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Case Study of the Voluntary Student Transfer Program:
The Perspectives of African American Students
and Parent Participants in One
Midwestern School District

by

Rosalyn Harper Goodwin

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

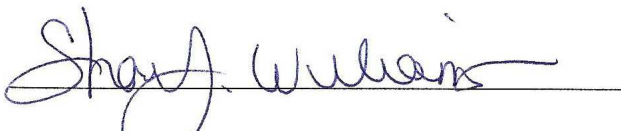
School of Education

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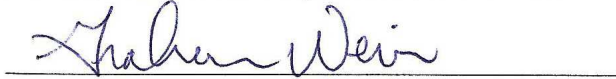
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degree of
Doctor of Education
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education



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11/15/13

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Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Rosalyn Harper Goodwin

Signature: Rosalyn Harper Goodwin Date: 11/15/13

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Abstract

This study investigated the perspectives of four students and 6 parent participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program, an inter-district desegregation program that involves transporting African American students from urban area schools to surrounding county schools. Due to limited and dated research related to the Voluntary Student Transfer (VST) program, the researcher employed a qualitative collective case study framework which included a semi-structured interview protocol and questionnaires to gather perceptual data of parent and student participants of the program. The collective case studies revealed that parent and student participants of the VST program were satisfied with the program overall had not considered discontinuing participation for any reason. Data analysis revealed common themes addressed by parents and students to support their perceptions about the VST program. These themes included quality of education, the importance of relationships, and parent activism. Busing and the distance from home was another combined theme that developed, presenting a drawback from program participation. Because the sample size of this study represents a small percentage of the participants in the VST program, further studies should be conducted to include more perspectives within the research district and other districts implementing the VST program.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

Education has become the single most important factor in garnering success as an adult. According to the 2009 Educational Attainment Report developed by the U.S. Census Bureau (Ryan & Siebens, 2012) higher educational attainment directly corresponds with higher earnings. High school graduates earned about \$27,000, while workers with a General Education Diploma (GED) earned approximately \$23,000 annually. Median earnings for persons with a bachelor's degree were 77% higher than the median earnings for persons with a high school diploma (Ryan & Siebens, 2012, p. 3)

While education is the largest indicator for success in adult life, the United States has historically underserved the educational and economic needs of minority populations living in urban settings (Jones, 2007; Sadovnik & Semel, 2010). Over 14 million children living in urban settings must combat difficult familial circumstances such as poverty, violence, language barriers, and low parental involvement (Jacob, 2007; McKinney, Robinson, & Spooner, 2004; Sachs, 2004). Once at school, urban students must then endure and overcome teachers who may be less qualified in “experience, educational background and teacher certification” (Jacob, 2007, p. 129). Research conducted by Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005) concluded that there is a 44% difference in passing rate when a student is in an effective versus ineffective school setting. With the 1954 Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Friedman, 2004) the promise of equal educational opportunities for all students has been a legal mandate. While this promise is evident in law, the execution and implementation of

practices to uphold the law has been slow, and fairly nuanced in districts across the country for almost 60 years.

One result of the inequality that has permeated minority students' educational experiences is the emergence of school choice. Within the public setting "charter schools, magnet schools, and traditional public schools can be accessed through intra- and inter-district open enrollment plans, voluntary integration plans, or more regulated desegregation programs" (Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 84). School choice has gained popularity over the past 40 years, particularly for parents and students who live in the nation's urban settings where minorities, particularly African Americans, are the predominate populations being served (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Jones, 2007; Musher, Musher, Graviss, & Strudler, 2005). School choice, in the form of an inter-district program, became an option for St. Louis, Missouri, residents after a federal court case affirmed African American parents' beliefs that St. Louis City Public School District's policies obstructed African American students from receiving equality in their educational experiences due to segregational practices (Freivogel, 2002; Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004).

The events leading to this historic precedent began in 1971 when Minnie Liddell, an African American mother of four, grew tired of St. Louis City Public School's constant changes in school assignments and transportation for her children. Ms. Liddell received a school reassignment letter stating that her eldest son was being reassigned from the school with "middle-class and blue-collar neighbors...and a fantastic principal" (Freivogel, 2002, p. 211) to a school that Minnie Liddell later described as a "boarded up

building surrounded by deserted and burned buildings” (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 89). Minnie Liddell, along with a core group of parents, formed the Concerned Parents of North St. Louis. This group went on to later file a suit on behalf of their children in February 1972 against the “St. Louis School Board, individual members, the school superintendent, and district superintendents in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri” (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 80).

In 1980, after many years of languishing through the state and federal courts, St. Louis Public School District and the State of Missouri were proven liable for sustaining a desegregated school system (Freivogel, 2002). The ruling also stated that the St. Louis Public School District failed to “counteract the continuing effects of past school segregation...from discriminatory location of school sites or the distortion of school sizes to maintain artificial racial separation” (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 93). The ruling went on to hold the state mostly culpable for the insistent segregation that occurred in St. Louis City Public Schools. The courts charged both parties to develop and implement an all-inclusive plan that would begin with the 1980-1981 school year. With the court’s mandate, a “voluntary, cooperative plan of pupil exchanges” (Freivogel, 2002, p. 211) between city and county schools was created and named the Voluntary Student Transfer (VST) program. The program, developed to “eradicate the remaining vestiges of government-imposed school segregation in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County” (Freivogel, 2002, p. 212), began with six pilot districts.

In 1983 a Settlement Agreement was reached to include not only the transfer of Black city students into primarily White suburban districts, but White suburban students

into magnet schools in the city (Voluntary Inter district Choice Corporation, n.d.). One of the agreement's most crucial components required St. Louis County's mostly White schools to increase the African American population by 15% or reach and maintain a student population that was 25% African American (Freivogel, 2002). These changes were overseen by the Voluntary Inter district Coordinating Council (VICC), a state-funded committee that coordinated transfers to and from county schools and conducted research data on the inter-district program (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004; Voluntary Inter district Choice Corporation, n.d.).

In 1999, the Voluntary Student Transfer Program was no longer under federal supervision and a new settlement agreement was reached to extend the program through the 2008-2009 school year (VVICC, n.d.). The program extension was supported by a 2/3-cent sales tax increase that was approved by St. Louis City voters to recompense for state funding that was no longer available. Subsequently, the VST program went under another program extension in 2012 to allow students to continue to enroll in participating districts through 2019 (VICC, n.d.).

St. Louis is not the only city that has adopted inter-district desegregation programs in the United States. At the time of this research eight other inter-district school desegregation programs had been implemented across the United States (Wells et al., 2009). Each program shares the same goal of providing a quality and diverse education for students, but also share differences in origin, ethnic participation, and legal intervention. Federal court orders spurred the inter-district programs in St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Indianapolis. State court orders impelled programs in Hartford,

Minneapolis, and East Palo Alto, while state, and local policies to create more racially balanced schools provided the foundation for inter-district programs in Boston and Rochester (Wells et al., 2009). While other inter-district desegregation programs exist, the Voluntary Student Transfer program is the largest of its kind, transferring well over 150,000 students to St. Louis County schools to date. Further information about each inter-district program is discussed in Chapter 2 (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004; VICC, n.d.). While St. Louis is not the only city to implement an inter-district desegregation program, it is the largest in the nation being twice as large as Milwaukee's program, 20 times the size of Harford's, and five times the size of Boston's inter-district program (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004; VICC, n.d).

Statement of Problem

The *Plessy v. Board of Education* ruling has prompted many studies on the topic of desegregation, but there have been few studies of the Voluntary Student Transfer Program. A 1990s quantitative study examined student test scores as a predictor of the program's success or failure (Freivogel, 2002). The most recent report provided an overview of the VST program along with seven other existing inter-district desegregation programs across the United States (Wells & Crain, 1997). These two studies follow the popular trend of desegregation research that focuses on the academic and social gains of student participants. According to research conducted on all St. Louis County schools participating in the VST program, there are benefits to students opting to participate in this program by being bussed from their urban community to a suburban school setting (Wells et al., 2009). In comparison to their peers who continue in St. Louis Public

Schools, students in the VST program graduate at a higher rate, have more social exposure, and higher Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores as they persist in suburban schools (Freivogel, 2002). However, a gap in achievement still exists between African Americans and their White peers, particularly when analyzing American College Testing (ACT) scores and grade point averages (Freivogel, 2002; Wells et al., 2009).

As an employee of the participating district whose primary job was to analyze data and build staff capacity to make sound data based decisions, this researcher began to notice themes in conversations and practices related to the achievement of African American students, particularly students who participated in the VST program. Themes of deficit thinking and stereotyping that oversimplified student's behavior and academic issues were observed and overheard. Faculty and staff referred to factors such as parenting, home environment, poverty, lack of motivation, and commitment to explain the gaps in achievement between VST student participants, and their White peers. Singham (2003) would call these achievement gap explanations myths, because

The difficulty with myths is not that they are necessarily false, but rather that they are beliefs whose truth or reality is accepted uncritically. It is relatively easy to debunk falsehoods. Much harder to overcome are those beliefs that have some element of truth in them but that are promoted with a single-minded determination that can undermine attempts to systematically solve the problem.

The persistence and prevalence of these myths can be seen if you attend any meeting...that deals with the causes of the achievement gap between Black students and White students. You will find a range of analyses (and a corresponding variety of suggested solutions): biased standardized tests, tests that

do not match the learning styles of Black students, less money spent on educating Black students, socioeconomic differences, lack of motivation, negative peer pressure, lack of family support for education, teacher biases, and many other possibilities. All of these figure prominently in the menu of causes. (p. 586-587)

After listening to these conversations over the years from the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and staff, this researcher grew curious of the educational satisfaction and experiences of parents and students who participated in Voluntary Student Transfer program. Upon thorough review of the research, no studies related to the perceptual data of parents and students of the Voluntary Student Transfer program emerged.

At the national level, various desegregation programs exist in addition to inter-district desegregation programs. According to Finnigan and Stewart (2009), inter-district programs exist in “New York, Massachusetts, Missouri, California, Connecticut, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Nebraska” (p. 2). In 2000, New Jersey joined the group of metropolitan areas providing an inter-district choice for all students (New Jersey State Board of Education, n.d.). Research has been conducted on the strengths and weaknesses of these inter-district programs as it relates to financial cost, as well as academic and social benefits (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Wells et al., 2009). Studies including the perspectives of students and parents are even more limited. One study conducted by Sturges, Cramer, Harry, and Klingner (2005), examined the behaviors and contrasting perspectives of school personnel and parents related to a parental involvement initiative that followed desegregation efforts at an elementary school in Texas.

Another study of desegregated high schools and their class of graduates focused on perspectives more than 20 years after the integration occurred. This study, however, was conducted in a single district setting where desegregation occurred within the district (Wells, Holme, Revilla, & Atanda, 2004). Lastly, a quantitative study published in 1997 reported the perspectives of parents and student participants in Boston's inter-district desegregation program (Orfield et al., 1997). Due to limited and dated research available at the local and national levels related to the perspectives of student and parent participants in the Voluntary Student Transfer program or other inter-district desegregation programs, current participant perspectives are unknown.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to research the perspectives of student and parent participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program who have participated in the program from five years or more in one St. Louis County school district. Voluntary and court-ordered desegregation continues to occur across the country. This study will close the gap in current literature for other local districts who continue to implement desegregation policies across the country.

Questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to answer the following research question and sub questions:

What are the perceptions and attitudes of parents and students participating in the Voluntary Student Transfer Program?

- a. What are the similarities and differences between parent and student perceptions?

- b. Have parent and student expectations changed through their experiences with the program?

Significance of the Study

According to research conducted by McClain (2010), little attention is paid to the perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes of parents who are actively engaged in their children's schooling. McClain (2010) stated, "Educators often do not recognize the many ways in which urban parents may be involved in their children's schooling" (p. 3075). McClain, therefore suggested more qualitative research be conducted to provide more in-depth understanding of parents' perspectives as they navigate and make critical decisions related to their child's schooling. Ladson-Billings (2006) believed "it is important not to overlook the ways that communities of color always have worked to educate themselves" (p. 7). School choice plans at its core, "relies on students and parents to make choices" (Wells et al., 2009, p. 3), thus it is important to gather the perspectives of the students and parents that provides the impetus for this program to continue and evolve. At the district level, gathering in-depth perceptual data from participants will provide useful information to help strengthen the program. This information will also be useful for the Voluntary Inter-district Choice Corporation, and its other participating districts as they make future decisions related to the continuation of the program. Finally, voluntary and court-ordered inter-district programs are still being implemented across the country. This study fills a gap in the research available for other districts who continue to implement desegregation programs in the United States.

Delimitations

The sample size for this study is delimited to one school district in St. Louis County, Missouri, the Midwestern School District, a pseudonym to protect the district's anonymity. Because this study involves only a few participants of the program in one district, the findings may not be representative of all participants of the VST program (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). Also, only students who had participated in the program for five years or more were included in the study.

Limitations

Researcher bias may influence the interpretation of the data collected from the qualitative measures used in this study (McLeod, 2008; Frankel & Wallen, 2010). Researchers tout the importance of being aware of one's "biases, blind spots, and cognitive limitations" (Mehra, 2002, p. 4). Because of this theory, potential biases were outlined and potential preconceptions were discussed with the Lindenwood University teaching staff prior to data collection. Once this researcher was made aware of biases, the importance of setting these biases aside when interpreting the data was understood. For this cause, data was triangulated to support research findings.

Definition of Terms

Brown v. Board of Education. A United States Supreme Court case that deemed state-sanctioned segregation of public schools unconstitutional. This ruling, dated May 17, 1954, ended "separate but equal" schooling (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

Cultural Capital. Cultural capital is “the forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society” (Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 269).

Liddell v. Board of Education. A Missouri court case that found St. Louis Public School District and the State of Missouri liable for sustaining a desegregated school system. The ruling held the state mostly culpable for the segregation that occurred in St. Louis City Public Schools. The courts charged both parties to develop and implement an all-inclusive plan to integrate schools beginning with the 1980-1981 school year (Liddell v. St. Louis Board of Education, 1979).

Plessy v. Ferguson. A United States Supreme Court case that sanctioned the “separate but equal doctrine” giving states permission to legally separate Blacks and Whites (Mintz, 2012).

School Choice. A reliance on parents and students to make the decision to enroll their child in a school program of their choosing (Wells et al., 2009).

Turner v. Clayton. A St. Louis County Court case that vetoed the transfer of students in locally unaccredited St. Louis City, and Riverview Garden School Districts to better districts at the expense of the home district (Bock, 2012).

Voluntary Inter district Choice Corporation (VICC). A non-profit organization that has also used the moniker Voluntary Inter district Coordinating Council. This organization oversees the implementation of the St. Louis metropolitan area desegregation program, and facilitates transfers of city students to suburban school districts since 1981 (BICC, n.d.).

Voluntary Student Transfer Program (VST). Inter-district desegregation plan that involves transporting African American students from urban area schools to surrounding county schools and vice-versa (Freivogel, 2002).

Summary

In this chapter, the importance of education as it relates to the success of adults, and the educational inequities for minorities was discussed. The advent of school choice, particularly the Voluntary Student Program was outlined, and also provided background for this research study. A gap in literature related to parent and student perspectives of inter-district programs was exposed as well. Delimitations and limitations of this study were included in this chapter, along with terms to help provide an overview to the research study. Chapter 2 will discuss the history of St. Louis and surrounding counties as it pertains to race, housing and education, along with the impact these subjects had in precipitating the need for the Voluntary Student Transfer program. The reactions of stakeholders to the program will be explored along with the program's success in meeting its established goals. Finally, a description of other inter-district programs in the United States will be provided.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

On any given school day, in any given neighborhood in the city of St. Louis, school buses travel the urban streets collecting over 5,000 students transporting them to a suburban school as far as an hour away (VICC, n.d.). These students, participants in the VST program, are traveling in hopes of receiving a better, and more diverse education that is not likely to be found in their partially accredited St. Louis City school district where 20% of African American students do not graduate and whose average ACT score is 16.5, five points below the Missouri state average (ACT, 2013; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). The VST program, a court ordered, inter-district busing program established in 1981, was established to nullify years of segregation and disparate educational opportunities for African American students.

The practice of busing minorities out of their communities to schools with majority White populations coincides with the interest-convergence dilemma offered as part of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework (Morris, 2001). CRT was born out of the work of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars who began to question whether the progress made during the civil rights era of the 1960s was continuing at an appropriate speed and rate (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). Early theorists such as Bell, Freeman, and Delgado began to examine foundation of civil rights and question its true mission of providing equality for all when most civil rights laws, upon closer review, placed more burden African Americans, and continued to reinforce stratification

of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). Morris (2011) quoted Bell's thoughts on the subject with this explanation:

- 1) the interest convergence principle is built on political history as legal precedent and emphasizes that significant progress for African Americans is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites, and
- 2) the price of racial remedies asserts that Whites will not support civil rights policies that appear to threaten their superior social status (p. 577)

An example of this, Morris (2001) purported, is civil rights legislation that often involves "the disproportionate busing of African Americans into predominately White neighborhoods" (p. 577).

Each year, thousands of parents complete transfer applications to send their child to a county school through the VST program. These completed applications require information regarding residency, student's grade, current school, special education needs, and guardianship status. Parents also indicate three school district choices within their attendance area, along with siblings who currently participate in the program as it is their policy to place siblings in the same district. Preference is also given to new applicants whose siblings are already participating in the program (VICC, n.d.). Completed applications are then sent or faxed to the VICC office that manages the transfer program.

According to the VICC website, their office receives approximately five applicants for every spot available (VICC, n.d.). Because this program is no longer under court order to continue, chances for obtaining a spot within this program is also complicated due to decreasing district participation and the increased diversity that lives

within district communities (VICC, n.d.). As of the 2011-2012 school year, 11 of the 16 original school districts are still accepting new transfer students, with a total of 6,147 students transferring to suburban districts. This number is half of the spots that were available a decade ago (VICC, n.d.). While space is limited for this first come, first served program, parents are hopeful that they will be one of the lucky ones to receive notice that their child has been accepted.

Although the VST program was created to provide more diverse educational opportunities for students in the St. Louis metropolitan area, when looking at the broader context, the program has affected the residential, political, social and economic cultures of the area as well. According to an article by Wells et al. (2009),

School...boundaries shape children's educational opportunities in countless ways. Living on one side of a district boundary line or the other can dictate whether a student has access to challenging curriculum...high expectations...and a wealth of other tangible and intangible factors that influence learning. (p. 1)

Such is the case when looking at the lives of students in the city schools of St. Louis, Missouri.

Through the combined review of books, newspaper, and journal articles that help to provide a pertinent and well-rounded context of information due to the limited amount of research conducted on the VST program, this literature review begins with an overview of the history of race relations in St. Louis, which describes discriminatory patterns in housing and schooling that sets the foundation for the advent of the VST

Program. A description of the VST Program and stakeholder reactions at the start of the program follows. A small number of quantitative research articles related to this topic are discussed, and a section examining other inter-district desegregation programs implemented in the United States is included.

St. Louis City and Race Relations

In the 1800s the geographic location of a state provided great insight to the social and political philosophies and ideologies the people living within the state held. The state of Missouri, and its oldest city, St. Louis, is geographically located in an area that was considered neither South nor North. Because of this geographical positioning, St. Louis seemed to mirror a “confluence of cultural themes” (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 23), particularly when exploring the themes surrounding African Americans and race relations. Some argued that St. Louisans racially had the worst of both worlds. Heathcott (2005) described St. Louis as a “cultural breakpoint between the North and the South, and its social and civic life blended aspects of both regions” (p. 709). Missouri acquired southern state attributes that condoned inequalities such as slavery, and later residential and educational segregation, yet practiced the North’s lackadaisical attitude when socially conscience response to these inequalities were necessary (Wells & Crain, 1997; Heathcott, 2005).

