors have equated the market pressure from school choice competition as creating “a rising tide that lifts all boats” (Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013, p. 29), improving the educational experiences for all children. If there is not “a rising tide that lifts all boats,” then the very nature of competition may create a public education system where there are winners and losers within the landscape of school choice. Ultimately, if this is the case, those really losing are the children who remain within school districts losing the school choice competitive melee.

This study reveals an undertone of inequity of choice, an inequity that often has socio-economic implications. Less affluent families often do not have the fiscal resources to buy homes in communities with higher performing schools. The legislative acts authorizing inter-district school choice and charter schools in concept opens these high performing schools which are generally located in more affluent communities, providing these higher-quality educational options for all families and children. These school choices options are generally only available to children if their parents can read and educate themselves on how to access these choice options, have parental band-width to explore these choice options for their child, and have the ability to transport their child to these choice options, which generally do not provide transportation to school. This means that to exercise school choice, families generally need one parent to drive their child which requires a vehicle, sustained daily commitment to a child’s education, and a parent that has a work situation that would allow them to be available before and after school for their child. For immigrant families where English is not spoken at home, or for economically-disadvantaged families who might not have a car or flexible employment schedules, charter schools and inter-district school choice may not be options.

This study examines the often-neglected area of research on how government regulations and legislation influence competition (Heil, Lehmann, & Stremersch, 2010). This study explores
whether Massachusetts’ policies on inter-district school choice and charter schools are promoting healthy market competition or leading to suboptimal outcomes for schools. Understanding how Cape Cod superintendents strategically responded to government-regulated school choice and how these regulations impacted each district may shed light on whether these regulations have improved education for all students and may be applicable to similar regulations throughout the United States.

**Review of Methodology**

This was a collective case study of how superintendents strategically responded to school choice competition on Cape Cod and the impact of this competition on their districts. The study addressed three research questions:

1. To what extent did inter-district school choice and charter school choice impact the district’s enrollment, demographics, and budget?

2. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents negatively responding with direct conflict over students or obstruction of choice (e.g. territorial disputes, obstructive responses, and fiscal disputes)?

3. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents responding with constructive initiatives to mitigate enrollment losses (e.g. innovation, cooperation, or increasing efficiency)?

   The participants were four largely retired school superintendents who were at the helm of a Cape Cod school district between the years of 2005 and 2010. The superintendents’ experiences running their schools within the landscape of regional school choice competition, how they responded to competitive pressure, and why were probed for significant themes. The superintendents’ recollections and themes that emerged were also triangulated with archived
enrollment and financial data for each Cape Cod school district during the focus time period. Research in the literature related to school choice and administrative decision-making was compared with the prominent themes that were extracted from the data by lean coding the transcripts, then organizing the codes across all transcripts into these prominent themes. The research for this study was done in a secure manner, and the four superintendents and their districts purposefully kept anonymous to maintain trust and candor during each interview and how each interview was reported out in this dissertation.

This chapter will be divided into the following sections: a discussion of major findings, a discussion of these findings in relation to the study’s theoretical framework a discussion of these findings in relation to the existing literature, a discussion of this study’s limitations, a conclusion, a summary of the significance of this study, and avenues for future study related to this topic. The chapter closes with a personal reflection on this topic from the scholar-practitioner who has experienced being a superintendent in both settings with negligible school choice competition as well as experiences within the intense competitive landscape of Cape Cod

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is largely grounded within the discipline of economics. Economic theory and market dynamics (Armor & Peiser, 1997) should dictate how school choice influences local school districts and the decisions superintendents are making in response to competitive pressure. Theoretically, the loss of students and funding, due to charter school or inter-district school choice competition, should pressure local school districts to improve. Those districts most impacted by competitive pressure should be motivated to strategically respond to market forces; thereby improving their programs in order to retain and
attract students. Districts facing less competitive pressure should be less motivated to respond by adjusting programs to maintain enrollment.

Table 3

*District Enrollment and the Estimated Competitive Impact from School Choice, 2005 versus 2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Pseudonym</th>
<th>PreK-12 Enrollment</th>
<th>2005 Estimated Competitive Impact from School Choice</th>
<th>2010 Estimated Competitive Impact from School Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sea Crest Public Schools &lt;3000 students</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Neck Public Schools 3000-5500 students</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoreline Public Schools &lt;3000 students</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariner’s Point 3000-5500 students</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evidence of market dynamics at play.** An analysis of the state enrollment data and movement of school choice into and out of each Cape school district revealed that the school districts in this study spanned the range of competitive pressures. This data is summarized for the four school districts in this study in Table 3. Sandy Neck Public Schools was estimated to experience only mild competitive pressure between the years of 2005 and 2010. Compared to the other three districts in this study, Sandy Neck appeared to not specifically develop programs to counter the impact of competitive pressure. As Superintendent Newton stated, “Did we add programs? I don’t think so.” By contrast, Sea Crest, Shoreline, and Mariner’s Point all experienced what was estimated as moderate competitive pressure in 2005, and each district’s superintendent described initiatives that were undertaken to develop or improve programs to retain students.
While the districts that were experiencing more competitive pressure all appeared to respond accordingly to market dynamics, not all of the districts were equally successful in this response. Frank and Cook (1995) describe how small differences in performance can translate into large differences in reward in a “winner-take-all” market. The reward, in the case of school choice competition, was not just more students, but getting more students who were disproportionately high-achievers. Sea Crest Public Schools and the charters became the winners within this “winner-take-all” market, concentrating the reward of high-achieving students in these schools. By 2010, Mariner’s Point was apparently losing in this “winner-take-all” market and was hemorrhaging its best and brightest to neighboring districts and the charters, which only decreased its perceived performance and fueled more exodus of high-achievers.

Subtle differences in perceived performance seemed to drastically swing the Cape towards a “winner-take-all” market, which emphasizes how important parent and/or student perception is at driving these market dynamics. High achieving students appear to be moving based on parent perceptions rather than on the actual opportunities available to their children. High achieving students would have been well served in any of these four school districts in this study – each had robust Advanced Placement programs and talented teachers. If anything, the sheer size of Sandy Neck’s high school and its gifted and talented program would have enabled it to offer the most opportunity to high achievers. Likewise, the large size of Mariner’s Point also allows it to cater to high achievers, but parent perception was not retaining or drawing high-achieving students in large numbers at either Sandy Neck or Mariner’s Point. There was greater movement of school choice students towards smaller districts like Sea Crest and Shoreline and to boutique charter schools. As Shoreline Superintendent Kimball stated, “Perception is reality,” so there must be some small performance advantage for high-achieving students that is perceived to
exist in the smaller districts, despite the breadth of advanced options existing within the larger districts.

While the proponents of competition between public schools see market dynamics as having only positive impacts on the educational system, thereby “lifting all boats.” There is an ultimate price to pay when market dynamics are taken to the extreme. In the private sector, the competitive pressure of market dynamics pushes under-performing organizations to go out of business. While it is rare that competition ultimately forces public school systems to close, it can happen, as it did with Inkster Public Schools in Michigan (Smith, 2013). On Cape Cod, dwindling student enrollment because of a declining school aged population in one small town, coupled with inter-district school choice, played a role in the closure of Provincetown’s high school (Oakes & Tobin, 2010). Provincetown now tuitions all of its high school aged children to other districts. Only time will tell whether competition and declining enrollment will lead to further closures or consolidations.

**Evidence of the “Prisoner’s Dilemma”**. As indicated earlier in the findings, each superintendent in this study expressed a want to not be involved in inter-district school choice, but each continued the status quo, rather than cooperating to end what each saw as a practice that was not ideal. The dynamics of inter-district school choice on Cape Cod parallels what is described in game theory as a “prisoner’s dilemma,” as first modeled by A. W. Tucker in 1950.

In the prisoner’s dilemma, the decision made by one game player is dependent upon what he anticipates his opponent doing. Tucker (1983) describes the prisoner’s dilemma scenario as two men charged as partners in a crime and held separately by the police (Figure 2).

1) If they both remain silent and don’t confess, they will each get one year in jail.
2) If one confesses and will testify against the other and the other remains silent, the confessor will go free and the individual who remains silent will serve 20 years.