Freivogel (2002) best encapsulated the dichotomous roles Missouri, and most notably, St. Louis played in the race relations in the United States.

Missouri has been a stage on which the tragedy and triumph of race have played

out...The Missouri compromise held off the Civil War. The Dred Scott case helped precipitate it. A Jefferson City inn's refusal to serve African Americans was one of the legal cases that resulted in Plessy's separate but equal doctrine. Lloyd Gaines of St. Louis won one of the landmark desegregation lawsuits that preceded Brown. After the University of Missouri build a separate "law school"...Gaines mysteriously disappeared. The Supreme Court decision that outlawed enforcement of racial real estate covenants, *Shelley v. Kramer*, arose in St. Louis, a few blocks from where the school desegregation case later began. When the court upheld a Reconstruction statutes as a bar to housing discrimination in *Jones v. Mayer*, it was...a St. Louis case. (p. 210)

In 1820, The Missouri Compromise prohibited slavery in newly admitted states north of the 36° 30' latitude line, with the exception of Missouri (Wells & Crain, 1997; Congress, 2010). Some historians believe this compromise may have "postponed the Civil War for a generation" (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 25). Years later, a St. Louis slave, Dred Scott, traveled to Illinois, a free state. After returning to Missouri, he sued for his freedom, citing that when he traveled to a free state, he then became free. This case went all the way to the Supreme Court and in 1857, the courts ruled that a slave, by Missouri law, could not sue for his freedom (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 26). This ruling helped spur great debate over the principles of slavery, causing many slave owners in Missouri to begin freeing their slaves. After the Civil War, Missouri legislature freed the last 45,000 slaves around the state, many of those free men, women and children chose to settle in St. Louis City (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 28). Thus the journey for equal housing and schooling for African Americans began.

From slavery to segregation: housing. St. Louis boasts a diverse population of people. Heathcott (2005) argued that the emergence of segregation occurred as a product of the “settlement of cultures” (p. 707) in the city during World War II, yet people of Irish, German, Polish, and Italian descent were eventually able to settle nicely into St. Louis’ dominant culture. Regrettably, that is not the case for African Americans. Between 1900 and 1950, African Americans migrated to St. Louis from the deep South looking for a better way of life and better opportunities. “In ten years, between 1910 and 1920 the White population increased by 12% while the African American population increased by nearly 60% to 70,000” (Heathcott, 2005, p. 707). As the population of African Americans increased in the city, the poor treatment of this race grew as well.

A concerted effort was made by St. Louis realtors and other powerful decision makers to confine the growth of African American communities and contain the amount of space they inhabited in the city (Gordon, 2008). Wells and Crain (1997) reported that by 1900 the city of St. Louis had more than 30 wards and close to 50% of African Americans lived in only six of them compared to 14% of White. Of these six wards, two were so heavily packed that living quarters were sandwiched behind factories and warehouses. The other four wards were littered with poorly constructed homes and shanties. African Americans desiring to move into better homes were forced to stay in these poor living conditions due to high rent, discrimination, and persecution imposed by Whites (Wells & Crain, 1997). According to author Gordon (2008)

The isolation of African Americans on St. Louis’ near northside was accomplished and enforced in a variety of ways; some private and public strategies of exclusion overlapped and reinforced one another, others were

cobbled together as legal challenges prohibited some of the more direct tools of segregation. At the center of this story was the local realty industry, which lobbied for explicitly racial zoning in the World War I era; pursued and enforced race-restrictive deed covenants into the middle years of the century; pioneered the practice of residential security rating which governed both private mortgages and public mortgage guarantees; and—as a central precept of industry practice—actively discouraged desegregation of the private housing. (p. 68)

Though the U.S. Supreme Court nullified racial zoning laws in 1917, decades later, White property owners established private pacts in their neighborhoods vowing not to sell or rent their properties to African Americans. By 1930, 316 covenants were in existence in the city. In 1939, the Shelleys, an African American family, attempted to purchase a home in a neighborhood under a 1911 covenant that forbade the sale of the property to anyone other than a Caucasian for 50 years (Wells & Crain, 1997). The White property owner agreed to sell the property, but a couple living in the neighborhood sued to prevent the family from moving in. The Missouri Supreme Court believed the housing covenant was lawful and did not infringe upon the rights of the Shelleys. In May 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned that ruling saying while restrictive covenants are not a violation of the United States Constitution, states were not able to enforce these covenants in the courts (Wells & Crain, 1997). Since the states were not able to reinforce these community and neighborhood covenants, White homeowners resorted to violence and intimidation to keep African Americans out of their communities. While racial zoning laws, and other practices of racial segregation no longer legally exist, the color line in the West and North sides of St. Louis City still exists

(Wells & Crain, 1997; Heathcott, 2005). According to the 2010 Census, 100,985 residents live in the North corridor of the city. Of these residents, only 3,691 are White and 94,900 are African American (Census Results, 2010).

After World War II, over 100,000 residents left St. Louis City, while the surrounding suburbs increase in population by over 50% (Reisner, 1967, p.53). By the same token in “1930, non-Whites represented 11.6% of the population; by 1960 the percentage had risen to 28.8% of the city total” (Reisner, 1967, p. 53). When Whites fled the city, they took with them business and industry. Between 1947 and 1958, the city of St. Louis lost 21% of its manufacturing jobs and the suburbs gained 42%. Between 1951 and 1969 the city lost 37,000 payroll jobs and 49,000 manufacturing jobs while the County added 197,000 payroll and 44,000 manufacturing jobs. In 1970 St. Louis lost 43 companies to the suburbs (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 64). These departing industries also took important tax monies that would prove vital for continued growth and progress of the city.

From slavery to segregation: schools. Bolstered by the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1896 decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, deeming separate but equal facilities constitutional, Missouri “sought to apply the principals of *Plessy v. Ferguson* to the letter of the law” (Heathcott, 2005, p. 712) by requiring segregated schools for all its African American students (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004). In testament to this statement, St. Louis city built Sumner High School in 1903, considered to be the “finest African American high school in the country” (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 59). The \$300,000 building included an auditorium, labs, industrial education facilities, and a pool. While African American teachers were the lowest paid teachers in St. Louis City, Sumner High attracted

the best and brightest African American teachers, among them some of the first African American Ph.D.s (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 62). Twenty years later, Vashon High School was built to meet the demand for the growing African American population. African American enrollment in the St. Louis City schools district rose from 10,547 in 1920 to 15,554 in 1929. While seven new African American elementary schools were built from this point until 1945, Sumner and Vashon High Schools remained the only options for African American secondary students in St. Louis City. In 1929, an educational survey revealed that the opportunities for African American students in St. Louis were “relatively adequate” (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 61).

Although St. Louis City schools were considered moderately satisfactory, there still lacked equality between White and African American students. According to Wells and Crain (1997), the St. Louis School Board spent three times the money on White students than on African American students. Moreover, African American students received the worn and torn hand-me down resources and books of White students. In 1939 kindergarten classes had an average of “27.5 students in White schools and 34.8 students in African American schools” (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 64). In elementary schools, the average class size was 41.4 for White schools opposed to 45.4 in African American schools. Only when students arrived in high school did the numbers equalize. At this time, many African Americans were not able to move on to high school as many dropped out to work or were not able to meet the demands of the rigorous course work. Additionally, White students had the privilege of attending neighborhood schools in walking distance to their homes. Before Vashon High School was built, African American students living in the city and surrounding rural areas attended Sumner and had

to endure long walks, horse, and trolley rides in order to receive a relatively adequate education (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 61). The lawful support of separate but unequal schooling in Missouri continued until the 1950s, mirroring the practices and treatment of African American students across the United States.

Desegregation (after *Brown v. Board of Education*) 1954-1971

The landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* affirmed the role of education in the lives of all students:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments...It is the very foundation of good citizenship...It is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust to his environment. (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights & The Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2013, p. 6)

This decision proved that the beliefs and actions prescribed by *Plessy v. Ferguson* “has no place in the field of public education” and “deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities” (Kinshasa, 2006, p. 16). This ruling rattled the foundational structures of segregation which polarized two distinct groups, “one free the other slave, one a master class the other a social pariah, one privileged the other deprived, on White the others African American, brown, red or yellow” (Kinshasa, 2006, p.16). While the law was meant to be followed with “all deliberate speed” (Daniel, 2005, p. 58), the road to true integration in schools in St. Louis and around the nation was marred with complications for almost two more decades.

St. Louis Public Schools were ready to respond to the changes in the law, however inappropriate the response. Seven years prior to the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education*, St. Louis public schools hired a desegregation consultant to prepare for changes in the legislation many knew were coming. The board of education unanimously adopted a two-year, three-phase integration plan that national groups embraced as a solid plan for implementation (Wells & Crain, 1997; Freivogel, 2002; Heaney & Uchitell, 2004). This plan allowed African Americans to go to neighborhood schools. On the national stage, it seemed as if great things would be happening for African American students and their families. In St. Louis, the reality was that little changed after the integration plan was implemented. Because of the real estate covenants that had been put into effect years before, most African Americans lived in confined spaces in the city with clearly drawn school boundaries that did not allow for truly desegregated schools. The attendance boundaries of 16 of its 84 White elementary schools were redrawn to include a small number of African American students. All traditionally African American elementary schools were then fed into the two African American high schools, Sumner and Vashon. If African Americans and Whites were in the same school boundaries, the district gave them the option to stay in their previous schools until graduation, allowing many White students to capitalize on this option. Another policy supporting continued segregation was the “intact busing” policy (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 79).

Because of overcrowding at the two African American high schools, the district proposed intact busing as a way to combat this issue. Busses transported classes of African American students to White high schools with vacant rooms available. At the height of this policy, as many as 5,000 African American students were bussed to other

schools. However, the African American students were wholly segregated from their White peers being educated, fed, and socialized in confinement. As White flight escalated due to desegregation efforts, plummeting home values, and African Americans slowly moving to what were once all-White neighborhoods, the district redrew district boundaries often to exclude African Americans in their schools as much as possible (Wells & Crain, 1997; Heaney & Uchitell, 2004). As a result of outcries from parents, as well as community and civic leaders from both sides, the district eventually refrained from busing students, instead choosing to build more schools in nearly all-African American attendance areas through bond issues that all White, Southside neighborhoods handily supported in order to keep African American children on the north side of town. African Americans began naming these schools “containment schools” (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 87).

Voluntary Student Transfer Program. While the St. Louis Board of Education continued to be nationally recognized for having a motivated and ambitious integration plan that was “good government in action” (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 80), the local comments and reactions to this plan were quite different. The reality for some students in the African American community was the yearly receipt of a letter before the start of school detailing mandatory changes in school assignments due to redistricting and overcrowding of African American schools. Over time, community groups loosely contested these unwarranted interruptions to African American students’ education. One such community group, the Citizens for Equality Education, provided a list of demands that recognized the inequalities that occurred in St. Louis’s implementation of the desegregation plan to the board. The document’s contents, drawn from a local African

American newspaper in the city, the *St. Louis American*, (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004) gave voice to the growing frustration in the African American community. It stated:

We do not oppose busing as a sensible plan for utilizing the total school facilities of the community, but we do not find acceptable the fall plans for busing...[which] include: A) Containment of the transportation of Negro children within the Negro community thereby extending de facto desegregation into administrative segregation; B) Transportation of children greater distances than necessary for available seats; C) Refusal to use all the schools for integrated busing that had been used for segregated busing two years ago; D) Refusal to admit that departure and return schedules can be adjusted to allow transported pupils full participation in the life of half-empty schools some distance away; E) Non-utilization of all the available school space in the St. Louis Public School System; F) Threatening to segregate bused pupils in receiving schools if further construction or rented facilities are not obtained within the Negro community.

We strongly oppose the current and future plans calling for the rental of marginal church facilities where the environment gives children the minimum of a seat and a teacher without the full use of necessary common facilities such as library, gym, playground space, lunchroom...etc. We insist that the Board make public the amount of classroom space available and establish a policy of utilizing such space...[Preceding] any plans for new construction of schools, so that a full utilization of existing school facilities can save taxpayers the needless cost of new construction. (p. 80)

A group called the Concerned Parents of North St. Louis was created due to the displeasure of educational conditions for African Americans, which echoed the Citizens for Equality Education's beliefs that St. Louis City School's policies were obstructing African American students from receiving equality in their educational experiences. In February 1972, the Concerned Parents of North St. Louis filed a law suit against the "St. Louis School Board, individual members, the school superintendent, and district superintendents in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri" with Minnie Liddell, an African American mother of four chosen as the face and voice of the disgruntled parent group (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004, p. 80). Minnie Liddell is quoted as saying, "I had to do something about segregation. When we started our crusade, we had no idea where the struggle would take us....But we were determined to improve the quality of education for our children" (Tabscott, 2009, p. 4).

Eight years later St. Louis Public School and the State of Missouri were proven liable for sustaining a desegregated school system, with most of the culpability being placed on the state (Liddell v. St. Louis Board of Education, 1979). Because of this ruling, both parties were mandated to an all-inclusive plan to integrate schools starting with the 1980-1981 school year that held these elements (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981):

1. Clustering of elementary schools
2. Reassignment and transportation of high school students
3. Continuation of existing magnet schools and creation of six new schools
4. Creation of specialty programs to be offered to all students in the district

5. North St. Louis schools would be offered development and enrichment programs including remedial and compensatory features
6. Sharpening the provisions applicable to permissive transfers
7. Commitment by the board to seek and develop inter-district plans of voluntary cooperation with school districts of St. Louis County
8. Adoption of a “Singleton” type faculty assignment plan to equalize the proportion of minority and majority faculty in each school
9. Regular reporting to the court
10. Monitoring of the plan
11. Citizen participation in implementation. (p. 18)

The elements of this ruling built the foundation for inter-district transfers, which required White suburban districts to increase the number of African American students by 15% or to reach and maintain a 25% African American student population. This mandate allowed African American students living in the City of St. Louis the opportunity to transfer to any of 122 schools in 16 suburban districts (Wells & Crain, 1997; Freivogel, 2002; Heaney & Uchitell, 2004). The cost of this program was tremendous. In the first year of the program the state paid half the cost of the program, over \$11 million dollars (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981).

At the inception of the VST program over 30,000 African American students in the city were in all-African American schools (Freivogel, 2002, p. 217). According to the VICC, the non profit organization that oversaw the implementation of the VST program and their website, at the height of the program in 1999 over 14,000 city resident students were served in a suburban school during a school year, slightly short of the court’s goal

of 15,000 (VICC, n.d.). Another component of this agreement allowed for White students from the suburbs to attend magnet schools in the city of St. Louis. This component was met with much less enthusiasm. At the height of this program, in a given school year, as many as 1,300 students transferred from suburban schools to St. Louis City's magnet schools, severely short of the court's goals of 6,000 (VVICC, n.d.; Freivogel, 2002). Over 41% of suburban students dropped out of the transfer program due to the lengthy bus ride and poor educational programs that were provided in the city schools. This is in stark contrast to the city residents who dropped out at an average of 14 %. Thus, just as in so many other communities with desegregation programs, the burden of success for the busing program landed squarely on African American shoulders (Woodward, 2011). From its beginning until 1999, the program was considered one of the most innovative and expensive desegregation programs in the country, costing more than \$2 billion (Freivogel, 2002, p. 209; Morris, 2001).

In 1999, the case was removed from federal supervision after a settlement agreement was reached allowing the program to continue through the 2008-2009 school year. A five-year extension was approved by the VICC board, whose members are superintendents of the participating suburban districts. This extension allows students to continue to enroll students until the 2013-2014 school year, with talks of another extension in the works. In order to support the continuance of the program, St. Louis City approved a tax increase to help cushion the cost of the no longer state supported initiative. Prior to the 1999 settlement agreement, African American students could choose any school to attend. To make transport more manageable, the VICC board established four attendance zones, allowing students to apply for transfer within their

attendance zone. Only if students were able to provide their own transportation were they able to attend a school outside their attendance area (Heaney & Uchitell, 2004; VICC, n.d.). Transfer participation has not declined for there are thousands of applicants who are placed on wait lists every year (VICC, n.d.; Wells et al., 2009).

Typically VICC receives five applications for every one opening, with a majority of these applications for students in transition grades of sixth and ninth (Hahn, 2010).

Table 1.

VST City to County Enrollment from 1999-2013

School Year	Total City to County Enrollment	Total Transfer Students
1999-2000	12978	14227
2000-2001	11694	12619
2001-2002	11197	11991
2002-2003	10649	11356
2003-2004	10093	10649
2004-2005	9598	10097
2005-2006	8257	8675
2006-2007	8027	8318
2008-2009	6774	6945
2009-2010	6147	6314
2010-2011	5882	6024
2011-2012	5450	5554
2012-2013	5130	5217

Note. Adapted from the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation's website. (VICC, n.d.)

St. Louis County districts are no longer required to accept students; moreover, legal and political support for the program has waned, causing some districts to opt out of the VST program altogether. Other districts are limiting the amount of slots available for transfer students due to an increased minority population living in the school's residential area. Yet other districts believe it is the end of the program and will phase out available opportunities until the program no longer exists in their districts (Hahn, 2010). See Table 1 to view VST participant enrollment from 1999-2013.

The non-profit VICC not only oversees the implementation of the VST program, but also handles the recruitment, placement, and transport for students. During the 2009-2010 school year, VICC coordinated 305 bus routes and 93 cab routes for the 6,300 students still part of the program with a student's ride averaging 53 minutes each way. VICC employs five counselors who aim to provide assistance to students and families when and if problems occur. They provide classes for parents and students concerning the achievement gap, as well as classes for students regarding race relations and leadership (VICC Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.).

Stakeholder Reactions to Program

Just as the St. Louis School Board received praise for its response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, the St. Louis School Board returned to the national stage of praise for its inter-district desegregation plan; considered to be the largest and most innovative effort of its kind. Many other districts looked to St. Louis as a model to pattern itself after to erase the vestiges of unequal opportunities for African American

students in urban city districts (Wells, 1988). Locally, responses were, and remain mixed among city and county stakeholders.

St. Louis City Stakeholders. The former superintendent of St. Louis Public schools, Jerome B. Jones, gave voice to the mixed feelings of the community calling the desegregation plan a “bane and a blessing” (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 109). A bane, for with every parent choosing to send their child to a county school felt like an insult to teachers and students who remained. Conversely, the district received millions of dollars to improve educational programming in order to retain students who were educated in the community schools, as well as build a promising future for students when and if the desegregation mandate ended (Wells & Crain, 1997).

St. Louis athletic coaches and directors feared their programs would suffer severely when the desegregation plan took effect. Coaches believed that Black athletes would be attracted by better facilities, larger coaching staffs, and more extensive sports programming than was available in the city (Holden, 1983). While the St. Louis County coaches agreed that the desegregation plan would change athletic program, they saw the change in a more positive light. Some county school officials said that the plan “ushered in a new era in high school sports here that would result in athletes shopping for schools the way high school stars now shop for colleges” (Holden, 1983, p. A-1). Floyd Irons, a coach for St. Louis City School, Vashon said,

Athletically, the city schools will get the short end of it in terms of equity of kids, stated the coach that won the class 4A State Championship last season. It will be open season for county schools to come in and skim the cream of the crop. That’s been the trend with desegregation all over the county. I couldn’t get the best kids

from the county. And even if I could sell a white player my program, I couldn't sell it to his parents. I've had a few white kids tell me they'd love to play for me, but their parents wouldn't let them play in the city. (Holden, 1983, p. A-1)

A qualitative study conducted by Morris (2001) revealed the perspectives of African American educators who taught in the St. Louis Public School System, many from the inception of the VST program. The major themes that arose from this study of teachers, administrators, and teachers assistance was the unfair stigma that African American teachers were incompetent, the disconnection of students from their home neighborhood, the true benefit of the desegregation program, and the outcomes of ending the program. These stakeholders felt that achieving racial balance in schools was only one way to implement desegregation policies. These stakeholders also believed that desegregation "should have been more about African Americans in St. Louis having greater political and economic control of the education of Black students" (Morris, 2001, p. 595).

Similar concerns and responses to mandated desegregation were echoed by African American leaders across the country in response to legally mandated segregation. Leaders believed that desegregation efforts pushed the untrue notion that all-Black institutions were inferior. The former superintendent of Topeka, Kansas, the birth place of desegregation, believed desegregation helped to perpetuate the poor academic performance of African Americans and "ripped the centerpiece" (Caldas & Bankston, 2007, p. 255) out of African American communities.

Despite the concerns of educators in the effected urban districts, newspapers reported students that were happy with the program's initial efforts. In the article "First

Day Goes Well at Parkway” (Rogers,1983), one student had this to say, “There’s a better atmosphere for doing school work” (A-4). Tasha Valiant, a student attending Midwestern School District School District commented that “things went well and people were very nice” (Rogers, 1983). She also mentioned her nervousness over attending Midwestern School District with this statement, “When I told my friends about transferring to Midwestern School District, they weren’t too happy. They told me girl you are going to get your head busted over there. But I went to check it out myself and everybody was very nice, very helpful” (Rogers, 1983, p. A-1).

St. Louis County Stakeholders. Prior to VST implementation, county superintendents held varied opinions on their participation in the program. Clayton School District’s Superintendent Earl W. Hobbs said, “There is certainly nothing wrong with keeping an open mind about this situation. I think it is important to explore the possibilities and make no conclusions at this time” (Lockhart, 1980, p. D-1). George E. Baxter of Bayless School district was also fairly noncommittal in his public beliefs stating, “The school district needs more time to study the issue and more information” (Lockhart, 1980, p. D-2). Maplewood-Richmond Heights’ superintendent Fred Lanigan expressed more firm views for non participation when stating, “We’re not a party to the lawsuit, so we shouldn’t be a party to the solution” (Lockhart, 1980, p. D-2). Subsequently Clayton School District was the first to verbally support the desegregation plan.

Although few opposing voices were heard as the first classes opened, not all Missourians were pleased with the plan. Missouri attorney general John D. Ashcroft asked the 8th U.S. circuit court of appeals to throw out the plan, for he along with other

state officials believed it interfered with school district autonomy and simply cost too much money (Rogers, 1983). Many Whites in St. Louis County felt that their districts had no choice and were forced to accept the drapes of students that come in from the city each day, for they feared that they would lose local control of their districts if they did not comply. Wells and Crain (1997) reported the attitude of many conservatives as “hostile, and often condescending and magnanimous” (p. 253), believing tax payers’ money was wasted on this program. The strategy for many suburban districts was to wait out this change until the program stopped, hoping students would soon return to their community schools to obtain education. This approach charged the participating African American students with the primary burden of desegregation and conforming to the cultural norms of the hosting district, not Whites. One administrator said, “We tried to make the African American students into perfect little...kids with Izod T-shirts. We did not appreciate the African American students for who they were” (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 262).

On the other side of this issue were the more liberal stakeholders who sympathized with the “poor African American children of the city” or chose to see kids through a neutral colorblind lens. The institutional practice of colorblindness furthers the idea of White racial superiority by refusing to honor a student’s individualism, culture, family, background, and needs, thereby lessening a child’s opportunity to flourish behaviorally and academically (Dickar, 2008). While some educational institutions practice colorblindness, others acknowledge racial difference, attaching negative connotations with it (Hyland, 2005).

Media and society frequently portray African American students as at risk and troubled (Milner, 2007). Similar language and philosophy, categorized as deficit

thinking, invades school settings as well (Milner, 2007). Scholars report that deficit thinking unjustly reinforces negative stereotypes and is one of the most potent forces for African American students to overcome (Takei & Shouse, 2008). This practice does not assume student potential, but operates under the premise that African American students are misfortunate, unsuccessful, and should be overcompensated for that lack (Hyland, 2005). Hyland (2005) stated when looking at students as poor, needy, and incapable, notions of superiority are demonstrated, thus reaffirming the “racist status quo” (Hyland, 2005, p. 440). Some teachers report that standards for African American students and their White peers are not the same, due to African American students’ background and struggles; as a result, low academic expectations for African American students abound (Hyland, 2005). Both conservative and liberal county stakeholders seemingly had good intentions, but instead of minimizing the issues of race and culture prevalent in the St. Louis metropolitan area, these beliefs and practice further exacerbated the need for a school program of this magnitude.

While initial reactions to the program showed stronger opposition than support in the early phases of implementation, St. Louis has showed strong opposition to the discontinuation of the program, as noted in the vote to continue the program after the federal order was lifted. In 2004, students in an affluent district walked out of class to show support for the inter-district program (Wells et al., 2009). Students signed petitions to support the diversity of the top-ranked district and their friends. Student support has been an area that showed the most support, even in the early stages of the program, more so than suburban teachers or parents (Freivogel, 2002).

Program Impact

Achievement. The VST program has been relatively successful in providing thousands of urban students opportunities to attend some of the most renowned schools in the state of Missouri, and in some cases the nation. According to a study of the eight remaining districts implementing an inter-district desegregation program in the United States, research shows that the inter-district desegregation program is more successful than some of the newer desegregation initiatives of today (Wells et al., 2009). While the program's initial thrust was to achieve racially balanced schools in both the city and county of Missouri, the true test of an educational program is the academic gains that a student is able to achieve. Unfortunately, there was not a great deal of research found touting the academic success of students participating in the VST program. Initially, according to Heaney and Uchitelle (2004), some districts wanted to only accept students that boasted solid academic records, fortunately the non-profit association that governs the VST program, the Voluntary Inter-district Choice Corporation, did not allow this to be a requirement of participation.

The most in-depth research related to the academic achievement of student participants in the VST program was conducted in the 1990s by Lissitz (Lissitz & Uchitelle, 1993). This quantitative study examined the academic achievement of students in the VST program. From 1990-1994 student achievement data was analyzed for the courts as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the program (Freivogel, 2002). Research showed that elementary school students participating in the program did not show "significant gains on academic tests" (Wells et al., 2009, p. 5), but as students persisted in the suburban school setting, their achievement "improves over time to far

surpass that of their peers in magnet or neighborhood schools by the time they reach 10th grade” (p. 5). Further research conducted by Freivogel (2002) based on 2001 Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test data shows the same trend of higher academic achievement of transfer students over time.

One of the most popular and divisive issues discussed in education is the disparity of achievement between African American and non-African American students. While a gap exists between African American and White students in St. Louis County, in broader terms, inter-district school desegregation seems to be more successful than other policies in reducing the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites (Freivogel, 2002; Wells et al., 2009). While standardized test scores improved among VST participants, these same scores were used to track them during the beginning stages of the VST implementation. According to a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article, students were grouped and tracked according to test scores which re-segregated county classrooms. Most minority students were disproportionately in lower-track classes due to low standardized test scores.

Test scores are only one way of measuring the success of an educational program. Graduation rates are also an important data point to reference the success of academic programming. A study following 4,154 children each year from age one to 17 found that the continued exposure to disadvantaged communities has a profound impact on high school graduation. In the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, the probability of graduation decreased from “96 to 76 percent” for African American students (Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011, p. 713).

Trent (1997) provided evidence at a St. Louis school desegregation hearing of the positive graduation rate trend for transfer students. In the 90s, the graduation rate for students participating in the VST program was 50% compared to the 24% graduation rate for students in all African American city schools. Within this data there were also variance in transfer students graduation rates amongst suburban schools. Schools with higher socio-economics and higher overall college-going rates, had higher graduation rates for transfer students. An example from this research would be a wealthier district such as Clayton School District, where the college-going rate was 95%, the graduation rate was 65% for transfer students, but in a poorer school district such as Hancock Place with college-going rates of 46%, the graduation rates were about 27% (Trent, 1997). Graduation rates on students solely participating in the VST program is unavailable in reports provided by the Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education's Annual Report Card; therefore, more recent data is not readily available.

Discipline. Prior to students walking into the doors of any county school, discipline issues persisted. Unruly behavior on the part of students riding the bus, was compounded by the long bus rides to and from their county schools. The *St. Louis Post Dispatch* reported several articles highlighting this issue. Some bus drivers reported in a 1988 article, "They're cursing, standing up, fighting; it's unsafe" (Librach., 1988, p. 2). During the early days of the program there was a report of a junior high student using his fist to pound a driver's head, a teenager pointing a pistol at a driver, and a student placing her hands over a driver's eyes (Librach, 1988). On other buses there were reports of fights, vandalism, profanity, and sexual misconduct. A report compiled by the Voluntary Transfer Program's oversight council showed that almost 9,000 transportation violation

tickets, detailing over 18,000 violations had been issued within the 1986-1987 school year (Librach, 1988, p. 8).

Educators began to notice that the disruptions from the bus carried over into the school day. Reward programs, incentives, and clear disciplinary policies were put in place to help squelch this issue. Students were provided tape recorders to listen to music and stories, while others received food items as a reward for good behavior. Punitive consequences required students to attend a bus-safety workshop at night with their parents or requiring a Saturday study hall for misbehavior. Bus drivers were also trained to enforce the district discipline policy (Librach, 1988).

After dealing with long and often disruptive bus rides, students walked into new suburban schools with a culture quite different from their own, complicated by a community, teachers, and administrators on the fence about the very reasons for their presence. In the classroom, racial bias and stereotyping influence how teachers respond to discipline issues (Takei & Shouse, 2008). Studies indicate African American teachers are more likely to give positive affirmation and encouraging evaluations to African American students under the belief that African American students pose more behavioral problems than African American students do (Takei & Shouse, 2008). An analysis of 11,001 disciplinary records of students in 19 Midwestern middle schools found African American students received harsher punishments than did their White peers for similar infractions (Milner, 2007). The findings from Milner's (2007) research mirrored the outcomes of African Americans in Freivogel's (2002) article about St. Louis desegregation. Freivogel (2002) reported that the experiences of students varied from

district to district, but “in four of the more inhospitable...districts, more than 25 percent of the transfer students were disciplined” (p. 219).

Teachers. One important, yet quietly unsuccessful goal of the VST program was to increase the amount of African American teachers on staff in St. Louis County schools to 15.8%. By 1995, none of the districts met this goal, many districts hovering around 5% or less (Freivogel, 2002, p. 218). There is a great deal of research supporting the success of students whose teachers share the same “cultural and racial heritage” (Dickar, 2008, p. 116) or who “draw meaningfully upon it” (Dickar, 2008, p. 116) by adapting teaching styles and addressing the issues that face students of color. Milner (2007) asserts that African American teachers are not the only teachers who understand, and hold the necessary expertise to teach African American students successfully, as not all African American teachers are successful at teaching African American students. It is important, however, to draw on what researchers know about African American teachers who successfully teach African American students in order to help prepare teachers from all backgrounds to be successful as well.

Common themes surrounding the successful teaching of African American students by same race teachers include seeing great potential in students, being committed to and having a clear mission of success, and knowing that “an undereducated and under-prepared African American student could likely lead to destruction (drug abuse, prison, or even death)” (Milner, 2007, p. 92). Studies conducted with African American students suggest they feel safer and more at ease speaking with same race teachers on issues surrounding race (Dickar, 2008). Adding to this context, Pang and Gibson (as cited in Milner, 2007) are cited for affirming the importance of African

American teachers who bring such diverse experiences, values, and family histories to students that are often omitted in textbooks and curriculum. The unique background that African American teachers possess, rife with racism, oppression, and sexism coupled with stories of triumph and strength provides a solid framework for African American students to understand, navigate, grow, and succeed (Milner, 2007).

A report entitled “School Desegregation in the St. Louis and Kansas City Areas” (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981) added to the theme of providing adequate educational supports for students coming from varying backgrounds than that of teachers, students, and staff in St. Louis County. A weakness of St. Louis’s integration plan was the state’s lack of initiative in requiring multicultural education as part of its classification process in order to truly provide a “desegregated learning environment” (Missouri Advisory Committee, 1981, p. 30). Hyland (2005) asserted that few educators would knowingly continue detrimental practices that would jeopardize students’ success; however, a national survey showed that while more than 54% of teachers teach in diverse settings, only 20% of those teachers felt comfortable and prepared to meet the varied needs of their classroom population (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). It is necessary for teachers to develop culturally relevant and responsive teaching skills to ensure the success of African American students (Hyland, 2005). Culturally relevant teaching provides educators opportunities to reflect on their thoughts, beliefs, and practices, understand the culture of the students they teach, while making learning relevant for all students, including that of African American students (Lin et al., 2008; Vescio, Bondy, & Poekert, 2009).

In a *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (Hick, 1989) article, Diane Killion, the president of the Missouri Federation that represented several local unions in St. Louis County, voiced concerns about equitable and fair treatment of African American students in the county schools. Killion called for a change in the attitudes of staff towards African American students stating, “If teachers have negative, preconceived notions about minority students and their ability to learn, it will be almost impossible for those students to overcome these obstacles” (Hick, 1989, p. 11). A common practice amongst schools was tracking students based upon standardized test scores. The outcomes from this practiced typically placed African Americans in lower-track classes in greater numbers, causing a resegregation of classes. Killion (Hick, 1989) believed that teachers would need to employ the use of a variety of instructional methods in order to meet the needs of the diverse learners that were in the county classrooms.

Students. Some advantages to participating in the VST program are not necessarily measurable, particularly when looking short-term. One such advantage is the increase in cultural capital that students received from participating in the VST program. While parents are the primary givers of cultural capital, interactions with peers, adults, and pop culture also impact a person’s cultural capital. The greater a child’s cultural capital, the easier he or she is able to navigate through school and ultimately attain academic and long term success. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam (Cobb & Glass, 2009) affirmed that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a greater chance of succeeding beyond school when they are able to bridge social networks in integrated settings. In return, White students from more privileged backgrounds also benefit as they become more socio-culturally aware and receptive to urban youth culture

(Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 270; Kurlaender & Yun, 2005). Given the history of racism, separatism, and poverty experienced by many St. Louis City African Americans, a child's cultural capital could be limited. To this cause, integration is touted as a great way to distribute students possessing "varying degrees, and different types of cultural and social capital" (Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 270).

Not all students who attended the VST program remained to reap the social and academic benefits of the program. According to an article by Cobbs (1988) 12% of VST participants withdrew from the program. For the next three years the withdrawal rate increased to 15% (Cobbs, 1988). Some of the reasons students gave for program withdrawal included the long bus ride, missed friends, poor relationships with White students, and trouble with their White teachers. More direct accusations were made by other students in the same article by Cobbs (1988). Some students blatantly called teachers at county schools racist, citing that all Black students received Fs because of the color of their skin. "When we would be in gym and a white person's money came up missing from the lockers, they would look at the blacks like they stole it" (Cobbs, 1988, p. 1).

Parents. After the 1983 settlement agreement, families had a choice to either stay in their current school, attend a magnet school in the city, or participate in the inter-district busing program in the suburbs. While decision making differed from house to house, many parents made the decision for their children to participate in the VST program. Parents believed that the county schools were safer, had better facilities, resources, and opportunities. Although parents were aware of the potential negative social ramifications surrounding this choice, one parent stated, "You might be able to

deal with prejudice, but you can't deal with knives or a gun" (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004, p. 130).

While racial discrimination has great potential to negatively impact a student's achievement and emotional well-being, the impact of parenting can serve as a buffer to these outside influences (McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003). Decades of research support the positive influence of parental involvement on student's academic performance (McKay et al., 2003). Researchers have found that African American parents place "a high value on education, are concerned with educational issues, and have aspirations for their children that equal those of non-minority parents" (Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2009, p. 1141). While this finding does not align with higher education attainment for minority students, minority parents seemingly understand that education is the key to their children's future socio-economic success. Parents are also willing to make decisions to participate in school programming that can lead their students to a more successful future.

Other Inter-district Desegregation Programs

At the time of this research, eight other inter-district school desegregation programs existed in the United States (Wells et al., 2009). Some of these programs began as grass roots movements dating back to the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s and 1970s. Wells et al. (2009) admitted that while these programs buck the current "political framing of problems and solutions in the field of education" (p. 1), the research of these desegregation programs is favorable when compared to other choice programs aimed at eliminating the achievement gap.

While these inter-district programs have the same goal in mind to provide better school choices for African Americans, and in some cases Latino, and Asian students, each plan's genesis was born from varying origins. Federal court orders spurred the inter-district programs in St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Indianapolis. State court orders spurred programs in Hartford, Minneapolis, and East Palo Alto, while state, and local policies to create more racially balanced schools provided the foundation for programs in Boston and Rochester (Wells et al., 2009). The most recent inter-district program in the state of New Jersey was created through the state's Department of Education to provide more educational choice for all students regardless of race or socioeconomic status. The following sections will detail each program and its impact on the communities they serve.

Rochester, New York. Rochester history does not point to one particular event that led to the desegregation of its schools, but a combination of events based on rising racial tensions in the area. In May 1962, 10 families took legal action against the Rochester School District on the grounds that separate but equal schools deprived their children of appropriate educations (U.S. Department of Health, Education, & Welfare, 1969). During this time, the State Commissioner of Education was also studying schools who were racially imbalanced due to a series of racial protests that had occurred (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Wells et al., 2009). In 1963, a plan to provide more racially balanced schools within the city of Rochester was put in place through an open school enrollment plan for African American students, which allowed students to be transported to different schools with financing by the school system.

By 1965, the success of the city's plan aroused the curiosity of White school board members, educators, and parents at West Irondequoit School District in the suburbs

of Rochester (U.S. Department of Health, Education, & Welfare, 1969; Wells et al., 2009). This school district began the Intercultural Enrichment Plan in order to bring more racially diverse students to its almost entirely White student population. The district, the only one admitting to having racially imbalanced schools at the time, believed that their students were “being deprived of meaningful opportunities to interact with children of other cultures” (Wells et al., 2009, p. 13). West Irondequoit began with 25 African American city students, and added 25 each year until there were approximately 300 attending their schools. Funding for these students were provided by Rochester, New York, and mostly reimbursed through Title I and Title III funds.

Because of the commitment of West Irondequoit School District, and with the help of the New York State Commissioner and Rochester Public Schools, the Intercultural Enrichment Plan, now called the Urban-Suburban Inter-district Transfer Program (USITP), has seven participating suburban districts. The Urban-Suburban Inter-district Transfer program, is now considered to be the first, and oldest voluntary desegregation program providing more equitable educations to city students of Rochester, New York (Monroe #1 BOCES, n.d.). Researchers of the program found that with this plan came more “openness and candidness among teachers, administrators, and other school personnel concerning their own personal emotions, hopes, prejudices, and endeavors” (U.S. Department of Health, Education, & Welfare, 1969, p. 16). Another study conducted by Finnigan and Stewart (2009) found that the program could benefit from other inter-district programs’ policy of allowing students from the suburban setting to attend schools in the city of Rochester, as this program only involves city students to enroll in suburban schools. The researchers also believed that a greater number of

students should be allowed in the program in order to truly “address the longstanding segregation” (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009, p. 39) in the Rochester area as only 1%, or approximately 100 students, of the city school population participates in the Urban-Suburban Inter-district Transfer Program.

Boston, Massachusetts. The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO) is a voluntary inter-district program that began in 1963 by African American parents and teachers in the Boston, Massachusetts area (Orfield et al., 1997). At its genesis, 220 African American students from Boston’s inner city participated in the inter-district program in seven participating school districts in the suburbs. The program currently serves approximately 3,330 students, and is open to Latino and Asian students as well (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2012).

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education oversees the METCO program; ensuring state funding reaches the participating districts.