3) If both confess, they will each get five years.

In Nash’s (1951) seminal paper on game theory, he demonstrated that in non-cooperative games, like the prisoner’s dilemma, there is always at least one equilibrium point. These equilibrium points will be consistent if the players understand the rules of the game and are anticipating the moves of the other players in the game.

The collective optimal outcome for the prisoners in the dilemma is if they both remain silent; thereby each only serves one year in jail. In the scenario, the police hold the prisoners separately, and in doing so, neither prisoner knows the decision of the other. The prisoners anticipate that the other will confess to the joint crime, and testify against them to be set free, leaving the one who remains silent to serve a 20-year sentence. The Nash equilibrium predicts that both prisoners will ultimately confess, strategically responding to the anticipated decision of the other, despite the fact that in confessing they will each serve five years. The rules of the game and their anticipation of the other’s decision leads to predictable, albeit suboptimal, outcomes for both prisoners.

Prior to 1991, school districts neither gained nor lost enrollment due to choice, because a family’s local school district was its only public school option. Legislation providing for inter-district school choice in 1991 and charter schools in 1993 created enrollment-driven competition. Massachusetts’ and Cape Cod’s population had been gradually increasing over the last half of the 20th century, but the decade between 2000 and 2010 brought about population declines, most notably of school-aged persons under 18 years old. Faced with enrollment losses to charter schools and other districts, magnified by a declining school-aged population, superintendents on
Cape Cod strategized how to maintain enrollment and ultimately guided school committees to vote to accept inter-district school choice students.

**Figure 2.** The Prisoner’s Dilemma, highlighting the anticipated Nash Equilibrium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy of the Prisoner</th>
<th>Confess</th>
<th>Remain Silent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confess</td>
<td>5 Years</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain Silent</td>
<td>5 Years</td>
<td>1 Year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Massachusetts’ legislation providing parents school choice appears to have created a disequilibrium, forcing these superintendents into a prisoner’s dilemma. If superintendents kept their school’s doors closed to inter-district school choice, they potentially lost enrollment to other districts and charter schools. If superintendents opened their schools to inter-district school choice, they may have mitigated enrollment loses, but the district was also electing to accept the
state regulated inter-district school choice tuition of $5,000 per student, far less than the per pupil expenditures on Cape Cod.

If a superintendent’s strategy was to not accept $5,000 tuition per student and reject inter-district school choice students, but surrounding school districts embraced inter-district choice students, the district not accepting choice students may have faced significant enrollment loses. To mitigate enrollment loses, a superintendent could have advocated for the benefits of increasing the district’s enrollment by accepting $5,000 in tuition for each student and guided his or her school committee to vote to accept inter-district school choice students. If enrollment-driven competition was significant enough, all school districts could have been pushed towards a Nash equilibrium of accepting inter-district school choice students (Figure 3), even though this equilibrium has suboptimal outcomes for some of the school districts. Given that there is no change in the average enrollment due to inter-district school choice within a confined geographic area, like Cape Cod, if all districts in the region engage in this prisoner’s dilemma, it would result in some districts “winning” this game of choice and gaining enrollment while other districts end up “losing” enrollment.

In 1994, Chatham was the first school district on the Cape to have its school committee vote to permit students from other towns to enroll in its schools through inter-district school choice. Because of Chatham Public School’s small size, school choice allowed the district to build educational programs which were larger and had more diverse offerings than it could have supported relying on only the student population residing within the town of Chatham. Shoreline’s former superintendent was describing the prisoner’s dilemma on Cape Cod when he said, “Chatham started school choice, because they wanted to carry an extra classroom in each grade so they could have a reasonably defensible population for a school district…there was a
logic – but that opened the door to everybody on the Cape, because you couldn’t in Shoreline Public Schools not do school choice, because all you did then was eliminate your opportunity to fill the seat that somebody just left to go to Chatham.” “It is insidious,” he said, “There is no benefit to not offering school choice once one of your neighbors does.” Ending the practice across the region is unlikely, when collaboration between districts is strained and when some districts are artificially sustaining larger enrollments and educational programming by recruiting children from other districts.

Figure 3. A Potential Nash Equilibrium for Inter-district School Choice, highlighted in gray

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy of Another School District</th>
<th>Strategy of a Particular Superintendent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept Inter-district Choice Students</td>
<td>Accept Inter-district Choice Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Accept Inter-district Choice Students</td>
<td>Don’t Accept Inter-district Choice Students</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Cape Cod school districts appeared to be in a Nash equilibrium (Nash, 1951), where enrollment-driven competition was significant enough that by 2011 all districts voted to accept inter-district school choice students. Through inter-district school choice, some districts were gaining enrollment and some were losing it, yet each district was accepting significantly less in
tuition than the per pupil expenditure for students in the district. Despite the superintendents’ espoused preference to not accept inter-district school choice students, the Nash equilibrium reached was generally not ideal from either a fiscal or district pride perspective.

Heil, Lehmann, and Stremersch (2010) advocated that there is a need to understand how patterns of competitive interactions evolve to determine if the prisoner’s dilemma is inevitable, or whether competitive interactions can be managed so that organizations do not engage in competition leading to suboptimal results. Sandy Neck Superintendent Newton was the only superintendent in this study to actively attempt to extricate her district from inter-district school choice, but her recommendation to stop accepting students from other towns was rejected by her school committee. Mariner’s Point Superintendent Moss raised the prospect of stopping inter-district school choice with the other Cape superintendent colleagues, only to be rebuked by another superintendent who saw inter-district school choice as the solution for her district; thereby ending the discussion by the group. Despite suboptimal results, Cape Cod superintendents appear to be unable to disengage from this established prisoner’s dilemma.

By 2010, both Nauset Public Regional Schools and Chatham Public Schools were taking in so many school choice students that their districts were likely offering an educational program broader than they could than if they only had an enrollment equivalent to the students residing in their towns. If these two school committees were to vote to stop accepting inter-district school choice students, there is a strong likelihood that teacher jobs and some of the breadth of the educational program would be lost. This limits the likelihood that these two districts could even consider ending choice. If even one district on the Cape were still open to school choice students, it is likely the entire region would remain ensnared in a program that its own superintendents feel isn’t optimal.
In game theory (Tucker, 1983), the prisoner’s dilemma occurs when parties won’t work together, even when it’s beneficial to do so. Because of a lack of trust, the prisoners trapped in the dilemma act in ways so as not to be taken advantage of. Superintendents in this study suggested that to end school choice on the Cape, each district would have to agree to stop accepting inter-district students – an act that would have to be voted on and approved by at least 10 separate school committees. Each district would have to trust, when taking its vote, that the other districts would make the same selfless decision to stop choice, knowing that if any district voted to continue being a school choice option, it would have the unfettered ability to pillage students from the others districts.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

**Market dynamics of school choice.** Proponents of school choice advocate that the competitive pressure of market dynamics will push public schools to improve (Armor & Peiser, 1997; Aud, 1999; Hoxby, 2001; Hoxby, 2003b). Parent choice was predicted to drive administrators to make decisions that would improve the academic program, quality of teaching, or school culture to mitigate the loss of students (Kim & Youngs, 2013). Each of the superintendents in this study was aware of the need to be competitive, what types of students were leaving their district, and what the families were looking for when exercising their legislatively granted right of school choice. Sea Crest, Shoreline, and Mariner’s Point each made tangible adjustments to their educational program in concerted attempts to attract and retain students.

Some studies indicate that school districts may not be responding to predicted market dynamics (Arsn, 2012; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005; Kim & Youngs, 2013). Sandy Neck Public Schools appeared to not respond to the prevailing market dynamics. Despite losing over a
million dollars in school choice tuitions to other districts and charter schools and around 175 students, Sandy Neck did not appear to react as strongly to school choice as the other districts in this study. It is possible that the size of Sandy Neck mitigated much of the competitive pressure on the district; by virtue of its large size, the district experienced a net loss of only 2% to 3% of its enrollment and 1% to 1.5% of its district expenditures on choice tuitions (Table 2).