Legislature supporting the METCO program can be found in Chapter 76, Section 12A of Massachusetts General Law that stated,

the school committee of any city or town or any regional school district may adopt a plan for attendance at its schools by any child who resides in another city, town, or regional school district in which racial imbalance exists. This plan shall tend to eliminate racial imbalance in the sending district and, as the law states, to help alleviate racial isolation in the receiving district. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2012, pg. 3)

A qualitative study, conducted by the Harvard Civil Rights Project in 1997 (Orfield et al., 1997) exploring the perspectives of the parent and student participants of Boston's inter-district transfer program, found that families had very positive experiences with the teachers, administrators and METCO officials, and felt very little discrimination. The families also reported that they were pleased with the academic programming that their children received as a result of participating in the program, and expressed a desire to live in the communities in which their children attended school if affordable housing were available.

Hartford, Connecticut. Project Concern, Hartford Connecticut's desegregation program, began in 1966 as an experiment to allow mostly African American students from the city of Hartford's low-income areas to attend suburban schools. Program participants, as well as a control group remaining in the city, were randomly selected, and tracked over time to indicate success or failure of the experimental program (Crain, Miller, Hawes, & Peichert, 1992; Wells et al., 2009).

The researchers for Project Concern (Crain et al., 1992) program drew six conclusions related to the success of the students participating in the transfer program. Researchers found that male participants in the program were more likely to graduate from high school, and finish more years of college than non-participants. Male participants also perceived less racial discrimination in their adult lives, experienced less trouble with the police, and participated in less fights. Female participants in Project Concern were less likely to have a child before turning 18 than non-participants. Finally, researchers found that program participants lived in more racially diverse neighborhoods and had more social contact with Whites (Crain et al., 1992, p. 6). Qualitative research

conducted in 1982 of over 700 former program participants who had finished secondary school determined that participation in the inter-district desegregation program reduced drop-out rates, increased socialization across racial lines and were more likely to attend and complete college (Gurren, 2012).

Although the program was successful for the few fortunate to attend, the program did not have the desired effect of creating and maintaining desegregated schools. In 1989, a lawsuit filed on behalf of Elizabeth Horton Sheff brought against William O'Neill, then governor of Connecticut, charged that Hartford's system of separate city, and suburban school districts further perpetuated racial segregation (Dougherty et al., 2006). In the case of *Sheff v. O'Neill*, the State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs stating that racial segregation of schools violated the state constitution (Dougherty et al., 2006). In 2003 a settlement agreement was reached between each party with the goal of having 30% of all minority students attending Hartford City Schools to be educated in racially desegregated settings by 2007 through three voluntary programs available to parents and their students: 1) Inter district magnet schools that would draw both city and urban students, 2) An open choice program, formally known as Project Concern would transfer city students to the suburbs and vice versa, and 3) Inter district cooperative grants would provide "support for part-time exchange programs" (Dougherty, et al., 2006, p. 3)

More recent data on the program shows that more than half of student participants scored better on standardized achievement exams than those who chose not to participate in the transfer program. Moreover, the Project Choice participants' proficiency rates

were higher than African American and Hispanic students across the state (Wells et al., 2009).

Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Milwaukee inter-district program started with parents who fought to have a better and more equitable education for their children. In 1964, Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC) devised a boycott of the Milwaukee Public Schools to protest intact busing of African American students to predominately White schools (Wells et al., 2009). Intact busing practices at the time allowed African American students transportation to predominately White schools, while being educated in isolated classrooms away from White students (Wells et al., 2009).

In 1976, Milwaukee, Wisconsin began the Chapter 220 inter-district transfer program “to promote cultural and racial integration in education where students and their parents desire such transfer and where schools and school districts determine such transfers serve educational interests” (Kava, 2007, p. 1). This program not only allowed students to transfer between the Milwaukee Public Schools and other surrounding suburban districts, but also within the district to help achieve more racially balanced schools. Due to a lack of participation of suburban schools in the program, the Milwaukee Public Schools filed a suit in federal court against the 24 suburbs of Milwaukee, the state superintendent, and the governor (Bonds, Famer-Hinton, & Epps, 2009; Kava, 2007). In 1987, a settlement was reached, and the surrounding suburban cities of Milwaukee agreed to participate in the program, growing the number of participating districts from 12 to 23. Similar to the agreement reached in St. Louis’s VST program districts were no longer required to participate in the Chapter 220 program once their district attained 30% minority enrollment.

The original program agreement expired in 1995, however, individual participating districts maintain individual transfer agreements with Milwaukee Public Schools (Kava, 2007). In a report published by the Public Policy Forum (2001), the number of students transferring to schools in the suburbs peaked in 1993 with 5,918 students (p. 10). Students from the suburbs transferring to city schools in Milwaukee Public Schools peaked in 1988 with 1,021 students participating (Dickman, Kurhajetz, & Van Dunk, 2003, p. 10). As of 2009, participation of city students had declined to 2,300 (Hetzner, 2008). Over the years, enrollment in the Chapter 220 program has declined for reasons including achievement of racial quotas, declining budgets and revenue, the introduction of other school choice programs, and more recent legal rulings such as *Parents Involved in Community School v. Seattle School District No. 1* (Dickman et al., 2003; Kava, 2007; Hetzner, 2008; Bonds et al., 2009).

Indianapolis, Indiana. The one-way busing of African American children from the city of Indianapolis to surrounding suburbs began in 1980. For more than 20 years, Indianapolis provided transportation for approximately 5,500 student participants each year (Hendrie, 1998; Nave, 2009). The Indianapolis program is unique in that it is mandatory for individual students, it pairs particular areas of the city with specific suburban schools, and does not allow families choice where their children will attend school (Wells et al., 2009). Within this program, there also lacked a provision for White students to transfer to schools within the city of Indianapolis (Hendrie, 1997). In order to oversee the success of the program, each of the six participating suburban districts hired a Marion County Coordinator of Integrated Education (MCCIE) to “supervise staff, students and programs as African American students began enrolling” (Wells et al., 2009,

p. 17) in suburban schools. These coordinators also collected data for the Indiana Department of Education to ensure that African American were benefitting from the program.

The state-funded program allowed suburban districts to receive an average of \$2,400 more per transfer student than students living within the suburban attendance area in an effort to offset the negative effects of coming from a poor school system (Hendrie, 1997). While suburban stakeholders initially resisted this transfer program, they fought to continue the program when Indianapolis Public School District legally sought to phase out the program over 13 years, in order to bring their students back into the district (Hendrie, 1997).

On June 25, 1998, U.S. District Judge S. Hugh Dillin approved the discontinuation of the inter-district program, citing that the program had “met its legal obligations to desegregate” (Hendrie, 1998, p. 1). The phase out began for one participating district in 1999 while the other five participating districts began their phase outs in 2004. Wells et al. (2009) asserted Indianapolis city officials fought the hardest to end the program because the city district did not have a reciprocal agreement to receive students from the suburbs, nor did they receive special funding to make school improvements as was the case in cities such as St. Louis. With the ruling to end this desegregation program, came a commitment from the Indianapolis Housing Agency, the state of Indianapolis, and the United States Department of Justice to increase the amount of affordable housing available to low-income families within the suburban cities to enable more families the opportunity to attend suburban schools (Hendrie, 1998).

East Palo Alto, California. The Tinsley Voluntary Transfer Program allows children of color from Ravenswood City School District to attend schools in seven participating districts. This program also allows the opportunity for White students to apply for transfer to the Ravenswood district (SectorPointe, Inc., n.d.). As part of a 1985 settlement, 60 students entering kindergarten through second grades were eligible to attend the suburban school districts. San Mateo County Office of Education oversees the program which includes administering the application process, and providing workshops for parents to ensure each child's academic goals are met (Palo Alto Unified School District, 2010).

Minneapolis, Minnesota. Resulting from a settlement between the state of Minnesota and the Minneapolis National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 2000, The Choice is Yours program required eight suburban school districts to reserve 500 seats for low income city students each year for four years for a total of 2,000 students (Orfield, 2006; Regan, 2011). As of 2011, about 2,000 students continue to participate in the program (Johnston, 2004; Regan, 2011). The NAACP argued that this agreement would help prevent low income, minority students from attending only a small number of inner-city schools, but would allow them to inherit greater educational opportunities by going to more affluent districts in the suburbs (Blake, 2010).

Of the nine inter-district programs, The Choice is Yours program is the only one that uses socioeconomic, rather than race as an indicator for participation in the program. Participants of this program include a majority of African Americans, but Asian and Hispanic students as well. Because the program uses socioeconomic criteria to

determine student participation, Minneapolis is unconcerned about the legal ramification of *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, unlike the other states mentioned in this review (Blake, 2010).

A study released in November 2009 by the Harvard Law School's Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice revealed that The Choice is Yours program had "perhaps the most impressive system of outreach for students and families crossing school district boundaries- as well as racial, social-class and cultural boundaries" (Wells et al., 2009, p. 16). The yearly evaluation reports of the program show irregular academic results for inner city students participating in the program compared to a comparison group choosing to stay in their inner-city schools. In 2004-2005, data showed that inner-city transfer students benefited academically from the program, while the next year's data showed the opposite. It was concluded that it was too early to draw conclusions based on the newness of the program (Wells et al., 2009). Parents, however, praise the program saying that their children are safer, and more academically successful, all while enduring longer bus rides and racism from students unaccustomed to being around Hispanics and African Americans (Orfield, 2006).

New Jersey. In 2000 New Jersey began the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program that allows students in the state of New Jersey to participate in a program that designates school district as choice districts (New Jersey Interdistrict Public School Choice Association, 2013). This program differs from all other inter-district programs because it allows students to enroll in schools that have special programming in the arts, technology, foreign languages, and music. This program also seeks to stabilize enrollment in small districts that experience population shifts, boost enrollment of

students from different cultures, perspectives, and backgrounds heighten diversity in school populations, and create “healthy competition among school districts” (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010).

Similar to the VST program, New Jersey created a non-profit association to handle transfers for the participating districts. This association, called the New Jersey Interdistrict Public School Choice Association, has overseen the expansion of the program in 2010 with 16 pilot districts to now over 100 participating districts with over 3,000 students. According to the association’s website, their duties included promoting, marketing, and advocating for the program through the media and legislation. The association also supports participating districts with professional development and facilitation of lotteries to determine student participation. Finally, New Jersey Interdistrict Public School Choice Association is charged with delivering up to date information to parents, students, staff, and community related to changes that occur with the program (New Jersey Interdistrict Public School Choice Association, 2013). Specific research about the success of the program could not be found, however, more and more districts are choosing to participate in the program due to increased state aid that many districts receive from participating in the program (D’Amico, 2013).

Summary

Two sides currently exist on desegregation in the field of education. One side believes that busing to achieve balance and parity in education is the most effective choice available to providing a good education for all. On the other side of this argument, beliefs of high expectations for all, explicit learning standards, learning targets,

and accountability will be the factors to equalize education for all (Guthrie & Springer, 2004).

Of the research that have studied inter-district choice programs, most report that African American and White participants of choice programs have an increased level of comfort when interacting with different races (Wells et al., 2004; Wells & Crain, 2005). African Americans also report higher future aspirations, and increased likelihood of attending a primarily White college or university (Wells & Crain, 1997). Holme and Richards (2009) further purports inter-district desegregation programs “ensure that students are provided information, transportation, and support in their chosen school” (p. 170), and are the most “equity-minded” (Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 273).

While research supports the positive social and academic gains of desegregation efforts, court rulings in the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* cases altered the latitude in which local officials have in creating and maintaining diverse schools that provide excellent educational opportunities for all (Wells & Frankenberg, 2007). The issue challenged whether a school district can continue to offer programs to achieve racial balance if they are no longer under legal oversight to do so. The Supreme Court ruled that making school placement decisions based on race was illegal and that a colorblind approach to school placement should take place (Wells & Frankenberg, 2007). This ruling does not dismantle the past efforts of inter-district choice programs as urban and suburban school districts work together to diversify their schools. It does, however, give districts and officials pause in how to shape future programming.

Desegregation in St. Louis has a long and storied history that continues to affect the current landscape of the city and surrounding counties. This chapter described the setting and the foundational backdrop for why the VST program exists and the stakeholder's initial reactions to the programs' implementation. The VST program's impact on achievement, discipline, teachers and students was also discussed. Other inter-district desegregation programs that have been implemented across the United States were evaluated. Finally, a brief discussion of the current landscape of desegregation was included.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study sought to understand the perspectives of students and parent participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program. According to Howard (2001), research revealing the perspectives of African American students is important when investigating for worthwhile solutions for school reform. Because African American students and their parents are the primary beneficiaries of the VST program, it is important for them to tell their stories. Due to this goal, this researcher chose a collective case qualitative design.

Methodological Framework

As defined by Maxwell (2005), author of *Qualitative Research Design*, qualitative studies are the best method when seeking to gather “the participants perspectives and how they view their reality as a result of circumstances and conditions” (p. 22). Furthermore, qualitative research seeks to understand occurrences in real life settings “where the phenomenon of interest naturally unfolds” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). Qualitative collective case studies allow the researcher to study various cases at the same time as part of an overall study which can be considered “more likely to lend themselves to valid generalization” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010, p. 431). Baxter and Jack (2008) also noted, “collective or multiple case studies also allow the researcher to compare and contrast within and across each case” (p. 550). This researcher sought a variety of cases of parents and students in one school district who had five years of experience in the VST

program to compare and contrast their experiences for possible generalization about the program.

A qualitative collective case study framework to examine the perspectives and attitudes of students and parents participating in the VST program was employed. A semi-structured interview protocol and questionnaire was included to answer the following research question: “What are the perceptions and attitudes of parents and students participating in the Voluntary Student Transfer program?” The study also sought to answer the following sub questions: 1) What are the similarities and differences between parent and student perceptions, and 2) Have parent and student expectations changed through their experiences with the program?

In this chapter, a discussion of Critical Race Theory, which provided the framework for conducting this research, is included. The methodological procedures for gathering participants and interviews are outlined, the population and school district in which the research was conducted is defined, and the validity, reliability and ethical considerations of the study is explained.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT). In the 1990s critical race theory gained prominence as education scholars such as Ladson-Billings began to use this framework to help address the inequities and disparities in education, particularly for African Americans (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Critical race theory seeks to “reveal the hidden curriculum of racial domination” (Lynn, 2004, p. 154) and discusses how this hidden curriculum maintains the dominance of White culture. CRT was constructed based on the understandings of critical legal studies and radical feminism (Baxter, 2003; Delgado

& Stefancic, 2006). CRT seeks to uncover racism in its various forms (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and negate the popular narrative in the United States that racial justice is liberal and successful in its outcome (Woodward, 2011). CRT provides a counter narrative to shed light on the pervasive nature of racism in the United States and provides a lens of understanding for marginalized or minority groups (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). These beliefs, therefore relocate the voice of the marginalized, and gives power to people who would otherwise not have a way to express their voice (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Trevino, Harris & Wallace, 2008).

One of the most prominent leaders in the CLT movement, Derrick Bell, was an African American New York University law professor who began working with a White professor named Alan Freeman who both expressed distress over racial reform in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1998). They were soon joined by many other scholars whose viewpoints aligned with these theories and observations about race in America. One such scholar, Delgado, outlined the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory in the book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* along with Stefancic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). CRT first views racism as the foundation and norm of everyday practices that people of color see and experience on a daily basis. Racism is not the exception; it is the rule for minority populations.

Interest convergence and social construction are also tenets of CRT. Interest convergence puts forth the belief that laws originally passed to eradicate racism further uphold racism by advancing the material and physical interests of Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). Another CRT tenet is social construction. Accordingly “race is a social construct, race permeates all aspects of social life, and race-based theology is

threaded throughout society” (p. 176) and is “not objective, inherent, or fixed” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006, p. 3). Closely related to social construction are the concerns regarding differential racialization. Folklore and political systems have primarily constructed the definitions of race (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). When examining the terms and historical precedence surrounding race, the dominant group has used race as a way of determining who is in or out of the dominant group. Those then placed outside the dominant group receive less resources and opportunities. Differential racialization changes the mass opinions of minority populations based on current events. Delgado and Stefancic (2006) further supported this tenet by discussing how popular culture reinforces racial stereotypes based on the need or non-necessity of a racial group.

Another belief of CRT theorists is that of intersectionality and anti-essentialism. No one is a single unit or entity, but each person has many identities that overlap and perhaps conflict each other. The final element of CRT is the thought that each person of color has a unique voice based on their various histories and experiences. Because people of color have different experiences based on racism, they are likely to add important narrative to that of the stories often told from the perspective of Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006). While CRT theorists first began looking at the marginalization of Blacks, it has grown in its scope to identify and give voice to other marginalized groups such as Latinos, women of color, homosexuals, Asians, and Indians (Trevino et al., 2008). CRT has also expanded into areas of study outside of law and social justice. Critical Race Theory is being applied to social work, science, public health, and education to name a few.

An expert in the application of Critical Race Theory to expose unfair educational practices for students of color is scholar Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings along with co-author Tate suggested public education as a prime example of the negative effects of deeply ingrained racism in America (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While some researchers argued that poor children will academically fair worse than other children simply due to their socio economic status, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) believed that the factors involved in the academic success of students is a more complicated issue. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) maintained that “institutional and structural racism” (p. 55) has helped to preserve the poverty status of children, compounded by the current conditions of schools.

A repetitive theme within the history of education in the United States is the battle for equal opportunity starting with landmark decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education* and still recurring presently (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT in education examines “curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding and desegregation” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21) to recognize, evaluate and change the structures that suppress students of color. As it relates to desegregation, CRT theorists believe desegregation has greatly benefited Whites and ensured their happiness while placing more burdens upon Blacks by riding long bus rides, failure to vastly improve academic achievement, and increasing suspension and expulsion rates (Ladson-Billings, 1998). I sought to identify if the perspectives of parent and student participants in the VST program to see how they aligned with CRT theories of racial burden.

Critical race analysis in education also analyzes at the overrepresentation of students of color in special education programming, lower tracked classrooms, and the

lack of teachers of color to represent students within schools (Lynn, 2004). Finally, using Critical Race Theory in education helps to challenge the notion of color-blindness. CRT theorists believe color-blindness negates the voice and importance of marginalized groups. These theorists believe it is important to give voice to marginalized groups in order to hear their stories and give them power (Smith, 2008). Therefore, using Critical Race Theory as a theoretical lens for conducting this research allowed the parent and student research participants' narratives to stand as truth against myths, accounts, and images transmitted by the dominant culture as it relates to the Voluntary Student Transfer program.

Instrumentation Development

After the researcher reviewed literature related to parent and student perspectives of the Voluntary Student Transfer program, she found little qualitative research on inter-district desegregation programs from the perspectives of parents and students. However, research conducted by Beard and Brown (2008) related to African American suburban mothers' perspectives of their children's school served as a base for the interview items and protocol. Once items for both the questionnaire and interview were gathered they were sent to a content validity panel. This panel consisted of both experts and instructors in the field at both the local district and university levels. The committee read each question intended for use in the questionnaire and student and parent interviews and compared it to the research prospectus. After rewriting and adding questions based upon the suggestions of the committee, the content validity panel determined that each instrument appropriately aligned with the research questions.

After the survey instrument was complete, the interview protocol that can be found in Appendix A was created and sent to the participating district for approval. This tool outlined the steps taken in approaching potential research participants at a district-sponsored event for VST participants. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to gather participants for in-depth interviews. The questionnaire consisted of two levels of participation. Level 1 participation questions were related to the years of experience in the VST program, how parents learned of the program, who made the decision for participation, along with factors leading parents to participate in the program. Level 2 participation asked parents to indicate their willingness to participate in individual interviews along with their children. See Appendix B through E to view questionnaire and research questions and protocols developed to conduct this research.

Research Setting

This study was conducted in a large suburban school district in St. Louis County that contains two early childhood sites, 18 elementary schools, five middle schools, four high schools, and one alternative learning center. This district serves approximately 17,000 students and their families (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010). Of the 17,000 students and their families in the district, approximately 66% are White, 14.6% African American, and 11% Asian. Hispanic and Indian students comprise the remaining 9% (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). Within the population of approximately 2,600 African American students and their families in the district, about 45% or 1,700 contain the populace of students participating in the Voluntary Student Transfer program (VICC, n.d.). These

students, residents of the city, would otherwise attend schools within St. Louis Public School District or other private institutions if participation in the VST program was unavailable. Table 2 displays a side by side comparison of the population and student demographic data of St. Louis City Public Schools and the large St. Louis County district in which the research was conducted.

Table 2.
Comparison of City and Participating County District

Characteristic	St. Louis City School District	Midwestern Suburban School District
School Enrollment	Decline in enrollment from 2010- 2012: 25,046 to 22,516	Static enrollment from 2010-2012: 17,386 to 17,353
Current Student Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% Black • 13.6% White • 3% Hispanic • 2% Asian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14.6% Black • 65.9% White • 2% Hispanic • 11% Asian
Free/Reduced Lunch	87.4%	20.4%
Teacher Years of Experience (Avg.)	11.7	12.6
Teacher Education (Masters or Higher)	50.2%	70.9%

Student Dropout Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18.8% Overall • 20.7% Black • 11.2 % White • 16.2% Hispanic • 4.7% Asian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.0 % Overall • 2.3 % Black • 0.8% White • 1.5% Hispanic • 0.5% Asian
Four-Year Graduation Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62.1% Overall • 61.2% Black • 66.4% White • 51.7% Hispanic • 78.8% Asian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 92.01% Overall • 84.88 % Black • 93.78% White • 87% Hispanic • 95.07 % Asian
Where Graduates Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26.9% Four Year University • 39.3% Two Year University • 2.7% Technical College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36.46% Four Year University • 25.2 % Two Year University • 1.6% Technical College
ACT Composite	16.5 Average Score	23.3 Average Score
Accreditation Status	Unaccredited 2010-Present	Accredited
Per Pupil Expenditures	15,861	11,929

Note: Adapted from ProPublica March 6, 2012. <http://projects.propublica.org/schools/districts/2923580> and Missouri Department of Education April 29, 2013. <http://mcids.dese.mo.gov/quickfacts/SitePages/DistrictInfo.aspx?ID= bk8100130013005300130013005300>

Participant Recruitment Phase 1

A mix of purposive selection and convenience sampling strategies was employed to acquire information relevant to answer research questions that would be unavailable through other selection methods (Maxwell, 2013). Convenience sampling, a method used based on the availability of participants (Maxwell, 2013), was used in the first phase of data collection. While some researchers eschew the merit of convenience sampling, Weiss (as cited in Maxwell, 2013) is cited to have argued there are circumstances in which convenience sampling is the only way to proceed in research in instances where the group is difficult to gain access to or are rare in the population. In order to gain access to this population of participants, convenience sampling was used. Prior to the start of the Voluntary Student Transfer program family event, this researcher mingled with parents and directed parents towards the event space. This family event, held annually by the district traditionally attracted a variable number of attendees each year.

After the family event began, the district coordinator of the VST program introduced the researcher and allowed a presentation of the event protocol to approximately 55 attendees. Subsequently, the researcher passed out questionnaires, and directed parents to complete the questionnaire and place it in a manila envelope at the registration table. Refer to Appendix C to obtain further details of the family day protocol that was used. Out of the 55 attendees, nine parents indicated a desire to participate in the first phase of research and data collection by completing, and returning the questionnaire. Each questionnaire was then analyzed to determine who indicated interest in participating in the second phase of research and their eligibility for participation.

Participant Recruitment Phase 2

Purposeful selection or sampling allows the researcher to select those “times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Purposeful selection was used in the second phase of data collection in which in-depth interviews were conducted. Constraints that were considered in making participant selections limited the focus to parents and students with at least five years of experience in the VST program. After the information gathered during the first phase of data collection was analyzed, and limited participation to focus on parents and students with at least five years of experience in the program, parent participants were then called. Participants indicated a desire to contribute in the second phase of research and data collection by completing the questionnaire and providing consent to participate in the in-depth interview process. At this time parents also indicated a desire to have their child(ren) participate in the interview portion of the research as well.

Within two weeks of the parent event, parents who indicated interest in participating in the interview portion of the research were contacted, providing them options to meet that were close to their home residence at a time that was convenient for them. Adjoining times for student participant interviews was also set up. The researcher traveled to the communities of all interview participants. Of the nine parents who indicated a desire to participate in the second phase of research, six parents and four students were able to participate within the time frame of the research window. Prior to each interview, each participant was ensured anonymity through the participant’s consent and assent forms to encourage honesty and openness during the interview process.

In advance of beginning each interview, adult research participants were asked to read and sign the letter of consent to participate in the study (see Appendix F). Student participants were asked to read and sign the letter of assent (see Appendix G). These forms also ensure participant anonymity in order to encourage honesty and openness during the interview process. After consent was established for each participant, data collection began. Throughout the interview process, interview data was tape recorded to ensure proper transcription of participant responses. Field notes and observations were also taken to assist in interpreting results gained from the interview process. Each parent interview lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. Each student interview was 15 to 30 minutes long. These interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed against the research question and sub questions.

Because of the limited participant sample that was gathered from the VST family event, permission was gained from the participating district and building administrator to send a letter and questionnaire to VST participants within a building in which the participant worked. The letter and questionnaire found in Appendix E was sent home in a sealed manila envelope with nine VST students. One parent verbalized a lack of interest in participating, while the other parents chose not to respond to the request to participate in the study.

The sample size was limited due to the availability of the population and the willingness of parent participation in the study. The nature of a multiple case study presented limitations in the generalizability of the study. The researcher studied individuals in the VST program from one school district in the Midwestern United States. Because this study involved only a few participants of the program, in one district, the

findings may not be representative of all participants of the VST program (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). The researcher is also an employee of the district, working with teachers on interpreting and using data to make sound instructional decisions. This may have caused parents and students to respond differently in their interviews.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher adopted the use of questionnaires and in-depth interviews to capture the perspectives of the research participants for this multiple-case study. Questionnaires are paper and pencil data collection tools that provide opportunities to collect information from “open-ended questions...to provide...explanations, meaning, and new ideas” (Labuschagne, 2003, p. 3). In-depth interviews are dialogues between an interviewer and interviewee whose goal is “to elicit rich, detailed material that can be used in analysis” (The National Science Foundation, 2011).

The subject of validity and reliability in qualitative research is a highly debated one. Some researchers believe that reliability is irrelevant when looking to explore particular contexts and situations (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). Stenbacka (as cited in Golafshani, 2003) is cited as a detractor saying, “the concept of reliability is...misleading in qualitative researcher...if a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is rather that the study is no good” (p. 601). The opinions of the panel were valuable in eliminating bias in the instrument and helped the researcher control for content-related evidence of validity.

Other researchers believe that validity and reliability is a factor that qualitative researchers should be concerned about. In this case, the terms validity and reliability are

replaced by words such as rigor, significance, relevance, trustworthiness, integrity, and believability (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, & Olson, 2002; Golafshani, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). The results a researcher obtains are directly affected by the instruments used, therefore, the researcher must be very careful to select or create valid tools that are directly tied to the purpose of the research. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2010) “validity is the most important idea to consider when preparing or selecting an instrument to use” (p. 147), and is defined as the “...correctness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences researchers make based on the data they collect” (p. 148). While Fraenkel and Wallen (2010) referred mostly to quantitative studies when speaking about research validity, the researcher chose to use their description of “content-related evidence of validity” (p. 150) or “methodological coherence” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18) in this qualitative study.

The researcher controlled for content-related evidence of validity by submitting research questions, questionnaire, and interview questions to a content validity panel to improve the instrument. The data was collected and analyzed concurrently by using a journal to record general, interpretive, and specific anecdotal notes during the research study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010; Morse et al, 2002). The concurrent relationship between collection and analysis helped form a “mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18).

To ensure participant anonymity, the researcher coded transcribed texts and is the only one in receipt of participant’s true identities. The researcher and persons associated with the research have access to the coded text generated from data transcription.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) argued that strong case study research relies on the

value of the researcher's understandings and conclusions, which raises the question about researcher objectivity. Data collection for this study included questionnaires and interviews. Because the reported stories are not told verbatim, researcher bias might influence researcher bias might influence the interpretation of these qualitative data gathering approaches (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010; McLeod, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations during the research study were addressed. The researcher also addressed the issue of voluntary participation by ensuring participants were not coerced into participating by offering incentives. Although the researcher provided a gift card to participants to thank them for their time after the interview, the researcher believed providing incentives upfront would have affected voluntary participation. While parents signed consent forms for children below 18 to participate in the research study, the researcher controlled for forced participation by providing the minors with assent forms to sign as well.

Closely connected to the ethical consideration of voluntary participation is the condition of informed consent (William, 2006). The researcher ensured each participant was aware of potential risks and benefits involved in the study by verbally explaining the consent and assent forms' contents as well as providing time for participants to read and sign the document. Researchers are required to protect participants from harm. The researcher assured each participant would remain anonymous throughout the study to anyone not directly involved in the study.

Summary

This chapter described the framework for conducting this research along with the methods employed to conduct a trustworthy and rigorous qualitative research study. The research setting and population were discussed to gather insight on the participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program. Next, the validity and reliability of the research was addressed. Finally, ethical considerations were outlined and discussed. The methods described aligned with current research on data collection, analysis, and ethics. Chapter Four will present the findings related to this research study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of student and parent participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program of one large Midwestern school district. Questionnaire and interview methods were employed to obtain in-depth information about the students and parents' perceptions. Six parents participated in the in-depth interview portion of this research study. These parents have had a very wide range of experiences with the Voluntary Student Transfer program.

Mrs. Blue is a mother of three children, one of which graduated from high school through the VST program, the other two current students in the VST program. Mrs. Blue was also a participant in the VST program, as she was part of the first group of students who participated in the program. Two other participants were Mr. and Mrs. Paul, a husband and wife who have two girls attending schools through the VST program in two different districts. Another research participant, Mrs. West, is a mother of nine children with all but two children going through Midwestern School District through the VST program. Mr. Cross is a father of five with two children having attended Midwestern School District through the VST program. The last participant, Mrs. Steel, is a mother of three and has two children participating in the VST program. All parent participants, with the exception of one had prior experiences with children attending St. Louis City public schools.

Four students participated in the in-depth interview portion of this research study. Two students, Roosevelt and Lilly, were both middle school students in the district. The

other two students, Clara and Loyal, are high school participants of the VST program. Each of these students has participated in the program for five years or more.

This chapter presents findings from the parent questionnaires obtained from nine respondents, and in-depth interview results from six parent and four student research participants. The findings in this chapter are organized to display the narrative case studies of each parent along with a question by question analysis of parent interview responses. Student case studies are presented, followed by a question by question analysis of student responses. Common themes between parent and student participants are then explored. After addressing common themes between participants, findings from the questionnaires are presented. Finally, a summary of findings based on the research question and sub questions are discussed.

Parent Case Studies

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes in length. An interview protocol was used to ensure the integrity of each interview, but follow up questions were added as information was revealed during each interview. All interviews were conducted at local libraries in the participant's neighborhoods, for the exception of two participants who believed their home would create the most convenient interview environment. Interviews were conducted after questionnaires had been distributed and collected. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality.

Mrs. Blue

Mrs. Blue is a mother of two sons and a daughter. Her oldest son, a high school graduate, attended school through the VST program from kindergarten through grade 12.

Her younger son is a sixth grade middle school student, and her daughter is in elementary school. Mrs. Blue believed that St. Louis City Public Schools “has gone down the drain.” Although she stated there were still some good programs available in the city for gifted students, most viable education options in the city would be private schooling, which would be a costly undertaking. Mrs. Blue attended high school through the VST program and reported that she was a part of the first group of VST students to go to the same district as her children. She later transferred to another county district in order attend a college preparatory program that offered business classes. Mrs. Blue has a career working in the banking industry.

When Mrs. Blue was asked about her own experience as a student in the VST program she said, “I had a good experience.” She talked about her feelings being part of the first group of transfer students within the district. “We were new so they didn’t really understand a lot about us.” She went on to say, “They really didn’t know how to react to us so they probably had those stereotype ideas.” Mrs. Blue then explained how her expectations changed based on her children’s experience in the program.

I would have to say it’s a little different than how I thought it was going to be.

Like I said, it was a learning process for the teachers as well as the students. But now I think that they have a grip on the type of students that they are getting and they try to adapt their program more so to those students. Because they do know some of the pressures the children come with, they are adapting their program a little more. The teachers used to be stereotype more when I was going and they are not now.

When Mrs. Blue was asked to clarify her statement “they have a grip on the type of student that they are getting” she talked about how urban students may not come from the same value system as suburban families, or have the same level of familial support.

Mrs. Blue was then asked to talk about her connectedness to the school community. She stated that the community had embraced her family, although her son had just gone through the transition from elementary school to middle school. She believed that teachers have high expectations for her children. She had never experienced negativity towards her children but stated that she was aware that prejudice may still exist. “You know, I think that teachers may still have that block. There may be some prejudiced teachers there, but for the most part they are not.”

When asked if her children had trouble adjusting to the VST program, Mrs. Blue did not voice awareness of transitional problems. She did state that teachers provided her children with a solid educational foundation, and being part of this program would prepare them for life. Mrs. Blue noted the diversity of the students who attended Midwestern School District and stated that this would teach them “how to adapt, be social and be successful.”

The only concerns Mrs. Blue expressed about participating in the VST program was with the overall struggle that came with providing a good education for her children. She stated, “It’s challenging, but it’s been worth it.” Mrs. Blue also went into detail about transportation concerns because, “We didn’t like what was going on with the bus so we decided to drive them.” She described the routine of how her husband, who works second shift, drives the children an hour to school in the morning, comes back home to

nap, rest, and run errands and then drive to work where she meets him to get the kids before he clocks in for work.

It is very challenging to be out there and also to be supportive because they have programs that they are in and they have violin concerts during the day and band and you know to support them you have to drive the distance to be there for them and that's challenging.

Overall, Mrs. Blue believed that her children were receiving a good education and that the experiences her children encountered would aid them in their future success.

Mr. Paul

Mr. Paul is a product of the St. Louis Public School system, as he attended magnet school special programming in junior high and high schools. He is a college graduate and is a tax law specialist with two daughters both in the VST program. While both daughters are in the VST program, only his middle school daughter attends school in the participating district. Mr. Paul noted that the demise of the St. Louis Public School System factored into participating in the VST program. He stated,

My oldest daughter was in the second grade when all of a sudden the St. Louis public school system was 90 million dollars in debt so they decided to move all the principals around, close the schools and basically decided to destroy that entire school system. And as a result, we know that the schools are not safe. It was a very difficult decision to send my daughter off to the Midwestern District.

When asked about his daughter's education through the VST program Mr. Paul believed his daughter was receiving a high quality education and believed the participating district, "truly goes out of their way to ensure that all parents are included in their curriculum and decision making." He talked about the journey to get to this place of satisfaction. He mentioned that the journey has been "expensive, tiring, but very rewarding."

Mr. Paul also talked about dissonance he had concerning the ride to the county. He stated,

I am concerned as far as transportation, time to get out there and it kind of sets a very conscious message that... things are better in the county. It can also lead to an inferiority complex...as far as going out to county schools in order for me to receive a quality education and a quality product. So that is something that I have to be diligent on insuring there is a counterbalance to that message.

Mr. Paul counterbalances this message by involving his daughters in programs within the city of St. Louis.

When asked about how his perception has changed through the course of being a VST participant, he mentioned his concern of how teachers would receive his child who is "very strong willed," "self-aware," and "very opinionated." He wanted to make sure his daughter was able to adapt to the new environment as they were dealing with "two different cultures." He believes his child has adapted well to the environment and is able to flourish.

When asked about the challenges to participating in the program he mentioned the challenge of distance. He stated,

I would love it if the neighborhood schools rose to that caliber but it (the VST program) is a two-edged sword. It drains the resources from city school systems, such as the accelerated students as well as financial. As a parent, though, we have to do what is best for our children. But overall it has been a worthwhile experience, because if it weren't, we would have to figure out how to put them both in private school.

Mr. Paul reports that teachers have high expectations of his daughters and that she is part of a "very warm, very loving environment" and did not experience any issues with transitioning into the program. He believes being a part of a diverse environment also enhances his daughter's educational experience.

Mrs. Paul

Mrs. Paul is a stay-at-home mom with two children attending VST programs in two different districts. She grew up in St. Louis City and is a graduate of St. Louis Public School system. She is a college graduate and worked for the federal government prior to making the decision to stay at home. She believes that the participating district's higher test scores was a great factor in participating in the VST program.

Mrs. Paul lamented over the fact that educating her children has been the hardest thing to contend with as a parent. She discussed the various disappointments her and her husband incurred through their experiences through city school, private school, and home

school options. She appreciated the fact that VST program participation allows her child to attend schools where she is able to meet “all kinds of people.”

Mrs. Paul’s main concern about program participation is being bussed. She talked about having a bus stop that is far away and the concern she has for her daughter standing at the bus stop in an unsafe neighborhood.

Her bus stop was just two blocks away but they were really long blocks.

So things happened at that bus stop. There was once a child abduction on the bus stop, someone actually got shot and killed on the bus stop. So it’s far away from home. So when I hear helicopters I wonder if I should stay or leave and go back home. That’s the concerns we have on the bus.

Mrs. Paul also talked about bully incidents on the bus, but felt that the administrators at the school handled the situation well. Mrs. Paul also relayed stories about busses breaking down without proper communication to parents about delays in drop off.

Mrs. Paul expressed delight in the amount of programs that are available to her daughter by attending the participating district. She attends as many events as she can although the family does not own a vehicle. When her daughter was in elementary school, she rode the bus to her daughter’s school to volunteer once per week, which took two hours each way. She feels that she is not a part of the community of her school because of the distance but tries to participate whenever she can. She reflected,

I’m not tied to her school district. There is something to be said with overcoming some challenges, but I think she is getting a first class education. That’s the point, you know I will fight or catch 10 buses or whatever to make sure they get a first class education.

Mrs. Paul talked about the high expectations that teachers have for her daughter, but was not sure if this was the same for every student. She believes teachers have high expectations for her child because “they know she can...They may not have the quite the same expectations of each child because it varies on how each student starts.”

When asked how her daughter adapted to the VST program when she started in first grade, she believed that her daughter’s transition was “good.” At the end, Mrs. Paul expressed gratitude for participating in the research by saying, “Sometimes you are just flying by the seat of your pants, and it is nice to verbalize the decisions that you have made for your child.”

Ms. West

Ms. West, who is working on her doctoral degree, is a mother of six boys and three girls. All of her children, for the exception of two boys attended school in the participating district. She currently has her youngest two children in the VST program, both of which are in high school. One she describes as “very popular,” the other she describes as “shy and timid.” She now also has two grandchildren who attend school through the VST program.

Ms. West thought that the St. Louis Public School elementary teachers her children had were great, but she believed that the schools that her children would have access to through the VST program had more resources such as “updated computers and books...They don’t have a problem with students not having a book or students not having educational materials, period.” She also pointed to the city school’s lack of accreditation and low graduation rates as factors for VST participation. “I think when I

started my kids in the VST program [Midwestern School District] had a 94% graduation rate or something like that and it has gone up since then so, it's really good."

When asked what she thought about her children's education she said that she is happy because she knows the district cares. Ms. West did not verbalize a difference in expectations prior to the start of program participation to the present time. She believed the "program was exactly how I thought it would be." She stated that she feels part of the district's community because she has always had "an open door policy." She has always encouraged teachers and administrators to call her when her children are doing well or not so well.