Funk’s (2015) study of school choice on Cape Cod suggested that social media driven parents are not always responding accurately to variables of school quality. In an information-rich world where parents are flooded with social media comments and ratings about the relative performance of districts, the parents use this information to make relative comparisons about schools. In Funk’s (2015) study he found that parents were basing their choices on information from other parents in their social network rather than upon actual information about the schools and their educational programs.

Inter-district school choice movement in this study’s four school districts found more families electing for smaller school districts, which arguably would have fewer educational opportunities than the larger districts. Sandy Neck, the largest district in this study, had a robust Advanced Placement program and a gifted and talented program, yet was seeing parents of its highest-achieving students disproportionately electing to send their children to a nearby charter school.

In some areas of the country where school-aged populations, and concurrently enrollment, are increasing, the competitive pressure driving market dynamics may be reduced (Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000). The opposite appeared to be happening on Cape Cod between 2005 and 2010. Given the ongoing decline of school-aged children on Cape Cod,
students themselves are becoming a limited resource for school districts, and this may be heightening the competitive pressure of school choice.

Sea Crest’s High School principal played an important role in recruiting families to his high school (Funk, 2015), which can be triangulated to the school choice movement into Sea Crest’s schools identified by this study. Sea Crest’s former superintendent described some of the marketing that his high school principal did to recruit students, which included pitching his school to students transitioning out of a nearby charter middle school. For districts to make headway in the competitive landscape of school choice, their principals need to effectively market their schools to parents, and this message needs to penetrate the social networks that parents are relying upon for their information about school quality.

**School choice in Massachusetts.** In a study of the early years of school choice in Massachusetts, Glenn (1991) found that school expanded options for poor families. Both a review of the state’s archived enrollment data of Cape Cod charter schools versus the local school districts (Appendix A Table A6) and observations on how families access school choice options on Cape Cod indicated that school choice, at least on Cape Cod, provided limited additional opportunities for poor families. If anything, access to school choice on Cape Cod favored families with economic means. In 2010, low income students represented only 6.7% of Cape Cod’s charter schools’ enrollment; whereas, low income students made up 22.5% of the enrollment in the Cape’s local school districts. Between 2005 and 2010, the discrepancy between low income students in charters versus the local school districts on the Cape grew.

To access both charter schools and inter-district school choice placements, Cape Cod families need to provide transportation to the choice placement. There is a regional transportation bus service that could provide a means for families to access both charter schools,
but the frequency of bus service is limited and the neighborhoods serviced are limited, leaving this form of public transportation as a far cry from the near door-to-door service provided by the local district school buses. Since parents would generally need to drive their child to a school choice placement, families without access to a car or children without a parent who is free to both drive them to school and pick them up are precluded from accessing most school choice options on the Cape. In a Denver urban study of inter-district school choice, where free transportation to choice placement was not provided, low income families were largely unable to take advantage of school choice options (Holmes & Richards, 2009). It appears that a lack of free school choice transportation on Cape Cod may similarly prevent poor families from expanding educational options for their children.

In previous studies, which included a few urban school districts in Massachusetts, there were mixed findings as to whether charter school competition caused local school districts to improve. One study found Massachusetts school districts not responding to charter school competition (Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000); whereas, two others found Massachusetts school districts changing in response to charter competition. One found competition to fiscally affect local school districts, leading to changes in operations and educational offerings (Ericson, Silverman, Berman, Nelson, & Solomon, 2001), and the other found that superintendents responded to charter school competition through innovation (Steedman, 2015). In this study the reaction of school districts to charter school competition was also mixed. Sea Crest clearly responded to charter school competition, improved its academic program, and found its schools retaining more students. Shoreline and Mariner’s Point also responded to charter school competition by innovating; however, neither was able to translate improvements in their academic program to a reduction in students exiting to the charters. By
contrast, Sandy Neck did not appear to make specific changes in response to competition from a nearby charter.

**School choice effects on demographics.** In a study on school choice in Massachusetts, Aud (1999) found that school choice did not have racial impacts on Massachusetts’ school districts. Other studies have found that segregating effects occurring when parents are given the option of school choice (Cullen, 2005; Fossey, 1994; Holme & Richards, 2009; Hoxby, 2000a). A review of the state’s archived enrollment data of Cape Cod charter schools versus the local school districts revealed that giving parents school choice options and charter school admissions practices have lead to the charters being less racially diverse (Appendix A Table A7), and between the years of 2005 and 2010, there was not a single English language learner student at a Cape Cod charter school while this growing population represented about 2% of all Cape students (Appendix A Table A6).

A cream-skimming effect happens if school choice were to disproportionately cause academically stronger students to leave school districts. In one study, it was found that charter schools were not cream skimming because the students attracted by the charter schools had disproportionately performed badly in the local school districts (Hoxby, 2003a). In another study of school choice, higher performing schools disproportionately attracted high-achieving students (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2008). Universally, the superintendents in this study indicate that school choice is cream skimming the highest-performing students from their districts, and concentrating these high performers largely within the charter schools and the Sandy Neck Public Schools. Success feeds on success.

A related finding in this study is that there is a cream-skimming of involved parents from school district due to school choice. Other studies have conveyed that affluent parents
Richards, 2009) or better educated parents (Kennedy, 2012) are more likely to take advantage of school choice programs for their children. Affluence and educational attainment of parents are easy parameters to assess compared to quantifying parental involvement in a child’s education and the ancillary factors involved parents bring to public schools. The Mariner’s Point superintendent emphasized that school choice was draining parental support from his district. The state’s legislature put into action a program that allows engaged and informed parents to readily pull their children from their local schools and send them through school choice to another district or a charter rather than seeing these parents stay with their home district and fight for what’s right for their child and all children in the district. The very parents who are most likely without school choice to be involved in their child’s classroom, to be on school-based committees, or to advocate for the budgetary needs of the local schools are the parents most likely to opt out of the district because of school choice. School choice doesn’t encourage parents to fight for public education; it allows them to give up on their local schools.

In a study of the factors influencing school choice in a Delaware school district, parents of students with high needs, which included special education needs, low income children, and children who are English language learners, were less likely to have their children partake in school choice (Kennedy, 2012). A review of the state’s archived enrollment data of Cape Cod charter schools versus the local school districts mirrored Kennedy’s (2012) findings (Appendix A Table A6). Students at charter schools were less likely to be receiving special education services, to be from families with low incomes, or to have limited English proficiency.

**Administrative decision-making regarding school choice.** If school administrators are to respond accordingly to the market dynamics of school choice competition, they need to have an understanding of what parents are valuing within their schools, when making decisions related
to their children’s education. Studies have shown that school administrators have an awareness of parent views of their local schools (Bagley, 2006; Kassman & Loeb, 2013). The findings of this study affirm that these superintendents were aware of parent views of the local schools and an understanding of what parents were seeking in alternative school choice placements.

Ideally with an understanding of parental views of their local schools, superintendents can lead districts to implement changes in the educational program to create systems in line with parents wants and student needs. In one study, marketing and promotion became the innovation implemented by administrators to mitigate the loss of enrollment (Kassman & Loeb, 2013) rather than substantive improvement of curriculum or instruction. Richardson (2013) found principals actively marketing their school to attract and retain the most academically talented students, which would be appropriate, given the findings of this study, where these are the students most likely to exit schools on Cape Cod due to school choice. In a study of Massachusetts’ school district responses to charter school competition, districts frequently referenced marketing as an innovation added in response to the competitive pressure (Steedman, 2014). While each of the school districts in this study expended time and fiscal resources on marketing efforts, three of the four districts also identified specific educational initiatives added in hopes of mitigating student losses to competitors.

Michael Klare (2008) characterized competition over diminishing resources as involving either conflict and obstructive responses or more constructive responses to the competition. In the literature there are examples of schools obstructing access to school choice competitors, like charters (Holley, Egalite, & Luken, 2013; Williams, 2007). The only obstructive response described by the superintendents in this study happened between a couple of the districts and the regional technical high school, where the superintendents were pushing back on what they
perceived as unfair recruitment efforts by the technical high school. Massachusetts’ statutes prohibit the local districts obstructing the charters by withholding student information or addresses.

While there may not have been overt conflict between competing parties, each of the school superintendents had what could be best described as visceral feelings toward the charter schools. The charters had been granted privileges to operate under a different set of rules and regulations. The admissions practices of the charters created a largely homogeneous, high-achieving student body, and a couple of the superintendents shared stories of charters counseling out students who were academically or behaviorally challenging. While one study found that competition from charters is promoting public school districts, including Boston Public, to collaborate with charters in an effort to improve education (Holley, Egalite, & Luken, 2013), perhaps the ill-will between the Cape’s local districts and charters appears to limit any constructive cooperation.

The lack of cooperation extended beyond the charters, and inter-district school choice competition appeared to strain potentially beneficial collaborative relationships between the region’s local school districts. The Cape’s most successful district at attracting and retaining students, which potentially could serve as an exemplar on best practice, was reviled by several of the superintendents in this study because it encroached on peer districts by busing students across town lines to its schools, and a couple of the superintendents raised concerns that the district was also using school choice to recruit talented athletes.

Three superintendents raised in their interviews the concept of further regionalization of Cape Cod school districts. Unfortunately, inter-district school choice appeared to have created an undertone of mistrust between peer superintendents and their districts, creating a barrier that
prohibited big picture conversations from starting. The prevalence of inter-district school choice in the region contributed to what the Sandy Neck Superintendent saw as a “lack of audacious visioning” amongst her peer superintendents.

**Lifting all boats.** Some advocate that competition between schools will create “a rising tide that lifts all boats” (Holley, Egalite, & Lucken, 2013, p. 29). To lift all boats, school choice competition needs to provide a substantive benefit to students in the local school districts, and not just those who exited to school choice opportunities. Some studies have found that school choice competition caused school district to respond accordingly to market dynamics and improve schools; thereby, lifting all boats (Aud, 1999; Ericson et al., 2001; Holley et al., 2013; Hoxby, 2003). Other studies found school choice competition not lifting all boats (Arsen & Ni, 2012; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005; Kim & Younngs, 2013, Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000).

While all four superintendents in this study saw school choice competition as having a beneficial impact on their district, this study could not truly discern whether school choice was lifting “all boats.” Clearly school choice on Cape Cod was benefiting students inequitably. For children attending the Sea Crest Public Schools, the clear school choice winner amongst the districts in this study, choice is lifting the educational experiences of all in the district; this likely is the case for the 3.5% of the Cape’s students attending the region’s Commonwealth charter schools and the 3% of the Cape’s students opting for inter-district school choice.

The segregating effect of school choice (Chisesi, 2012; Holme & Richards, 2009; Kennedy, 2012; Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008) creates equity concerns for the roughly 93.5% of students remaining in their home local school districts. When a disproportionate number of the high-achieving peers have exited to choice options, this study revealed how the
demographics of local districts, particularly in comparison to the charters, become skewed. While Mariner’s Point is innovating in response to school choice, it would be hard to believe that with roughly 10% of the potential enrollment leaving the district, taking with them over $2.5 million in school choice tuitions, that school choice is lifting the educational experiences of all in the district. The ancillary costs of school choice for Mariner’s point are far less quantifiable, as it lost a sense of community and hemorrhaged many of its most involved parents.

Of the school districts in this study experiencing moderate competitive pressure from school choice in 2005, there appeared to be a winning and losing school district that had emerged by 2010. Sea Crest innovated and emerged on the winning side, gaining more students and retaining more of its own. Mariner’s Point innovated and still continued to see its school choice loses increase and was clearly losing in this competitive melee. The median household income of families in Sea Crest is over 15% greater than those in Mariner’s Point, which translates into Sea Crest families having less than half the frequency of low income students. Socio-economic advantage may be a factor in the direction that parents are choosing to send their children, with choice students flowing from a less affluent community toward a more affluent one.

**Limitations**

This study gathered and analyzed superintendents’ perspectives of school choice competition coming primarily from charter schools and inter-district school choice. There are several limitations of this study that should be noted. Given the small, four superintendent sample size, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other populations. The findings only apply to the four superintendents and districts in this study.

A limitation of the study is that it involved a subset of the superintendents leading Cape Cod school districts between 2005 and 2010. It also included only superintendents at that time, in the region, who wanted to be part of this study. One superintendent invited to be part of this...
research declined, so there the sample, while purposeful, includes only superintendents who wanted to share their thoughts on school choice competition. Each participant had very strong opinions about school choice and of their competitors, but this may not be representative of all superintendents in the region during the timeframe of this study.

While each of the superintendents expressed some sort of benefit of school choice competition for their district, there was no actual measure of this benefit. It was at best a non-quantifiable opinion held by the superintendents. In the end, what truly matters is how effectively school choice is improving the educational outcomes of all students. Similarly, there was a darker side to school choice competition that had costs to some districts and the region.

Weighing perceived benefits against perceived costs is very subjective.

Another shortcoming of the study is that the research is directly involved in the present day school choice process on Cape Cod. The researcher is the Superintendent of Monomoy Regional School District. Monomoy is the state’s newest regional school district and did not exist in 2005 through 2010; however, its parent school districts Harwich Public School and Chatham Public Schools did. As the Superintendent for Monomoy, the researcher has become very cognizant of the impact of school choice on my district, both from a student and financial perspective. The researcher has been involved in actively transforming and improving this new school district’s educational program with a specific focus of retaining Harwich and Chatham families within our district. The researcher was not on Cape Cod during the timeframe of this study, nor had his school district even existed then. By virtue of the researcher’s role and personal connection to the research topic, there is an inherent limitation of the narrative inquiry used in this study, and the researcher’s positionality should be considered.

Conclusion
There were three research questions guiding this study:

1. To what extent did inter-district school choice and charter school choice impact the district’s enrollment, demographics, and budget?

2. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents negatively responding with direct conflict over students or obstruction of choice (e.g. territorial disputes, obstructive responses, and fiscal disputes)?

3. How did competition for students manifest in superintendents responding with constructive initiatives to mitigate enrollment losses (e.g. innovation, cooperation, or increasing efficiency)?

After analyzing the experiences and decision-making of four superintendents, the accounts revealed that school choice competition had some beneficial effect on each district, with most responding accordingly to market dynamics. The loss of students, not funding, appeared to be the factor driving these superintendent’s decision-making. Issues of inequity arose across these districts, as the families that elected to send their children to choice options sent disproportionately high-achieving students that generally had educationally-involved parents. This changed the student composition of districts and schools, particularly the ones either winning or losing in the competitive landscape. In districts with high losses of school choice students, the superintendents conveyed that the sense of community was being lost.

Perhaps it is the nature of these school administrators, but school choice competition did not generally erupt into direct conflict, rather the administrators generally harbored strong feelings, even years after the fact, regarding the greatest source of competition for their districts. Two of the districts perceived a charter school as the greatest source of competition and one considered peer school districts its greatest source of competition. The last district, considered a
nearby technical high school its biggest competitor, but these feelings may deal more with proximity and history rather than the actual number of students being lost to the school.

Three districts faced at least moderate competitive pressure from school choice. Each of these districts innovated programs in an attempt to maintain and attract students. One of these districts was very successful and saw its innovations correlate to a significant positive shift in enrollment in the district. One of the districts was not successful in innovating and retaining students. It appears that some factors beyond the school districts programs were influencing parental decisions regarding school choice, and the flow of students appeared to move from the less affluent community towards a more affluent one.

Each of the superintendents in this study expressed a desire to not have their district involved in inter-district school choice, but regional dynamics of school choice on Cape Cod kept each district ensnared in what this dissertation referred to as the prisoner’s dilemma. Inter-district school choice competition appeared to strain relationships between the superintendents of the local school districts. Ultimately these strained relationships may be preventing the local districts from cooperating and to explore regional solutions.

**Significance of Study**

This study is important to the field of education because it highlights the impacts of charter school competition and inter-district school choice competition on the local school districts within the geographic region of Cape Cod. Charter schools and inter-district school choice were created by the Massachusetts state legislature as part of education reform in the early 1990s. Similar legislation and policies, providing parents the freedom to choose the school that will provide their child with a publically funded education, have been created in states across
the country. The confined geographic nature of Cape Cod placed these school districts and charter schools in relatively close proximity and promoted the spread of school choice in the region. A decline in the school-aged student population on Cape Cod during the timeframe of this study further heightened the school choice competition for students.