Ms. West talked about the expectations that teachers have for children by saying this, "I think they expect them to do more than most other students because they know that I expect it." She went on to describe how active she is within the Midwestern School District community and how she maintains communication with teachers to ensure that teachers understand her expectations for her children. She believes that teachers may not have similar expectations for other children based on parent participation.

I think that if a child's parent is not as involved as I am they may not push them as hard and I say that because I have seen it. I'm pretty sure that parent expects the same thing whether or not they are up to the school or not. I didn't have a job, so I didn't have a choice. That was my job to go up there at the time. What am I staying at home for? I can be up here with [my kids].

When describing some of the negative experiences that she has had with the participating district, she seemed unsure about sharing, and kept reiterating that although she has had some negative experiences, they have mostly been great. She described

incidents of her son being bullied because of his shyness and timidity. “I did not really like the way administrators handled that, but other than that situation, everything else is fine.” Although she stated this issue was fine, she revisited this issue later in the interview by stating,

They didn’t call me and tell me what was going on and it wasn’t just happening in just one classroom, this was when he was in middle school and it continued when he was in high school. That was the one problem that I had, because no one contacted me and then one day I was talking to my son and he was really upset and I pulled and it was like pulling teeth but I found out what and when I found out I called and they were like, “Oh we handled it.” And I was like no you probably shouldn’t have handled it because he’s upset and I didn’t know... so that kinda made me feel excluded from the whole situation, but when I went up there, to me I still didn’t get the satisfaction of what I wanted to get because bullying should not be tolerated period. How can you suspend my son, because he got bullied? That was the whole, I didn’t get the whole thing you know and it really ticked me, really ticked me off.

When Ms. West was asked about her children’s initial adaptation to the program, she believed her daughter had some concerns about leaving her friends and riding the bus such a long way, but enjoyed going to a school that had “a big gym.” Her son, however, did not seem to mind going from the start. Ms. West believed that the program could be enhanced if there were more African American role models, especially African American males. She had this to say about the thought of attending schools in her own neighborhood,

I would love for my kids to be able to go to school up the street. I would love for them to not have to get up at 5:00 a.m. in the morning so they can catch the bus. I would love that more than anything. You got to make sacrifices if you want that extra education.

Mr. Cross

Mr. Cross is a youth minister who is a father of two sons. During the interview, Mr. Cross immediately speaks about St. Louis Public Schools, wishing they were of better quality. He stated that he didn't care about the credentials of teachers, but had this to say, "All I want to know is, can you teach? Do you care about the students? Will you go the extra mile?" He placed the boys in the VST program because their attempts at attending city magnet schools did not provide the results they hoped for, and the cost of private school for both boys would have been a great financial burden for the family.

Mr. Cross expressed his hopes for his sons in that he wanted them to be lifelong learners, balanced both academically and spiritually. When asked about how his expectations have changed over the course of participation, he stated that the program was what he expected initially. Once his children transitioned to middle school and high school, he felt that he was not able to develop the same interpersonal relationships that he had with his children's elementary school community. He spoke about the expectations that he had as it related to his son with a disability. He had this to say about transitioning from elementary to middle schools within the program:

How they responded wasn't my expectation, but it was way better than what I have seen in the [city] public school system. Way better with the emails, with the

ready to sit down and talk to you, a lot of time they are ready to sit down and talk to you, but they have already made up their minds. That is where we have run into a few barriers at times, but I'm not [the type] of person, I don't want to rock the boat. But I don't want you to think that I am not the type of person who won't say what I need to say. We've gone in there and I have had to tell them, "No, we aren't doing any of that and this is how it's going to go," and they say, "Oh, ok," they were like, "let's try to do that." My vision had to adjust, let me say that.

Mr. Cross made this statement about boundaries when recounting a story about his son with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The school suggested that he medicate his son, and he believed the school had overstepped their boundaries, as he felt the elementary school community in which they previously attended where more tolerant and willing to work with his son and the family.

Connected to this transitional adjustment, Mr. Cross stated that he didn't feel a part of the school district's community. "I attend what I can attend, but we are not interconnected." He believes this is because of the distance between his home and his son's school. "They do everything out there, but I live here." He appreciated the initiative of the district to offer a parent organization for people of color, and provide free activities such as the family day for VST participants, but felt the implementation of the program was not as successful.

Mr. Cross reflected on his overall view of the program and had this to say, "I say all of this and it may sound like I am complaining, but overall I still think it was a success...We have not moved because we wanted to stay in this [district]." Mr. Cross then recounted how he and his wife had discussed moving to another part of the city, but

decided against it as they would have had to transfer their children to another suburban district within the VST program; a district that they felt was not as successful as Midwestern School District. He also talked about moving into the Midwestern School District, but finances would not allow them to obtain a house with the same amenities and space that they have living in the city.

Mr. Cross voiced concerns about the expectations that teachers have of his son. He wants teachers to see his son as an individual, and not have preconceived notions of him and expect him to fit the mold of a “cookie cutter system.” He also talked about an issue with placing importance on athletics and not academics for his son. “I’ve noticed that through the VST program, for basketball, they will send a cab and they will make sure he gets to that practice and everything, but for like an academic thing, for like staying after for school, not so much.” Mr. Cross wanted to address the matter but again stated that he, “didn’t want to rock the boat...I mean he goes to practice seven days a week. Where is he supposed to get his academic time in?” Mr. Cross felt he needed to address this issue, but didn’t want to alienate his son from his coaches.

Mr. Cross also recounted the adjustment period for his students upon entering the VST program. His child with ADHD had a rough adjustment period due to his impulsivity, but his other son seemed to transition smoothly. Mr. Cross believed there were some race differences that he encountered upon program participation. He talked about one particular teacher that “was somewhat racist to me, but I let her know that we weren’t tolerating that and afterward she was much better.” He also talked about parents who lived in the district’s community, “there were some parents that seemed a little

indifferent [about having my kids at their school] and they didn't go over those parents' houses. But for the most part everyone accepted them.”

Mr. Cross had this to say about mindsets of people that lived in the county school district,

I think when people get to know our children they realize that they are children just like any others. One thing I didn't like, they would say stuff like this, “your children are different, they are well behaved, they are mannerable” and that type of thing. I wouldn't blow it up, I would say ok because I know no malice was involved, but what did you expect? You shouldn't expect that they wouldn't be well behaved.

Mr. Cross believed that his children would be successful because of their participation in the VST program because they were given a good opportunity to get a good education, and are exposed to multiple cultures and perspectives. Mr. Cross did note that the bus was one of the biggest challenges to participating in the VST program.

If you miss that bus, it's over. I just think it is a lot more difficult for them than it is for people who stay in the district. They have to get up earlier; it is dark when they get up. They have to get on the bus. It is dark when they get home, if they participate in extra-curricular activities they have to take that long ride home after doing all that other stuff and they still have to do their homework and so it's just tougher.

While Mr. Cross felt that his kids had a more difficult burden because of the busing, he felt that it was worth the burden until a more viable option was available in their communities and neighborhoods.

Mrs. Steel

Mrs. Steel is a mother of four children, two of whom attend the VST program. She is a graduate of the St. Louis Public School system and has attended two years of college. Mrs. Steel voices a desire to go back to college, as she has completed two years of coursework. She attributes her trouble in completing school to her lack of educational support when she was growing up. She has attempted to get her older son in the VST program, but has been unsuccessful due to slot availability.

When asked why she chose to become a participant in the VST program, she voiced concern about the St. Louis Public School system's lack of accreditation and low graduation rate. "I feel like nobody is doing what they should be doing to teach these children. I feel like I can do so much more and I want my children to have the best education." Mrs. Steel compared the experience of being a parent of a student in the city to the county schools. "They are more supportive and they keep you informed, they find other strategies to teach these children."

She voiced her frustration in not having a solid education for all of her children and children in general. She had this to say, "Every child has a different way of learning, but they should have an opportunity for someone to teach them what they need to know and prepare them for the things out here in the world." She believed that education was

the key to her children's success, for she wanted them to know that the "world is bigger than their community."

She believes her children's transition to VST participation went very well. She felt they had two different personalities, one to deal with the rougher nature of her neighborhood, and the other more "proper and well-mannered" at school. Mrs. Steel does not believe that her children would have made that behavioral transition had they not participated in the VST program. She also noted her feeling of connection to the school community, "It's awesome, they get you involved. I don't get treated any different than any other parent at that school."

When asked if teachers had high expectations for her children, she felt "confident and good" about her daughters' teachers, and "they do what they need to do to help them learn." Mrs. Steel's only concern about participating in the program is riding on the school buses. She outlined the hour long bus ride, the hot temperatures in the summer, and lack of air conditioning as some of her concerns.

Parent Interview Analysis

The researcher included responses to each question asked during the interview process. This information provides connection to the similarities of responses provided by parents.

Parent interview question #1: How did you learn about the VST program? Half of the parents revealed they knew of the program from growing up in the city of St. Louis as a child. Mr. Paul stated "well you just know...it has been going on for years. I grew up here, I just knew it." Two parents revealed they had learned of the program through a

brochure in the mail. The other respondent, Mrs. Blue, knew of the program from being involved in the program as a child.

Parent interview question #2: Who made the decision for your child to participate in the VST program? Half of the respondents reported that a joint decision was made by the husband and wife. The other half of respondents, all females who were single mothers at the time of this educational decision-making, solely made the decision to allow their children to participate in the Voluntary Student Transfer program.

Parent interview question #3: What factors influenced your child's participation in the VST program? Two parents who had placed their children in private schools within the city reported that they could not continue to send their children to private schools due to financial constraints. Another parent noted the lack of safety, financial instability, and difficulty in finding a program that suited her children's needs as the main factors for choosing the VST program. Three parents believed the VST program would provide a good education for their children. Mrs. Steel said "St. Louis Public Schools, especially in my area, are not up to what my thinking education should be for children." Another parent stated that they just wanted their child to have a good education.

Parent interview question #4: What are your thoughts about your child's education? All parents revealed their pleasure with the quality of education their children were receiving through participation in the VST program. Ms. West stated "I'm happy, because I know they care. I have had three children graduate from (this) school district...two have gone on to college." Ms. White explained, "They are all doing very well...they're comfortable, they're happy, if they have questions they are comfortable asking their teachers. I am very pleased with their education right now."

Parent interview question #5: What has educating your child been like for you as a parent? What sorts of feelings do you have regarding your experiences? All parents shared frustrations with the lengths they have gone through to educate their children. Ms. White stated that it is a “struggle.” Mr. Paul mentioned the expense and exhaustion that he has incurred when trying to make the best choices for his children. Ms. Paul stated

I never thought the hardest thing that I had to contend with is ensuring that they have a good education. As you see we have been all over the place and tried everything and I mean we just stay on it, and we have disappointments and you just can’t give up and there is luck involved [in getting chosen to participate in the VST program], but it has worked out for us.

Ms. Steel reported

It’s tiring at times...but then you feel good because my kids are getting what they need. It’s a good thing that my kids are in the school district and that they are learning and it’s so much easier on me not to stress and be like, “Oh my god my children aren’t learning, my kids are behind.”

Parent interview question #6: How has the experience of sending your child to school through the VST program compare to what you thought it would be? Two parents voiced differences in their expectations, and the outcomes of participating in the program. Mr. Cross voiced his feelings about differences in relationships as his children matriculated to higher grades.

I think at the middle and high school levels teachers have so many students you can’t develop that interpersonal relationship that an elementary teacher can

have...When you have 115-130 students you just don't have that kind of time."

Parent interview question #7: What experiences have made you feel part of the school community or not part of the community? All six parents have felt as if they were part of the school community at some point throughout the years of participation. Each parent talked about the communication that the district has with parents via e-mails, notices, and phone calls. Ms. White said that the middle school parents "just opened arms to (my husband)." Mr. Paul reiterated the district does "an excellent job ensuring that there is a partnership in the educational process." Ms. West said that "teachers call me when something's wrong...and when something's good."

Two parents mentioned distance as a factor for feeling disconnected from the school community. A parent explained a situation in which her son was being bullied in multiple school settings and did not feel that the school communicated appropriately. Mrs. West explained, "I found out, I called, and they were like "oh we handled it," but they didn't call so that made me feel excluded from the whole situation."

Parent interview question #8: Do you view your experience with the VST program as a worthwhile experience? Why or why not? All parents reported despite distance, and bus issues, participation in the VST program was a worthwhile experience. Mrs. Blue said of the program,

I take my oldest for instance because he's graduated, it's taught him about all cultures and to do his best and he has learned to be prideful for who you are, no matter what race you are and I am happy, I think he got the best...not the best, but one of the best education services that he could have gotten through [the

Midwestern School District]. I feel that way personally. It was a very good educational school that he went to so, just by his example and who he is now and who has become I can know that [Midwestern School District] is responsible for that.

Parent interview question #10: What are the expectations of teachers at your child's school? Do they differ for different groups of students? All six parents reported that teachers have high expectations for their children. Two reported the reason for this is due to their high level of parental involvement within the school community. Both parents mentioned that expectations for other children may not be as high, if parents are not involved. Ms. West indicated,

They expect a lot. I think they expect them to become, to do more than most other students, and I think that is because they know that I expect it. So they push them a little bit harder you know to get the A. The teachers know me, I know them, and they know what I expect.

Mr. Cross echoed Ms. West's sentiments,

I think that if a child's parent is not as involved as I am they may not push them as hard and I say that because I have seen it. I'm pretty sure that parent expects the same thing whether or not they are up to the school or not... I think they expect my child to work hard, do their best, participate in class, behave appropriately, you know just normal.

Mrs. Paul spoke to the fact that not all students come with the same skill sets and knowledge as a reason for teachers to treat students differently. "They may not have

quite the same expectation of each child because it varies on how they start. If you come in sixth grade reading at an eighth grade level, then they need to give her...more.” Other parents perceived treatment of students about the same. Mr. Paul stated that “...from my experience they do treat the students the same.”

Parent interview question #11: Reflecting on your experiences at each school level, what have been your experiences with teachers and staff at your child’s elementary school? All parents reported that they had good relationships with teachers at the elementary level. Comments parents made about elementary school staff included words such as wonderful, warm, very loving, a wonderful experience, and good relationships.

Some parents reported a change in the relationship between parents and teachers due to the increased size of middle school and also the changes in expectations of students. One parent, Mrs. Blue stated “there are some teachers that I know, but most I don’t know,” but she reported that they are all friendly and kind. Mr. Cross mentioned that elementary levels adapted education more than middle school. He felt middle school was less accommodating to his child’s medical diagnosis and Individual Education Plan (IEP). “They didn’t broaden their perspective enough to accommodate...they stepped into areas that were shocking to me.” When asked to talk more about this statement, Mr. Cross stated that the school suggested that he put get a medical prescription to aid in his son’s ADHD. None of the parent participants indicated issues with teachers at the high school level.

Parent interview question #12: What have been your experiences with the administrators at your child’s elementary school middle and/or high schools? All parents

reported positive experiences with administrators at all levels of their children's schooling. While all parents responded positively to this question, it should be noted that two parents voiced disappointment with administrator actions during their participation in the VST program. Ms. West voiced concern of how the bullying situation with her son was handled, during the interview. She believed administrators did not communicate properly with her about the problems her son was having. It should also be noted that Mr. Cross believed that administrators in middle school overstepped their boundaries as they suggested that he and his wife place his son on medication.

Parent interview question #13: What supports did you and your child receive as a result of participating in the VST program? Two parents reported that their children received the support of free transport to and from school, along with activity buses available for after school activities. Activity buses are provided to VST students who desire to participate in after school activities during the week. Cabs are sometimes used for transport if too few students require transport to or from school for extracurricular activities. Two parents mentioned support from the school for their children's learning and/or behavior difficulties. Another parent described the various school sponsored programs and events as supports provided through program participation.

Parent interview question #14: During the first years of participation, how did your child adapt to the new environment? All six stated that at least one of their children adapted well to the new environment. Mrs. Blue confirmed this feeling, "I don't think they had a problem because they all started off in kindergarten, for them they didn't know any different."

Mrs. West's daughter "didn't like the fact that she would be leaving her friends...but pretty much I didn't have a problem with any of them." Mr. Cross spoke about one of his children who had special needs. He stated, "the one with ADHD had the rough time making the adjustment because of his actions...he was wired and he had an issue with putting his hands on people playfully."

Parent interview question #15: How do you believe your child was accepted when he/she began participating in the program? All parent participants felt their child was accepted upon going into the new school environment. Ms. White, the parent who had experience in the program herself encouraged children to attend the program in kindergarten versus later on

When you start off from a fourth or fifth grade it is hard, because they teach differently, at least from what I've experienced the teaching is advanced, and things they expected you to know...you didn't get that in our city school. So you have to be almost taught over again when you go there so it's hard.

While Mr. Cross believed that their children were accepted, he described underlying racial tensions that were outlined previously in his narrative.

Parent interview question #16: Have you ever considered discontinued participation in the VST program? No parent participant thought about discontinuing participation in the program. One parent looked into moving in the Midwestern School District. Four parents mentioned that they wanted to move to a different area of the city, but decided

against it due to the boundary constraints for participation in the program and hosting district.

Parent interview question #17: How do you believe participating in this program will help your child in the future? Each parent believed their children would benefit positively from participating in the program. Three parents made comments based on the experience of older children who had successfully graduated from the program. Several of these children have gone on to college or other positive career pursuits. Ms. White believed that the diversity of the school district would prepare her children for the real world. Two parents responded by comparing their potential plight if their children had gone to St. Louis City Schools. Mr. Cross stated,

I think he has been given a good opportunity to get a good education in an institution that really cares about education, and they have more control of their environment more than St. Louis public schools do and I think that he will be successful.

Ms. Steel also replied,

Well look at the numbers, what's [Midwestern School District's] number of graduates going off to college? My point, now let's compare that to SLPS....so that's how I feel about it you know. I know they have more chance of succeeding with this school district than any other.

Parent interview question #18: How are your child's relationships with children in your neighborhood who do not participate in the VST program? Three parents said that there is interaction with a child or children in their neighborhood, but it is under very controlled circumstances. Ms. North said the children that her child interacts with are

also participants of the VST program. The other four stated that they did not know, or play with children in their home neighborhood. All parents talked about the selectivity that was required when living in their neighborhood. Mr. Paul stated, “We are very selective about who we associate with. Yes they do have some kids they play with during the summer, but we are very selective.” Mr. Cross stated, “They don’t know anyone in their neighborhood, but that was intentional. I’m very controlling in that environment. I didn’t just let them run the streets.” Mrs. Steel revealed,

Well I am one of those tight moms that hold your children close to them um, so when it comes to community kids, they really don’t play with them. I’m just going to be honest. I am not very comfortable in my own environment honestly so...I don’t really trust the community with my children.

Parent interview question #19: Has your child experienced pressure from children in your neighborhood related to participating in the VST program? No parents reported pressures from children in the neighborhood related to participating in the program.

Parent interview question #20: What are the challenges to participating in the VST program? Two parents believed there weren’t any challenges to participating in the program, but out of the two, Ms. West mentioned the need to have more African American role models in the district. Mrs. Steel believed the program needed to “stick around until we can improve the schools that are closer to our homes.” Transportation was the most mentioned challenge of participating in the VST program, four parents spoke of this issue. Ms. White chooses to drive her children to school because of the behaviors that children exhibit on the bus.

Parent interview question #21: What are the benefits to participating in the VST program? Three parents mentioned the cultural diversity within the school district their children attend as a benefit for participation. Mr. Cross, “My two sons...have become two well-rounded individuals because they are exposed to multiple cultures.” The other three parents mentioned the quality of education as the benefit of participation. Ms. West, “They give a good education out there, not just my kids but kids come out smart when they work with them in areas that they are defaulting, they work with the kids.”

A follow up question was asked of parents because of the mention of their desire for their children to attend neighborhood schools.