Faced with competitive pressure, most of the superintendents in this study guided school districts to innovate in an attempt to retain and potentially recruit students. One school district in this study was quite successful in these efforts, and is potentially an exemplar on how to operate within a similar competitive landscape. One school district in the study clearly struggled under the pressure of school choice competition. In the latter case, this district’s challenges may cause policy makers, in particular, to question the effectiveness of using competition from school choice competition as a lever to improve schools. In this study, each school district realized some beneficial impact of school choice competition, but at what cost and to whom?

This study has relevance to school administrators, school committees, and town leaders as they work together to support quality education in communities. To make headway in the competitive landscape of school choice these parties will need to work together to meet the needs of students and the wants of parents. Failure to effectively work together towards common goals will only fuel exodus from a school district as parents leave to seek out what they perceive as more stable and more supportive educational options for their children. Lastly, this study also provides administrators and school committees insight into what is required if the region is to ever escape the inter-district school choice prisoner’s dilemma in which it is ensnared.

**Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice**

**Implications for research.** Proponents of school choice competition contest that competition will create “a rising tide that lifts all boats” (Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013, p. 29).
They believe that school choice competition will influence market dynamics and compel local school districts to improve. Studies in the literature are mixed, with some studies supporting a theoretical market dynamic outcome of school choice (Aud, 1999; Ericson et al., 2001; Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013; Hoxby, 2001; Hoxby, 2003b) and others refuting it (Arsen & Ni, 2012; Buddin & Zimmer, 2005; Kim & Youngs, 2013; Teske et al., 2000).

While this study had mixed findings on the influence of school choice competition on market dynamics, three of the four districts in this study responded to competition, as predicted by market dynamics, with program improvements intended to retain and maintain enrollment. Even in Sandy Neck, the only district to not clearly respond to school choice competition, the former superintendent stated that her district had to keep in “the back of our minds that we could lose kids if we weren’t performing well.” While one could investigate the influence of school choice on other school districts in the region, state, or nation, perhaps it would be more beneficial to focus future research on factors that impact the market dynamics of school choice.

This study does shed light on three factors that may enhance or diminish the influence school choice competition on the prevailing market dynamics. The declining school-aged population on Cape Cod during the late 2000s may have enhanced the market pressures on school districts, as districts competed for an ever-diminishing student resource. Proximity of a competitor to a school district, particularly if the competitor is located within a local school district’s geographical bounds, appeared to enhance competitive reactions, and in some cases visceral responses. Finally, the size of school districts, relative to the number of students exiting due to school choice, appeared to influence the market dynamics – in this study, the sheer size of the largest school district may have diminished the market pressure of school choice.
Even though each superintendent in this study saw benefits to the market pressure of school choice competition, it does not mean that competition was creating “a rising tide that lifts all boats” (Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013, p. 29). The charter school and schools receiving a disproportionate number of inter-district students in this study benefited from the legislation bringing about choice, and likely benefited the students attending these schools. The implementation of the Massachusetts school choice policies on Cape Cod have led to segregating effects and inequity, consistent with what has been seen in the literature (Chisesi, 2012; Holme & Richards, 2009; Kennedy, 2012; Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008), where choice is disproportionately exercised by more affluent, white, English-speaking families. The actual impact of school choice segregation on the learning outcomes of students has not been ascertained in these studies or this one, leaving a great unknown as to whether choice is “lifting all boats” or sinking some.

A less tangible aspect to measure is the loss of a sense of community and diminishment of pride for some school districts when adversely impacted by inequitable school choice student movement. A loss of community and pride could impact school district’s fiscal strength, as funding for schools comes from local property taxes and may erode as more involved parents leave their home district for school choice options. A lack of school district pride was credited by both the Shoreline and Mariner’s Point superintendents for the exodus of high-achieving students and tuition dollars from their district. A study measuring the fiscal impact and educational impact of this diminishment of community and pride, may further highlight some of the darker aspects of school choice competition.

**Implications for policy.** School choice legislation in Massachusetts was passed to provide parents stuck in mediocre school districts educational options for their children, while
also serving to put market pressure on local schools to improve (Aud, 1997). Researchers have also found that integrating schools to be a powerful lever for improving opportunities for children (Kahlenberg, 2016). On Cape Cod in the last 2000s, there was a quandary when the educational gains of market pressure were being diminished by the harm done by unintended segregation. It would behoove the Massachusetts legislature and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to revisit school choice policies with an eye toward promoting integration, rather than tacitly condoning the resulting segregation by race, English-language proficiency, wealth, or special education need.

Legislation and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education policies should promote what the Sandy Neck superintendent called “audacious visioning” amongst school districts, to seek out regional solutions which can truly improve education and opportunity for all children – thereby “lifting all boats.” Unfortunately, this study found that school choice competition, both with the charters and local districts and between local districts, greatly impedes collaboration, cooperation, and regional thinking. Again, it would behoove the Massachusetts legislature and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to revisit school choice policies with an eye towards promoting real collaboration and cooperation.

**Implications for practice.** When it comes to school choice perhaps the mantra often misattributed to Gandhi is appropriate, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” In this study, every superintendent expressed a want not to be involved in inter-district school choice, but their decision-making and actions contradicted this want. While the prisoner’s dilemma may make ending school choice in the region challenging, individual superintendents and individual districts can actively say “enough is enough” and stop stealing students from their neighbors, thereby undermining the educational program experienced by the neighboring district’s students.
As a change agent, concerned with the intensity of school choice competition on Cape Cod, I can “be the change I wish to see in the world.” The first step in moving the Cape toward “audacious visioning,” begins with bold individual decisions focusing on what’s best for students in the region, not just what’s best for students in my own district. Imagine the power if all the Cape Cod superintendents supported the construction of a new technical high school, even if it would potentially detract from the enrollment in our individual district’s high school. To truly “lift all boats” the Cape needs a bit more altruism between its school districts and a little less competition. At some point this begins with individual change agents, modeling an altruistic regional mindset, and if united these individual change agents can become audacious in their vision.

**Future Studies**

The following list represents recommendations for further research on this topic:

- Expansion to include more school districts on the Cape Cod
- Expansion beyond the timeframe of this Cape Cod bound study, which focused on 2005 through 2010
- Extend the study’s approach to districts outside of Cape Cod, where the school-age population may not be in decline
- Explore the effect of district size on the competitive pressure and district response to school choice competition
- Explore decision-making in response to school choice from the perspective of charter school administrators
- Quantify the educational gains or costs that school choice competition is having on the all of the region’s students
• Exploring the parent and student perceptions that appear to be driving the market dynamics of school choice on Cape Cod

The findings from this study will hopefully shed light on how school districts are responding to the competitive pressures from charter schools and inter-district school choice. The data from this dissertation project may provide insights for both school systems and policy makers that may influence how school choice is implemented within Cape Cod and other regions of the state or nation. The information within this study may allow local school districts to more effectively respond to school choice competition in order to retain or attract more students. While a long-shot, the findings of this study may empower Cape Cod superintendents and their school committee to take control of their own fate when it comes to inter-district school choice and perhaps bring more sanity and parity to the region, or to collaboratively begin a process to look toward regional solutions that might truly “lift all boats.”

**Personal Reflection**

As I entered my last day of writing on this dissertation, I found myself reflecting back on how I got here. Shortly into the new year of 2013, I found myself yearning for a new personal and professional challenge and a change of venue, after spending the previous thirteen years as an administrator, and ultimately a superintendent in a great school system in Boston’s western suburbs. I was intrigued by a posting for a superintendent position for a newly formed regional school district, largely tasked with merging the former the Chatham Public Schools and Harwich Public Schools. At the time I hadn’t even vacationed on Cape Cod, so the towns and the region were quite foreign to me.

I can still vividly remember reading a newspaper editorial as I mulled applying for the position. The opinion piece was written by Jim Coogan (2013). There was one particular line in
his editorial that has always stuck with me: “Something is wrong when three teenagers who live on the same street all attend different high schools.” Having spent my previous twenty years as a teacher and administrator in two suburban Boston school districts where every child in town largely went to the same high school, I was perplexed by that one line and wondered, as a father of two future high school students, what environment would I be exposing my own children to if I applied for and was given the opportunity to help lead the formation of Monomoy Regional Schools. Having been hired as Superintendent of Monomoy Regional Schools, I decided to shift my research direction and attempt to understand the decision-making behind school choice, why it became so prevalent on Cape Cod, and why those who had been superintendents in the region before me didn’t preempt the very dilemma Coogan referenced above.

I hadn’t re-read Coogan’s thoughts until my last day of writing this dissertation. For all of you who have labored and read the last 152 pages seeking an understanding of the impact of school choice on Cape Cod, you could have simply read Coogan’s short one-page editorial. He reflected upon the academic excellence that students had access to and were realizing at Harwich High School. He wrote that the students were not “missing anything by staying local,” yet so many of Harwich’s students, as well as students from districts across the region, were fleeing schools in their hometowns through school choice. In Coogan’s opinion, school choice was causing the Cape to lose a sense of community.

Having now spent the past four and a half years on the Cape as Monomoy’s superintendent, researched the topic of school choice thoroughly, and interviewed many of my predecessors on the evolution of school choice in the region, I can see how the market dynamics of school choice has pushed area schools to progressively improve. These educational gains, however, have come at a fairly steep cost, being the erosion of the sense of community
throughout the Cape’s many small towns. What saddens me and Coogan, in his editorial, is how many parents are preferring to send their children to choice placements outside of their town’s schools, when a quality education can be found within each local school district.

It is the practice of each superintendent in our state to give a Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents’ Award for Academic Excellence to a senior who has distinguished himself or herself in the pursuit of excellence during their high school career, contributing both in the classroom but also in leadership and service within their community. In my region of the Cape, there is a touching tradition where the recipients of this award from each district gather to be honored at an evening reception. What is clear from this gathering is that the opportunity to excel is present in each Cape school district. An excellent education and a launching pad to a distinguished institution of higher learning is available in each of the Cape’s local school districts, and sadly, that is not what the public and parents perceive of some of the area’s schools. Overcoming this perception in hopes of restoring a sense of community within a school system was a challenge for each of the superintendents in this study and continues to be a challenge for me today, along with my other contemporary counterparts leading Cape Cod school districts.
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Appendix A

School Choice, Enrollment, and Financial Data
for the years 2005 through 2010 for all Cape Cod School Districts

In order to understand and explain trends in Cape Cod public schools during the second half of the 2000s, the scholar-practitioner conducting this study extracted data from publicly assessable information located on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, http://www.doe.mass.edu/. None of the following tables exist online, rather each district’s data was extracted from the source specified with each table and compiled to form a summary table for Cape Cod. In most cases, enrollment, inter-district school choice, charter school choice data is available from 2005 to present. The following tables summarize the years 2005 through 2010.

The Appendix A tables are as follows:

1. Enrollment in Cape Cod Public Schools from 2005-2010
2. Per Pupil Expenditures from 2005-2010 for Cape Cod School Districts
3. Inter-district School Choice Out from 2005-2010 for Cape Cod School Districts
4. Inter-district School Choice In from 2005-2010 for Cape Cod School Districts
7. Percent of Charter School and Local District School Enrollment on Cape Cod that is Non-white 2005-2010
Table A1

Enrollment in Cape Cod Public Schools from 2005-2010

Source: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/enrollmentbygrade.aspx

This table shows that charter school enrollment grew by 8.8% between 2005 and 2010, while enrollment in the local school districts decreased by 11.8%. Overall, enrollment in Cape Cod public schools declined by 10.6% over this time period.
Table A2

*Per Pupil Expenditures from 2005-2010 for Cape Cod School Districts*

Source: [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ppx.aspx](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ppx.aspx)

This table shows that local school district’s average expenditure per pupil was $12,504 in 2005 and increased to $15,922 by 2010. This was a 27.3% increase, and is significantly more than the $5,000 districts get for each inter-district school choice student accepted. Charter school tuition payments, are more per student, mirroring the average expenditure per pupil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Per Pupil (uses foundation enrollment, which includes all students for which the district is legally responsible)</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>$10,741</td>
<td>$11,523</td>
<td>$12,147</td>
<td>$13,006</td>
<td>$13,841</td>
<td>$14,940</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
<td>$10,599</td>
<td>$10,923</td>
<td>$11,897</td>
<td>$11,642</td>
<td>$12,466</td>
<td>$12,349</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>$8,184</td>
<td>$8,909</td>
<td>$9,560</td>
<td>$10,809</td>
<td>$11,165</td>
<td>$11,333</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
<td>$9,894</td>
<td>$11,314</td>
<td>$11,573</td>
<td>$13,150</td>
<td>$14,240</td>
<td>$13,870</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstable</td>
<td>$12,432</td>
<td>$11,594</td>
<td>$12,196</td>
<td>$12,654</td>
<td>$13,162</td>
<td>$13,861</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
<td>$10,511</td>
<td>$11,264</td>
<td>$11,726</td>
<td>$12,922</td>
<td>$13,525</td>
<td>$13,606</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
<td>$11,311</td>
<td>$11,429</td>
<td>$12,650</td>
<td>$12,871</td>
<td>$13,384</td>
<td>$14,850</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>$14,509</td>
<td>$14,157</td>
<td>$14,493</td>
<td>$14,660</td>
<td>$15,854</td>
<td>$16,447</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns*</td>
<td>$12,459</td>
<td>$13,341</td>
<td>$14,428</td>
<td>$15,733</td>
<td>$16,197</td>
<td>$17,043</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
<td>$15,660</td>
<td>$16,644</td>
<td>$18,137</td>
<td>$18,582</td>
<td>$19,749</td>
<td>$18,390</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
<td>$21,229</td>
<td>$22,663</td>
<td>$25,099</td>
<td>$24,002</td>
<td>$25,478</td>
<td>$26,119</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Per Pupil</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,504</strong></td>
<td><strong>$13,032</strong></td>
<td><strong>$13,991</strong></td>
<td><strong>$14,523</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15,369</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15,922</strong></td>
<td><strong>27.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This is a weighted average*
Table A3

*Inter-district School Choice Out from 2005-2010 for Cape Cod School Districts*

Includes number of students per district and tuition paid to other school districts

Source: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/schoolchoice/choicehist.xlsm](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/schoolchoice/choicehist.xlsm)

This table shows how the number of students electing to attend school in other districts, through inter-district school choice, increased by 76% between 2005 and 2010. Dennis-Yarmouth and Harwich experienced the greatest inter-district choice flight from their districts across this time period – with this flight went over one million dollars to pay for tuitions to other districts. The number of students lost by each district to inter-district school choice varied greatly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students OUT through School Choice (sending)</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>219%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>302%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>677%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>123%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstable</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>201%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>222%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>188%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Choice Students</strong></td>
<td>452</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Choice Sending Tuition (a charge)</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>$35,761</td>
<td>$24,782</td>
<td>$43,960</td>
<td>$42,622</td>
<td>$44,606</td>
<td>$107,764</td>
<td>201%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
<td>$34,150</td>
<td>$29,385</td>
<td>$32,467</td>
<td>$57,193</td>
<td>$105,395</td>
<td>$155,469</td>
<td>355%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>$31,506</td>
<td>$40,677</td>
<td>$65,150</td>
<td>$169,790</td>
<td>$208,664</td>
<td>$177,211</td>
<td>462%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
<td>$75,082</td>
<td>$74,280</td>
<td>$108,842</td>
<td>$171,758</td>
<td>$194,345</td>
<td>$183,163</td>
<td>144%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstable</td>
<td>$391,532</td>
<td>$468,187</td>
<td>$428,668</td>
<td>$383,064</td>
<td>$317,721</td>
<td>$369,021</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
<td>$665,904</td>
<td>$879,668</td>
<td>$950,335</td>
<td>$1,113,588</td>
<td>$1,430,082</td>
<td>$1,595,153</td>
<td>140%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
<td>$769,102</td>
<td>$856,409</td>
<td>$978,989</td>
<td>$1,049,767</td>
<td>$1,084,454</td>
<td>$1,058,530</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>$96,500</td>
<td>$141,525</td>
<td>$136,239</td>
<td>$206,237</td>
<td>$223,376</td>
<td>$264,920</td>
<td>174%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
<td>$636,669</td>
<td>$657,675</td>
<td>$601,675</td>
<td>$664,303</td>
<td>$662,183</td>
<td>$642,252</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
<td>$113,501</td>
<td>$124,431</td>
<td>$113,980</td>
<td>$40,522</td>
<td>$34,468</td>
<td>$33,055</td>
<td>-71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
<td>$86,850</td>
<td>$105,925</td>
<td>$160,707</td>
<td>$200,853</td>
<td>$238,891</td>
<td>$298,618</td>
<td>244%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Choice Tuition Receipts</strong></td>
<td>$2,963,617</td>
<td>$3,482,944</td>
<td>$3,621,012</td>
<td>$4,099,697</td>
<td>$4,564,565</td>
<td>$4,885,156</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Tuition/Student</strong></td>
<td>$6,651</td>
<td>$6,388</td>
<td>$6,616</td>
<td>$6,251</td>
<td>$6,198</td>
<td>$6,132</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A4