Parent interview question #22: What do you think it would take for your neighborhood schools to be able to provide a high quality education for your child? Mr. Paul stated,

You need to fund them at a higher level because the children need to go to school until maybe 6:00 p.m. because I think the values at home may not be advantageous for educational goals for our children. If you send them back to a toxic environment at 3:30 p.m. the education will not achieve the maximum results. I feel that St. Louis Public Schools will need a lot more resources. Actually, before they found that 90 million dollar deficit [the city] was beginning to fund programs with additional resources. They were two points away from accreditation and my oldest daughter was going to one of the schools, and they had a phenomenal program. So [I believe] if you put more resources towards the students...towards the teachers and teachers' aides, and ensure the student teacher ratio is more advantageous, make an effort to get parents more involved [that would help]. That is a wish; you would have to draw

back in the parents and resources that have already left. It would be an uphill battle, something that would not occur overnight.

Mr. Cross said,

It starts from the top, the leadership in the African American community and in general. We count on our leaders to help us, but they are not helping us, they are lining their pockets. They get in positions and worry about the money; they don't care about the children. We need new leadership; educate the parents. The parents are not educated. There are children walking around with children. Some of them have to work two to three jobs to make ends meet...I don't know if it can be fixed at this point. We would have to revamp the whole system. We would have to give free education to everyone. It is going to have to be remediation at this point. Students are pushed along and they don't even know what they learned so everything is learned on gradients. We don't have time to go back and fix that. We have to meet all these objectives from the state and schools are closing, children are being shuffled back and forth...it's too much. We are going to have to hold these politicians accountable. It's just ridiculous especially in the St. Louis public schools. Unfortunately it is spreading into the St. Louis County schools. Fortunately [Midwestern School District] has been able to do well and they are proactive, they are reaching out and they have technology and they are doing innovative things and we need that kind of stuff here too.

Mrs. Steel explained,

In my opinion, it is going to take the whole community. It takes a village to raise a child and we don't have just one child. It's going to take all the parents to be

involved. Lately in these communities that we are living in the parents aren't involved at all. You can't be like that. Not only are you making it bad for your child you are making it bad for the other children in the community. It's going to take also, some dedicated teachers. What I remember when you acted up in school, when you missed some days at school our teacher was so involved she'd come to my house. Community schools would be better, much better...there's no dedication, not for the teachers, not for the principals, not for the board of education people. I'm just going to be honest...the parents all the way down. We have to change all those aspects in order to succeed in these SLPS otherwise we are not going to succeed the way we need to. And we are going to have to continue to find programs like these to put our kids in.

Student Case Studies

Rossatto (2004) says this on the importance of gathering student perceptions, "Perceptions about life...has great impact on students' success in school. How they interpret the past, live in the present, and foresee the future is significantly influenced by their...life perceptions" (p. 55). Four students provided their perceptions in the in-depth interview portion of this research study. Two students, Roosevelt and Lilly are both middle school students in the district. The other two students, Clara and Loyal are high school participants of the VST program. Each of these students has participated in the program for five years or more.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 15-30 minutes in length. An interview protocol was used to ensure the integrity of each interview, but follow-up

questions were added as information was revealed during each interview. All interviews were conducted at local libraries in the participant's neighborhood, for the exception of one student participant whose interview was conducted at her home residence.

Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality.

Loyal

Loyal is a 16-year-old boy that loves listening to different types of music. He enjoys watching baseball, hockey, and soccer. He states that he has "some good friends, some bad friendships, and some good teachers." Loyal attends school in the district's alternative education program and has been a part of the VST program since he was in the third grade.

Loyal talks about his experiences when first participating in the VST program, "At first I was like I don't really want to go here [be]cause I didn't know anybody here." He stated that he felt as if his heart had "gotten broken" when he left his city elementary school because his whole family had attended that school. He believes his mother wanted him to attend the VST program because she "thought it was a good school and thought we would get a better education because of it."

Loyal remembers his first day of school through the VST program and he described it like this,

The first day was really nerve wrecking because I didn't know anybody, I didn't know where I was going. This was mid-year and I'm like I don't know what to do [or] who to ask for help. The teacher told me that a classmate was going to help me get my lunch and everything will be fine. When we got to lunch, the guy

didn't even help me; I had to do everything on my own. I didn't tell my teacher either. I honestly don't know why he didn't help.

Despite those first day experiences, Loyal felt that he was getting a better education than what he would be receiving if her were still in the city. "[Midwestern School District] is more strict and they are more high class in their rankings." When asked to define what he meant by strict, he went on to say, "I feel some schools have principals that don't have control. At my school they are strict and I like that. If they weren't strict nobody would get anywhere."

When asked about how his experience compares to what he thought it would be he talked about a feeling of loneliness that he had because of the long bus rides and riding a cab. Recently Loyal began riding in a cab because of the limited students in his attendance area that attends his school. He stated that he enjoyed going to school to see his teachers and friends. He said he felt most connected with the school community when he was able to sing in the choir. He felt that he is a better person because of his participation in the VST program, and he accredits that to his teachers. He believes that his teachers have high expectations and they expect for him to "try my hardest, do my best, and work hard as I can, and do my work."

As he continued to reflect upon his first years of participation he talked about an altercation that he had when a student pushed him down the stairs. He didn't recall why the altercation happened, but pointedly recounted the story that happened to him when he attended elementary school.

Loyal plans to become a school counselor and own his own counseling business after graduating high school. He believes the challenges to participating in the program

are having a new mindset and new ideas. When asked to explain what this meant he stated, “You can’t come to the Midwest District acting a fool. You are going to get all messed up. So you have to come in with a new mindset and know that you can do it, because they will push you to do your work.”

Lilly

Lilly is an active 11-year-old at one of the district’s middle schools. She enjoys swimming, sign language, volleyball, cheerleading, cross country, and track. Her favorite colors are orange and yellow and she loves to wear mismatched clothing. When she is not participating in all of her extracurricular school activities, she plays piano. Her aspirations are to be an actress on a television show. Lilly has attended the VST program since she was in the first grade.

When asked about her experience with the VST program, she mentioned that she enjoyed the amount of activities that she has access to. She felt that her poor experience while attending kindergarten in the city majorly influenced her parent’s decision to participate in the VST program.

Lilly recalls her first experiences with program participation. Lilly remembers the bus ride being very cold and feeling shy. She recalled that there was a 100th day celebration on her first day at her new school. She said there was food, games and a 100th day musical. Overall, Lilly was happy with her education, but didn’t have know what to expect when initially participating in the program. She recalled being very quiet during her first year of participation stating that “I was kind of by myself,” but in the second year she felt “used to everything.”

Lilly mentioned the challenges of participation include the long bus rides home. She stated, “I mean I like my school but maybe there was a closer school or a school with nicer teachers...” but she understood that the school “is a leading school, I see why they chose it, maybe the neighborhood, the records, and academics.”

Lilly appreciated the fact that teachers “get excited about what we are doing,” and because of this, she felt part of the school community. The only factor that negatively impacted her connection to the school experience was her family’s lack of transportation. “There wasn’t transportation to participate in after school activities when I was in elementary school and that made me really sad. I couldn’t sign up for stuff; I had to wait until middle school.”

When asked if Lilly believed that teachers had high expectations for her, she stated that they expected her to really try, and that expectations were the same for all students. Lilly believed that participating in the program allowed her to be part of a school district that had activities to cultivate each child’s talents and skills. She believed that the teachers were good, positive role models.

Roosevelt

Roosevelt is 11-years old and attends sixth grade classes at one of the district’s middle schools. Roosevelt’s favorite color is green and he enjoys playing sports such as basketball and football. He understands that his mother made the decision for him to participate in the VST program and believes that it is fun to attend his school because of all the activities that he is able to participate in.

When recounting his first years of participation in the program he had this to say, “I was nervous because I didn’t know anybody there. I was nervous, but soon it began to get a little easier because I was getting to know more people.” Roosevelt stated that he liked attending school through the VST program and also believed his teachers “are good.” He talked about being happy with his education because he is combining all of the things he is learning in order to prepare for high school. He desires to go to college and become a carpenter “to build stuff.”

When asked what made him feel part of the school community, Roosevelt stated, “the teachers and my friends.” He said that there had never been a time in which he has not felt a part of the school community. He believed his teachers have high expectations for him which include, “to get As, mostly As and be better. Cause like they tell me at school I need to do better.” He appreciated the fact that students treat him “kindly and respectfully.” He believed that by participating in this program, he is receiving the education he needs to be successful in the future.

Clara

Clara is a senior in high school who enjoys listening to music. She has attended the VST program since the fourth grade. Her aspirations are to work in the fashion industry after graduation. Clara was very reserved during the interview, and gave very limited answers and provided limited insight to her experiences in the VST program.

Clara understood that her mother made the decision for her to participate in the program, but stated that she couldn’t recall her initial thoughts of the program because it

was such a long time ago. She stated that she was happy with her education and was eager to graduate.

Clara stated that she is not sure whether she felt a part of the school community, but had never felt un welcomed. She also believed that her teachers expected her to do her best and pass, and felt that “they give us more work” than St. Louis Public Schools. Because of this she felt the challenges to participating in the program were “trying to stay on top, because of all the work.”

Student Interview Analysis

This section details the similarities in the student interview results for each question of the interview protocol.

Student interview question #1: Whose idea was it to participate in the VST program? Three students said it was their mom’s idea to participate in the VST program. Another student said that it was her mom and dad’s idea.

Student interview question #2: What was it like coming to school in Midwestern School District? One student, Clara, could not remember back to the time she came to Midwestern School District. Roosevelt felt that “it was good pretty much.” Loyal and Lilly mentioned feelings of nervousness and uncertainty.

Lilly commented,

The bus ride was very cold, it wasn’t hectic, because I mean, I was very shy. I didn’t really talk to anybody on the bus. [When I got to school] I liked that we had activities. For some odd reason we had this [100th Day] celebration, we got free food, [we had] some sort of musical or something.

Student interview question #3: Are you happy with your education? Each student voiced happiness with their education. Clara insisted that she was “just trying to graduate.” Loyal felt that he was getting a better education than what he was getting at the city school he had attended prior to participating in the VST program.

Student interview question #4: How has the experience of coming to school in the county compare to what you thought it would be? Of the two students that directly answered this question, Lilly stated, “Umm I don’t know. The first day I don’t know, I had no idea of what I was thinking.” The other student, Loyal, talked about the long bus rides and a feeling of loneliness coming to school.

Student interview question #5: What experiences have made you feel part of the school community or not part of the school community? Two students mentioned the various activities they were able to participate in school such as choir, drama, and sports. Two students mentioned the people that helped them feel included in the community such as their teachers, friends and administrators. Lilly said,

The teachers don’t have a favorite, so they understand each student and get to know them. They aren’t like get out your books while I text on my cell phone. They are reliable. They get excited about what we are doing and follow up with us on what we say we are going to do. There’s so many opportunities to get to know your teachers and for them to get to know you. They actually show up if you have a meet. My principal actually showed up for my [track] meet which

really surprised me, but she showed up so now when I have another meet I will expect her to be there.

Student interview question #6: What expectations do teacher have for you in this school? Are they the same for all students? All four students believed teachers wanted them to try their hardest, do their best, and be better. Lilly mentioned that teachers expected them to “really try and not just do it half-heartedly.” Roosevelt stated that his teachers wanted him to get “A’s and be better, because they tell me at school I need to do better. I’m doing good, but I need to do better.” Each student also believed that the expectations for each child were the same.

Student interview question #7: Reflecting on your experiences at each school level, what have been your experiences with teachers and staff at each level of school? Each student reported good experiences during their time at the district’s elementary schools. In middle school, Lilly mentioned changes that occurred between her and her experience with teachers. In particular, she recounted her frustration with a teacher’s grading practices when students turned in late work.

Student interview question #8: Reflecting on your experiences at each school level, what been your experiences with administrators? All students reported positive experiences with administrators at each level of schooling. It should be noted that while all students reported positive interactions, Loyal is now attending school in an alternative school setting. Prior to attending the alternative school, he attended school at one of the district’s general education settings.

Student interview question #9: What supports did you receive as a result of participating in the VST program? Of the three students that answered the question, all three mentioned that they received good support from their teachers.

Student interview question #10: During the first years of participation, did you have problems adapting to the new environment? Loyal mentioned that he did have a behavior issue where there was an altercation with a student, but he wasn't sure if it was because he was new to that environment or not. Lilly talked about her shyness and quietness during her first year of participation, "I was kind of by myself...by the second grade I was very talkative, more involved, I was used to everything." Roosevelt talked about the nervousness he felt, "because I didn't know anybody there, I was nervous, but soon it began to get a little easier because I was getting to know a little more people."

Student interview question #11: How were you accepted when you first began participating in the program? How has that evolved over the time of your participation? Each participant talked about everyone's acceptance of them. Some of the words used to describe their experiences were "friendly, kind, good, and respectful."

Student interview question #12: How do you believe participating in this program will help you in the future? Loyal discussed being prepared for the real world, he stated, "When I grow up I will come back and thank [Midwestern School District] because [they] have helped me go through the things I need to go through, you know?" Lilly acknowledged that there were many activities available to help hone her talents. "They have a lot of activities that you can do so that you can find the talents that will help you." Roosevelt stated, "It give us the education that we need and we can use it in the future."

Student interview question #13: How are your relationships with children in your neighborhood who do not participate in the VST program? Three of the four students mentioned they had no relationship or contact with the children that live in their neighborhood. Only one student mentioned having a relationship with one child on the street, while purposefully not befriending other children in her neighborhood. Lilly had this to say about the children in her neighborhood,

Their parents are different than mine, they are not as educated so it kind of rubs off on them. Like one day I decided to wear my socks over my pants and that's just the thing that I do and they said, oh my god why are you wearing that, that looks so stupid. Usually, if you had more educated parents you would keep that to yourself. But they just say anything that pops into their heads, without thinking about the outcomes. And sometimes you will hear the parents talking to their kids and you are like, don't ask to play with those kids because you might just get involved in something you don't want to get involved with.

Student interview question #14: Have you experienced pressure from children in your neighborhood related to participating in the VST program? No children reported pressure from students in their neighborhood because of their affiliation with the VST program.

Student interview question #15: Have you ever considered discontinuing participation in the VST program? None of the student participants considered opting out of the program.

Student interview question #16: What are the challenges to participating in the VST program? Two student participants did not mention any challenges to participating in the program. One student, Clara, mentioned trying to “stay on top, because you have to work. If I wasn’t going to [St. Louis Public Schools], I think I’d have less work.” Loyal talked about needing to have a new mindset and new ideas to be successful in the program, “you can’t bring your old ideas into [Midwestern School District].” When asked what “a new mindset” meant, Loyal had this response,

You are who you are, but when you are at school you have to be at school and not where you were before. You can’t come from [a city school] having that bad attitude and everything and those bad ideas. You can’t come to Midwestern School District acting a fool. [If you do] you are going to get all messed up so you have to come in with a new mindset and know that you can do it because they will push you to do your work.

Student interview question #17: What are the benefits to participating in the VST program? Three students spoke about the educational benefits of participating in the VST program. The other student, Lilly, spoke about the experiences and role models that are available in the district: “We can have a lot of hands on experiences and go on field trips. Umm probably another would be [that] there are role models that you have. The teachers are good examples.”

Common Themes: Parents and Student Participants

Certain patterns emerged as data were sorted, categorized, and coded. Table 3 reflects the common themes which emerged in the study by the responses from the student and parent interviews.

Table 3. *Questionnaire: Common Themes Between Parents and Students.*

Common Themes	Parents						Students			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4
Positive Experience with School	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Better Education at Suburban School	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Negative Interaction with Teachers			X					X		
Active Parent Involvement Important				X	X					
Has good relationship with teachers							X	X	X	
Good relationships with administrators	X		X		X	X	X	X		
Would like more AA students to participate					X	X				
Desire to go to school in a diverse setting	X	X	X			X				
Teachers have high expectations for all students	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Expectations Different for some students	X			X	X					
Perceived Racist Behavior on the Part of Faculty	X			X						
Change of perception				X				X		
Students encountering many different cultures	X	X		X		X				
Feeling a part of the school community	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Long bus ride		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Discipline problems on bus	X	X	X							
Tried SLPS		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Tried Private Schools		X	X	X						
Tried VST more than once to get in			X	X		X				
Experiencing dual cultures		X				X				
Distance from home/school	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Worthwhile experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Would like to attend closer school		X	X		X	X		X		
Issues with adjusting to program							X	X	X	

An open-ended, four-itemed, researcher-designed questionnaire was distributed at a VST event sponsored by the Midwestern School District. The questionnaire elicited responses from parents on the following topics including number of children participating in the VST program and years of participation in the program. Parents answered demographic questions related to their child's grade level and years of participation in the program. Table 4 shows the demographic information of the nine questionnaire respondents.

Table 4.
Questionnaire Findings

Respondent	Grades of Child(ren)	Years of Participation
1	K, 1st	2 years
2	4th , 6th	Not reported
3	5th, 6th, 11th,12th	10 years
4	6th	5 years
5	11th	8 years
6	K,1st	2 years
7	K, 1st, 7th	7 years
8	10th	Did not report
9	6th, 9th	5 years

The questionnaire also elicited responses from parents related to general questions related to the VST program (see Table 5).

Table 5.
Questionnaire Responses

Respondent	Knowing about Program	Decision for Child Participation in VST	Factors for Participation
1	Participated in VST as a student	Parent completing survey	Did not want students attending SLPS
2	Participated in VST as a student	Joint decision between husband and wife	Loves instruction provided by Midwestern School District and how district shows interest in student
3	Research	Parent completing survey	District had higher graduation rate
4	Just knew	Person completing survey	Experiences from older kids attending city schools
5	Newspaper	Parent completing survey	St. Louis Public schools were not providing quality education
6	Mail	Parent completing survey	Lack of improvement from city schools.
7	Friend	Parent completing survey	Believed it was a better choice for their schooling
8	Relatives had participated	Joint decision between parents	Better learning opportunities, better resources, more extra curricular activities, STL Public schools lacking accreditation
9	Relative had participated	Joint decision between parents	The demise of the St. Louis Public Schools. St. Public Schools becoming unsafe.

Table 6 outlines the responses related to how parents feel about the VST program in general and their willingness to participate in the interview phase of the research.

Table 6.

Parents Feelings Related to the VST Program

Respondent	Previous Experience with Program prior to 2011-2012 year	Program Met Expectations	Willingness to Participate in Interviews
1	Yes	Yes	No
2	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	Yes	No
8	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes

Findings Based on the Research Questions

Nine parents participated in phase 1 of the data collection process through questionnaires. Six parents and four students participated in phase 2 of the data collection process through in-depth interviews. All parent participants were asked the same questions set of questions, with follow up questions inserted based upon participant responses. All student participants were asked a similar set of questions with follow up questions inserted based upon participant responses. The following findings were a result

of the questionnaires, and interviews from the six parent and four student participants aligned with the research question and sub questions.

Research Question 1. What are the perceptions and attitudes of parents and students participating in the Voluntary Student Transfer program?

Overall parents and students reported feelings of happiness and contentment with their experiences through the Voluntary Student Transfer Program. Most reported that they felt connected to the school community, had few negative experiences while attending school through the program, and maintained that teachers had high academic expectations in their personal experiences. All nine questionnaire respondents noted that the program has met their expectations. The only issue that came up frequently between both parents and students was the long bus rides to and from school. There were some similarities and differences between the parent and student participants, this discussion will be outlined below.

Research Sub Question 1. What are the similarities and differences between parent and student perceptions? Each parent and student participant reported their experience with their schools has been a positive, worthwhile experience. Each parent also indicated that the suburban school provided a better education than that of the St. Louis Public School System. Only half the student participants mentioned this in their interviews. Most parents expressed pleasure that their child was able to attend a diverse school setting, while students did not mention this as a factor. Also, for the exception of one parent, all parents and students felt a part of the school community.