**Inter-district School Choice In from 2005-2010 for Cape Cod School Districts**

Includes number of students per district and tuition received from other school districts

Source: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/schoolchoice/choicehist.xlsm](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/schoolchoice/choicehist.xlsm)

This table shows how the number of inter-district school choice students entering Cape Cod school districts increased by 76% between 2005 and 2010. Nauset and Chatham experienced the greatest inter-district choice flight to their districts across much of this time period – with these inter-district choice students came over one million dollars to pay for tuitions to other districts. The number of inter-district school choice students gained by each district varied greatly.

### Number of Students IN through School Choice (receiving)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Choice Students</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>76%</td>
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### School Choice Receiving Tuition (a receipt)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>$113,089</td>
<td>$68,300</td>
<td>$83,362</td>
<td>$87,560</td>
<td>$118,912</td>
<td>$186,702</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$51,023</td>
<td>$86,300</td>
<td>$185,321</td>
<td>$100,337</td>
<td>$246,617</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$94,031</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstable</td>
<td>$151,673</td>
<td>$142,616</td>
<td>$175,318</td>
<td>$236,270</td>
<td>$415,670</td>
<td>$378,695</td>
<td>150%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
<td>$563,611</td>
<td>$573,738</td>
<td>$452,483</td>
<td>$469,590</td>
<td>$426,561</td>
<td>$466,520</td>
<td>–17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
<td>$352,746</td>
<td>$421,835</td>
<td>$497,521</td>
<td>$642,032</td>
<td>$724,164</td>
<td>$736,348</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>$1,021,839</td>
<td>$1,265,107</td>
<td>$1,242,635</td>
<td>$1,257,663</td>
<td>$1,355,142</td>
<td>$1,309,492</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
<td>$396,519</td>
<td>$548,954</td>
<td>$689,183</td>
<td>$825,448</td>
<td>$977,395</td>
<td>$1,065,391</td>
<td>174%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
<td>$57,848</td>
<td>$74,525</td>
<td>$103,853</td>
<td>$167,819</td>
<td>$182,134</td>
<td>$188,863</td>
<td>226%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
<td>$336,531</td>
<td>$297,123</td>
<td>$304,246</td>
<td>$297,177</td>
<td>$268,572</td>
<td>$254,174</td>
<td>–24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Choice Tuition Receipts</td>
<td>$2,993,856</td>
<td>$3,443,221</td>
<td>$3,634,901</td>
<td>$4,168,880</td>
<td>$4,549,087</td>
<td>$4,947,833</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition/Student</td>
<td>$6,571</td>
<td>$6,364</td>
<td>$6,600</td>
<td>$6,252</td>
<td>$6,210</td>
<td>$6,161</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table A5

*Charter School Choice Out from 2005-2010 for Cape Cod School Districts*

Includes number of students per district and tuition paid to charter schools

Source: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/tuition/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/tuition/)

This table shows how the number of students electing to leave their home district to attend charter schools. Charter enrollment increased on average by 8% between 2005 and 2010. Dennis-Yarmouth and Barnstable experienced the greatest flight from their districts to charters across this time period – with this flight went almost a million dollars to pay for tuitions to other districts. While the number of charter students rose by only 8% over this time period, the tuition payments to the charters increased much more – a 39% increase. The number of students from each district lost to charters varied greatly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students OUT to Commonwealth Charter Schools (ending)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocasset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Charter Students</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This does not include students at Barnstable's Horace Mann Charter School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charter School Net Tuition Cost (a charge, tuition less facilities aid and Chapter 46 charter aid)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocasset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Taxpayer Expenditure/Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A6

Percent of Charter School and Local District School Enrollment on Cape Cod with High Needs in 2005-2010

Includes students with learning disabilities, low income, and limited English proficiency.

Source: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/selectedpopulations.aspx

This table shows that charter schools have proportionately less students with learning disabilities and students who are low income. The charters had no English language learners. All three of these are considered “high needs” factors in Massachusetts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005 to 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sturgis Charter Public</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Commonwealth Charter Enrollmen</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>-0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstable</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
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<td>16.3%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>-2.1%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15.9%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
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<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005 to 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>5.2%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of Commonwealth Charter Enrollmen</td>
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<td>5.0%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
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<td>16.9%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.6%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>13.7%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
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<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
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<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
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<td>21.3%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
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<td>-0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
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<td>25.5%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of District Enrollment</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
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<td>22.5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2005 to 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sturgis Charter Public</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of Commonwealth Charter Enrollmen</td>
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<td>0.8%</td>
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<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Sandwich</td>
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<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashpee</td>
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<td>0.2%</td>
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<td>4.9%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
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<td>5.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis-Yarmouth</td>
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<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwich</td>
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<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauset &amp; region's towns</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<td>Percent of District Enrollment</td>
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<td>2.0%</td>
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</table>
Table A7

Percent of Charter School and Local District School Enrollment on Cape Cod that is Non-white 2005-2010

Source: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/enrollmentbyracegender.aspx

This table shows that charter schools have proportionately less students non-white students, which is an indication that proportionately more white students are leaving local school districts for the region’s two Commonwealth charter schools.

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>2007</th>
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<th>2009</th>
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<th>Percent Change 2005 to 2010</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of Commonwealth Charter Enrollmen</td>
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<td>9.0%</td>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Provincetown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of District Enrollment</td>
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<td>13.1%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
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</table>
Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Email

Dear [FIRST NAME],

While you know me as the Superintendent at Monomoy Regional, I am also a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am writing to invite you to participate in a study on superintendent’s responses to public school choice on Cape Cod during the late 2000s. I will be conducting this research as part of my doctoral dissertation. I am inviting you and three other superintendents from Cape Cod school districts during this time period to take part in this study.

The purpose of this research is to examine the history and impact of school choice on Cape Cod school districts and the superintendent’s responses to enrollment-driven competition coming from the loss of students to inter-district school choice and to charter schools. This study will interview and explore the perceptions of a subset of former superintendents on Cape Cod to understand how school choice affected each school district at a time when the number of children on Cape Cod was in decline.

I plan to telephone you during the next several days to see if you are willing to be a participant in my dissertation research. Your participation in this study will contribute to the body of knowledge and literature on administrative decision-making process in the face of school choice competition. When I call you, I will explain the purpose of my research in greater detail so that you will be fully informed in making your decision.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you would not like to receive a phone call, please email me at carpenter.sco@husky.neu.edu to opt out of future correspondence regarding this study.

I look forward to speaking with you on the phone.

Sincerely,

Scott

Scott Carpenter
Doctoral student in the College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University
Mobile (508) 375-5900

IRB# CPS17-03-18
Approved: 4/25/17
Expiration Date: 4/24/18
Appendix C

Questions to Be Asked in Each Interview

Introductory questions

1. Did you perceive your district to be in competition with private, parochial, or homeschooling for students? If so why?
2. Did you perceive your district’s high school to be in competition with area vocational technical high schools for students? If so why?
3. Did you perceive your district to be in competition with other school districts for students? If so why?
4. Did you perceive your district to be in competition with charter schools for students? If so why?
5. Did any of these four sources provide a bigger challenge for your district’s enrollment? Why?
6. Did any of these four sources of competition provide a bigger challenge for your district’s budget? Why?
7. In your opinion, has competition created by charter schools had a positive, negative, or neutral impact on your school district? Why?
8. In your opinion, has competition created by inter-district school choice had a positive, negative, or neutral impact on your school district? Why?

Interview questions related to research question 1 – Enrollment, Demographics and Budget

9. Why did some families from your district leave for charter schools? Were their reasons tracked? (i.e. from exit interviews or surveys)
10. Why did some families from your district opt for inter-district school choice? Were their reasons tracked?
11. Why did other families choose to come to your district for inter-district school choice?
12. If students returned to your district from charter schools or from inter-district school choice, what reasons might they site for this choice?
13. Between the decline of the school-aged population on Cape Cod and impact of competition for students, what sorts of demographic shifts did happened in your district?
14. When did your district begin accepting students through inter-district school choice?
15. How did your district fiscally justify accepting inter-district school choice students?
16. Were there discussions within your district to stop accepting additional inter-district school choice students? If so, why?

Interview questions related to research question 2 – Conflict, Recruitment, and Disputes

17. In what ways (if any), did competition for students create disputes between your district and another district or charter school?
18. What did your district do to recruit or retain students? (Did you market your schools, send buses across town lines, etc.) *
19. Was there any specific type of student you hoped to retain or attract? (ex. scholars, athletes, etc.)
20. In what ways might your district have obstructed competitors for students, in an effort to retain students or limit the growth of another district or charter school?
21. In what ways did school choice competition cause you to engage in fiscal disputes either at the local or state level?

**Interview questions related to research question 3 – Innovation, Cooperation, and Efficiency**

22. In what ways did competition for students cause your district to innovate or differentiate to retain or attract students? *
23. What specific categories of children did each innovation favor? (i.e. scholars, athletes, SPED, ELL, minority, or socio-economically disadvantaged)
24. How has school choice competition caused your district to cooperate with others to improve the educational program and to retain or attract students? *
25. In what ways did competition for students cause your district to increase efficiency, reduce its operating costs, or potentially to add staffing? *

**Closing questions**

26. How has giving parents “choice” improved the education for students in your district? *
27. Can you envision a scenario where your district stops accepting school choice students? What if every other school district on the Cape agreed to stop?

*If necessary, follow-up each of these questions by asking, “In your opinion, was this driven more by charter school or inter-district school choice competition?”*
Appendix D

Informed Consent Disclosure

Northeastern University, 560-177
360 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115-5000
Tel: 617.373.7570; Fax: 617.373.4595

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies, Doctorate of Education Program

Name of Investigator: Principal Investigator, Corliss Brown Thompson, Student Researcher, Scott Carpenter

Title of Project: Superintendent’s Responses to Public School Choice: An Inductive Multicase Study of School Choice Policies in Massachusetts

Request to Participate in Research
We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of school choice in Cape Cod school districts and the superintendent’s responses to enrollment-driven competition coming from the loss of students to inter-district school choice and to charter schools. Four superintendents from the region’s school districts during the late 2000s will be invited to partake in an interview for this research project. As a school superintendent in the region during the late 2000s, you are being invited to participate in this study. This qualitative study intends to interview and capture the recollections and perceptions of a subset of public school district superintendents from the area during the late 2000s. The study seeks to understand how policies related to inter-district school choice and charter schools affected each superintendent’s school district and how each superintendent responded to the enrollment-driven competitive pressure.

Only a subset of school superintendents during the late 2000s from the region will be invited to partake in two hour-long interviews for this research project.

The interviews will take place at a conducive place of your choice and can be conducted by phone.

If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to sign an informed consent form and to participate in a interview that will last no longer than 90 minutes. You will be contacted once by email following the interview, to be given a transcript of the interview and a summary of the findings of this study, and you will be offered the opportunity to provide feedback to the student-researcher.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may shed light on the effects of inter-district school choice and charter school legislation on local school district’s enrollment, budgets, and educational programs.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the interviewer will know how specific superintendents responded to interview questions. The dissertation and any publications based on this research will not identify you or your school district. While this study will focus on inter-district school choice and charter school choice in this region of Massachusetts, there will be no reference to the region in the dissertation and all superintendents, schools, and districts in this study will be given pseudonyms.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can

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refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

**You will not be paid for your participation in this study.**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call student researcher or his advisor if I have questions or concerns about participation in this study. The student researcher, Scott Carpenter, can be contacted at 56 Stepping Stones Road, Chatham, MA 02633, by personal phone number at (508) 375-5900 or his Northeastern email at carpenter.sco@husky.neu.edu. The principal investigator, Dr. Corliss Brown Thompson can be contacted at her Northeastern University email address, co.brown@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115 or by phone at (617) 373-4588. She may also be reached at n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this statement for yourself.

Thank you.

Scott Carpenter
Doctoral Student in the College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University

IRB# CPS17-03-18
Approved: 4/25/17
Expiration Date: 4/24/18
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University
360 Huntington Ave
Boston, MA 02115-5000
Tel: 617.373.7570; Fax: 617.373.4595

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies, Doctorate of Education Program

Name of Investigator: Principal Investigator, Corliss Brown Thompson, Student Researcher, Scott Carpenter

Title of Project: Superintendent’s Responses to Public School Choice: An Inductive Multicase Study of School Choice Policies in Massachusetts

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
You are invited to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of school choice on school districts in this region of the state and the superintendent’s responses to enrollment-driven competition coming from the loss of students to inter-district school choice and to charter schools. Only a subset of school superintendents at the helm of Cape Cod school districts during the late 2000s will be invited to partake in an interview for this research project. As a school superintendent in the area during the late 2000s, you are being asked to participate in this study.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of school choice the region’s school districts and the superintendent’s responses to enrollment-driven competition coming from the loss of students to inter-district school choice and to charter schools. This qualitative study intends to interview and capture the recollections and perceptions of a subset of public school district superintendents from the area during the late 2000s. The study seeks to understand how policies related to inter-district school choice and charter schools affected each superintendent’s school district and how each superintendent responded to the enrollment-driven competitive pressure.
What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one open-ended interview about school choice. You will be provided, in advance, a copy of the main questions asked of all study participants. You will be contacted once following the interview and given a transcript of the interview and summary of the findings of this study. The researcher will ask for your feedback to ensure that the transcript correctly captures your responses and to check whether the summary of findings coincides with your understanding of school choice.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The interview will take no longer than 90 minutes. The interview will take place at a conducive place of your choosing and can be conducted by phone. After the student-researcher provides you a transcript and summary of findings, and offers the opportunity to provide feedback, it is anticipated that your participation in this study to be at least 90 minutes, but not more than three hours.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study; however, your answers may help shed light on the effects of inter-district school choice and charter school legislation on local school district’s enrollment, budgets, and educational programs.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researcher conducting the interview will know which Cape Cod superintendents participated and how specific superintendents responded to interview questions. Any reports or publications based on this research will not identify you or your school district. While this study will focus on inter-district school choice and charter school choice on Cape Cod, all superintendents and districts in this study will be given pseudonyms.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You can choose to not be part of this study.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
You participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate and can choose to not answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study or participation in it, please feel free to call student researcher or his advisor. The student researcher, Scott Carpenter, can be contacted at 56 Stepping Stones Road, Chatham, MA 02633, by personal phone number at (508) 375-5900, or his Northeastern email at carpenter.sco@husky.neu.edu. His doctoral advisor, Dr. Corliss Brown Thompson, can be contacted at her Northeastern University email address, co.brown@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
Neither you nor your former school district will be paid for your participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
It will not cost you or your former school district anything to participate in this study.

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Expiration Date: 4/24/18
Is there anything else I need to know?
No.

I agree to take part in this research.

_________________________________________  __________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part     Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of person above

_________________________________________  __________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of person above