As it relates to the challenges of program participation, many parents and students noted the distance that must be traveled to attend school as a major concern. Most

parents noted that they would like their children to attend school closer to home if there were viable options available. Only one student presented this argument. Moreover, most students reported some difficulties when first attending the program, while parents did not seem aware of issues with adjustment to the new school and district setting.

Parents and students agreed that teachers have high expectations for their child(ren), however, some parents mentioned that teachers may have different expectations for other students of color based on ability and parental involvement. All student participants believed their teachers held the same high expectations for all students.

Research Sub Question 2. Have parent and student expectations changed through their experiences with the program?

Two parents specifically mentioned changes in expectations based on their continued experiences in the VST program. Mrs. Blue, a participant of the VST program as a child, used her experiences as part of the first group of participants in the VST program to form her expectations. During Mrs. Blue's interview, she did not believe that teachers were equipped to deal with the changes and cultural differences between students that lived in the city and county when she was a student participant in the program. As her children matriculated through the program, she believed that teachers were more accepting and better prepared to meet the varied needs of students that lived in the city.

Mr. Cross expressed disappointment in the way relationships changed from primary to secondary schools. Mr. Cross conveyed a feeling of loss and disconnection from the secondary school community. While he still believed the program was a good choice for his children, his feeling of community connectedness was diminishing as his

children grew older. No student research participants mentioned a change in perception as it related to participating in the Voluntary Student Transfer program.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program through interview and questionnaire methods. The chapter detailed the perceptions of six parent and four student research participants along with nine questionnaire participants. Individual narrative case studies along with group analysis were used to outline the findings of this research study.

Chapter 5: Summary and Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of student and parent participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program at a large Midwestern school district. This chapter summarizes the research problem and outlines the methodology utilized in this study. This chapter also discusses the summary of research results based on a review of literature, as well as an examination of the Critical Race Theory tenets that provided a theoretical lens for the conduction of this research. Additionally, this chapter presents recommendations and suggestions for additional research.

Summary of Research Problem

School choice has gained popularity over the past 40 years, particularly for parents and students who live in the nation's urban settings where minorities, particularly African Americans, are the predominate populations being served (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Jones, 2007; Musher et al., 2005). School choice, in the form of a multi-million dollar inter-district program, became an option for St. Louis, Missouri, residents after a federal court case affirmed African American parents' beliefs that St. Louis City Public School District's policies obstructed African American students from receiving equality in their educational experiences due to segregational practices.

With the court's mandate, a "voluntary, cooperative plan of pupil exchanges" (Freivogel, 2002, p. 211) between city and county schools was created and aptly named the Voluntary Student Transfer (VST) program. The primordial program, developed to "eradicate the remaining vestiges of government-imposed school segregation in the City

of St. Louis and St. Louis County” (Freivogel, 2002, p. 212), has served well over 100,000 students to date.

While there are many studies available researching the effects of desegregation, few studies exist that focus primarily on the Voluntary Student Transfer program. A 1990’s quantitative study examined student test scores as a predictor of the program’s success or failure (Freivogel, 2002). The most recent report provided an overview of the VST program along with seven other existing inter-district desegregation programs (Wells & Crain, 1997). These two studies follow the popular trend of desegregation research that focuses on the academic and social gains of student participants. According to research conducted on all St. Louis County schools participating in the VST program, there are benefits to students opting to participate in this program by being bussed from their urban community to a suburban school setting (Wells et al., 2009). In comparison to their peers who continue in St. Louis Public Schools, students in the VST program graduate at a higher rate, have more social exposure, and higher Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores as they persist in suburban schools (Freivogel, 2002). However, a gap in achievement still exists between African Americans and their White peers, particularly when looking at American College Testing (ACT) scores and grade point averages (Freivogel, 2002; Wells et al., 2009).

As an employee of the participating district whose primary job was to analyze data and build staff capacity to make sound data based decisions, themes in conversations and practices began to emerge related to the achievement of African American students, particularly students who participated in the VST program. The researcher observed and heard themes of deficit thinking and stereotyping that oversimplified issues. Faculty and

staff referred to factors such as parenting, home environment, poverty, lack of motivation, and commitment to explain the gaps in achievement between VST student participants, and their White peers.

After listening to these conversations over the years from the perspectives of teachers, administrators and staff, this researcher grew curious of the educational satisfaction and experiences of parents and students who participated in Voluntary Student Transfer program. Upon thorough review of the research, no studies related to the perceptual data of parents and students of the Voluntary Student Transfer program emerged. Due to limited and dated research available at the local and national levels related to the perspectives of student and parent participants in the Voluntary Student Transfer program or other inter-district desegregation programs, current participant perspectives were unknown at the time of this study.

Review of Methodology

The researcher employed a qualitative multiple-case study framework to examine these perspectives through questionnaires and a semi-structured interview protocol. This methodology was used to answer the following research question: “What are the perceptions and attitudes of parents and students participating in the Voluntary Student Transfer program?” The researcher also sought to answer the following sub questions: 1) “What are the similarities and differences between parent and student perceptions,” and 2) “Have parent and student expectations changed through their experiences with the program?”

Convenience sampling, a method used based on the availability of participants (Maxwell, 2013), was used in the first phase of data collection during a family VST event hosted by the participating research district. The researcher followed an event protocol located in Appendix A to gather research participants attending the event. Out of the 55 attendees, nine parents indicated a desire to participate in the first phase of research and data collection by completing, and returning the questionnaire to me. The researcher then analyzed each questionnaire to determine who indicated interest in participating in the second phase of research and their eligibility for participation.

Purposeful selection was used in the second phase of data collection in which in-depth interviews were conducted. Constraints that were considered in making participant selections limited the focus to parents and students with at least five years of experience in the VST program. After the researcher analyzed the information gathered during the first phase of data collection, and limited participation to focus on parents and students with at least five years of experience in the program, the researcher called parent participants. Participants indicated a desire to contribute in the second phase of research and data collection by completing the questionnaire, and providing consent to participate in the in-depth interview process. At this time parents also indicated a desire to have their child(ren) participate in the interview portion of the research as well.

Within two weeks of the parent event, the researcher contacted parents who indicated interest in participating in the interview portion of the research, providing them options to meet that were close to their home residence at a time that was convenient for them. The researcher also set up adjoining times for student participant interviews. The researcher traveled to the communities of all interview participants. Of the nine parents

who indicated a desire to participate in the second phase of research, six parents and four students were able to participate within the time frame of the research window. Prior to each interview, participant anonymity was ensured through the participant's consent and assent forms to encourage honesty and openness during the interview process.

In advance of beginning each interview, adult research participants were asked to read and sign the letter of consent to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Student participants were asked to read and sign the letter of assent (see Appendix D). These forms also ensured participant anonymity in order to encourage honesty and openness during the interview process. After consent was established for each participant, data collection began. Throughout the interview process, interview data was tape recorded to ensure proper transcription of participant responses. The researcher also created field notes and observations to assist in interpreting results gained from the interview process. Each parent interview lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. Each student interview was 15 to 30 minutes long. These interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed against the research question and sub questions.

Summary of Findings

The multiple case studies revealed that overall parent and student participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program were satisfied with the program and participating district. Research participants also noted that they had not considered discontinuing participation for any reason. Data analysis revealed common themes that were addressed by parents and students to support their overall happiness with the VST program and participating district. These themes included: quality of education and the importance of relationships. Busing and the distance from home was another theme that

emerged from the analysis of data, which presented a drawback from program participation.

Relationships. Parent and student participants voiced that they had good relationships with their teachers and administrators. Lilly stated, “There’s so many opportunities to get to know your teachers and for them to get to know you.” This finding is counter to research by Beard and Brown (2008) who believes it is often difficult to build reciprocal trust relationships between school, students, and parents particularly when working across “cultural and/or racial borders” (p. 471). While there was mention by some student participants about a particular teacher’s style of classroom management or polices, this researcher believes that all students and parents encounter a teacher that may clash with their personality or learning style. The researcher also limited participation to students and parents who have participated in the program for five years or more. Because participants have been in the program and participating district for five years or more, this has provided time and opportunity for trust to be built among parents, students, and teachers. Another explanation for the findings was established in research by Reed-Danahay (2000) who found a link to a child’s perceptions of their teachers and educational process to the perspectives of their parents.

All parent and student participants, for the exception of one, voiced feelings of connectedness and belonging with the school community. Parents detailed the welcoming nature of the school community, and the high level of communication from school through e-mails, phone calls, and text alerts as factors encouraging school connectedness. Mrs. Blue stated, “They just are very friendly. They call us, they have our numbers so they call us to keep us informed.” These findings support studies that

report parents have positive beliefs about their children's teachers when teachers make efforts to include them in the educational community (Sturges et al., 2005). Student participants noted the vast amount of sports, extracurricular activities, and friendships as reasons for their connectivity to the school community. However, one parent mentioned the long distance from school as a major reason for feeling disconnected from the school community. Distance from school and busing will be a theme addressed later in this chapter.

While relationships between school and home were important to all research participants, it seemed that relationships with children and families in their immediate community were not as important. Each parent and student stated that they did not have relationships with students that lived in their immediate home community. Mr. Cross stated, "They don't know anyone in their neighborhood, but that was intentional." Ms. Green stated, "You know, my kids don't hang around the kids in the neighborhood." Parents believed it was important for their kids to be around other kids who had the same goals and values. Parents felt that many of the adults and children that lived in their neighborhood did not share similar values, nor did they trust the adults in the neighborhood to be around their children.

The student participants were also candid when discussing this subject. "I don't have close relationships, I don't [hang] with the people in my neighborhood, because there are so many bad people out there," said Loyal. Lilly talked about the discomfort she felt when listening to how parents spoke to children in her neighborhood. "Sometimes you will hear the parents talking to their kids and you [think], don't ask to

play with those kids because you might just get involved in something you don't want to get involved with.”

Relationship Implications. If parents and student participants of the VST program sacrifice community relationships to benefit their well-being, it is of the utmost importance that educators understand the importance of relationships that include trust and commitment within the school setting. According to McClain (2010), much of the research related to parent involvement share a “school-centric” (p. 3075) focus and is based upon the “beliefs, values, and child-rearing practices of middle-class families” (p. 3075). McClain suggests that at the policy and practice level, efforts be made to foster true respect and stress parental roles in their children’s educational lives as “strong, positive, and active agents” (p. 3097).

Parents must feel connection through strong communication from teachers and the school community and be kept abreast of the activities that are going on at school. If parents are unable to attend events, there is a strong feeling of connection knowing what is going on at their child’s school. It is also important for parents to hear from schools when children are doing well as well as when they need support. Parents also voiced appreciation for having some school events outside of the school community, closer to the city in order to increase school community connectivity. Mr. Cross stated that while he appreciated the efforts the district made in including parents of color, he felt the implementation was not as successful as it could be. Although the VST family gathering sponsored by the district had occurred for many years, several parents the researcher came in contact with at the event stated that they had not known the event was held

annually. Some parents also stated that they learned of the event at “the last minute.” It is the district’s responsibility to ensure stakeholders are aware of events in a clear and timely manner.

Quality of Education. Parents and students variably expressed comments related to the quality of education being received through the participation of the VST program. Research participants mentioned the abundance of learning materials, high graduation rates of the participating district, the district’s accreditation, and facilities as factors for participation in the program. Lilly gave this opinion about the resources available, “the district has a lot of money they can spend towards the schools. The neighborhood pays higher taxes and we can have a lot of hands on experiences and go on field trips.” These findings are also similar to reports in Heaney and Uchitelle’s (2004) book detailing the history of the VST program. In the book, parents often mentioned the “county physical facilities as a reason for opting into the inter-district transfer program” (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004, p. 130). One parent recounted in the book,

I felt like it was a better opportunity for them to go into this program than going to the [St. Louis] public schools. Because I felt like the public schools would not take as much time, and I just felt like...this school would have been better for them...I felt like they would be under control, they would be able to watch them and they would be able to help them and they had more advancement, you know, as far as clubs, as far as computers and as far as everything.

Participants also noted academic rigor and preparation for real world as reasons for program participation. Lastly, many parents noted the importance of working with diverse students to prepare them for working in the global society as another factor. Mr.

Cross touted the value of diversity by saying, “They are exposed to multiple cultures. There is not just White, there is Asian and Arab[ic], and they have all types of friends and they get multiple perspectives. They [understand] that there are some that aren’t going to care about your color and some that do. They get to view the world as it really is.” This finding supports the impetus for the VST program, which was to provide a high quality education for all students in a more diverse school setting.

Quality of Education Implications. When the Voluntary Student Transfer program began, close to 13,000 students participated in the program in order to integrate suburban schools (VICC Corporation, n.d.). While this was touted as a success because of the sheer numbers of participants, a misstep of the agreement according to Heaney and Uchitelle (2004) was the “failure to require annual monitoring of student achievement within the city and...county schools of transfer students” (p. 206). High achievement for all students in both the county and city settings should have been the ultimate goal. Unfortunately, St. Louis city currently holds partial accreditation, and gaps in achievement levels between Black and White students in suburban schools remain a concern. Some researchers would disagree with Heaney and Uchitelle’s (2004) assessment as researchers have varying beliefs about the purpose of desegregation and its measures of success. According to Eaton (2011) desegregation was not meant to improve low achievement via test scores, but rather to provide an avenue to improve race relations and enrich our society as a whole.

Despite varying viewpoints, it is apparent from current data that St. Louis city must raise their achievement levels in order to compel students to attend schools in the city’s community. Of course, St. Louis city is not alone in its problem to raise academic

achievement in the face of a history of racial discrimination, high poverty, high mobility, and high crime. However, a larger social reform is needed to target these areas in conjunction with educational reform to gain the results needed for systematic change. According to 2012-2013 data only 5,000 students now participate in the program county-wide (VICC Corporation, n.d.). This is not due to the lack of program interest from parents living in the city. This is however due to the lack of districts who are currently participating in the VST program and the shrinking number of students districts are willing to enroll. To this end, more high quality education choices must be offered to city residents through public, magnet, and charter school options.

Busing. A reoccurring theme within the narratives of each research participant's story was the district's distance from school and the long bus trips to and from school. One parent felt the distance from their community to the county school caused a level of disconnection because he was unable to travel the distance to attend each of his son's activities. Mr. Cross lamented,

They have to get up earlier; it is dark when they get up to get on the bus. It is dark when they get home. If they participate in extracurricular activities, they have to take that long ride home after doing all that other stuff, and they still have to do their homework.

Other participants noted concerns with bus discipline and lack of supervision. Mrs. Green relayed her experience, "We didn't like what was going on with the bus so we decided to drive them. That was very, very hard because my husband had to be at work [shortly after picking them up]." Other participants detailed the discomfort of children on the bus during extreme temperatures in the summer and the breakdown of

parental communication when the bus experienced mechanical failures. Mrs. Steel talked about her bus concerns,

You have an hour ride, because you have to pick up the kids, and make all the stops. When you are dealing with the heat waves over 100 and you don't have air conditioning... My daughters came home looking like they had jumped in the swimming pool. And all we have is a cup of water [to give them] to stay hydrated? We need to do something about our school buses.

Busing Implications. According to the Critical Race Theory's principle of interest convergence, the "tendency of the judicial system of maintaining or not treading on the privileges of White citizens" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 16) can be seen fully in the situation of busing students an hour from home to receive a more diverse education. While the VST program has a dual busing system in which students from county schools are able to attend city magnet programs, only 87 students living in the county currently take advantage of this option (VICC Corporation, n.d.), which reaffirms that Black students are required to bear the burden of desegregation. Four parents and one student research participant reported that they would love to have schools in their neighborhood that could provide the same quality of education that is delivered through the VST program. Unfortunately, while the burden is placed on African Americans to make this program work, it seems to be one of the only ways currently to provide appropriate access to students to receive a diverse and high quality education.

In order to provide a more comfortable situation for students, bus companies must ensure that they are relaying current information to schools and parents when buses break

down, or when traffic has delayed pick up or drop offs. To ensure that appropriate behaviors are reinforced from school to home, bus companies and schools should coordinate in order to reinforce a similar code of conduct so that students are clear about the behavioral expectations required of them on the bus. A bus monitor would also be helpful to ensure that the bus driver is able to concentrate on driving kids safely to their destination. Lastly, buses should be required to have working air and heat to ensure students are transport in safety and comfort.

Unexpected Findings

Parent Activism. Five out of the six parent research participants reported trying multiple schooling options for their child prior to entering the VST program. Five parent participants reported having children in St. Louis Public Schools, three of these parents also tried private schools, and homeschooling. Three parents also reported applying to the program more than once in order to get their children into the program. McClain (2010) states, “Parents’ agency in utilizing various kinds of educational strategizing, especially...urban working-class parents, has been overlooked. Educators often do not recognize the many ways in which urban parents may be involved in their children’s schooling” (McClain, 2010, p. 3074). The efforts that these parents have put forth in order to provide a high quality education for their child negate the negative stereotypes that are held about urban dwelling African American parents and their activism for their children’s education.

Parent participation for African American parents living in urban settings has been viewed negatively when looking at traditional definitions of involvement such as attending school conferences, workshops, and parent teacher organization meetings

(Smith, 2008). Widely held beliefs about African American urban dwellers include “they do not care and are uninvolved” or “are not as engaged as high-SES parents” (Smith, 2008, p. 18). When schools hold these myths to be true for all African American parents, educational opportunities are missed. However, when looking at expanded definitions of parental involvement that include proper school preparation in the form of supplies, monitoring sleep habits, and ensuring students arrive to school on time, African American parents fair better (McKay et al., 2003).

The parents who participated in this study affirmed research on school choice that suggests the more actively involved the parents are in the education of their child, the greater access to information they will have. These parents seemed to understand their options, and were well-equipped to acquire the tools and resources necessary to participate in school choice programs (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). To this end, only six parents agreed to participate in this study out of over 50 families that attended the VST family event. This researcher may conclude that parents who agreed to participate in this study are the highly involved and active parents in the traditional sense.

Decades of research support the positive benefits active parental involvement has on a child’s educational attainment (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & DePedro, 2011). Research links parental involvement to better attendance, positive academic outcomes, lower drop-out rates, and more positive perceptions about school (Huang & Mason., 2008; Sturges et al., 2005). It is important that teachers, administrators, and educational stakeholders at large examine their personal beliefs and biases towards others. When personal inspection is done, only then will people begin to change the culture of schools to examine people at their true level and withhold judgment.

Race and Deficit Thinking. According to this researcher's experiences and conversations with teachers related to student participants in the VST program, deficit theories about low-income and/ or African American parents and students is pervasive within the educational communities in which the researcher has worked. Research affirms that deficit thinking is overwhelmingly upheld through the communication, teaching practices, values and beliefs of suburban school districts that educate low income and/or students from urban settings (McClain, 2010). The researcher expected most parents and students to detail experiences that was derived from deficit thinking on behalf of teachers and staff. Conversely, only two parent participants noted that district staff had treated their child differently based on race. Three parents also noted that it was important for them to be active within their child's educational community so that they were able to communicate to teachers the high expectations they held. These parents also believed that less active parents may yield varied results in teacher expectations. Only one parent expressed a need for a more diverse teaching staff in the participating district. Ms. West stated,

I think they need to have more African American role models out there. From top to bottom, they need to have more [African American role models], especially the males. Because males can relate more to males, I think they need to have that.

While these issues were noted in interviews, parents did not go into high detail about their thoughts and experiences. Mr. Cross said that he wanted to address issues but did not want to "rock the boat." Ms. West seemingly had a very traumatic experience with her son that involved bullying, but "didn't want to seem negative." The parents' reluctance to speak about issues of race could be explained through a study conducted by

the United Negro College Fund on African American Perceptions on education (Bridges, Awokoya, & Messano, 2012). In this study on parent perspectives, parent research participants voiced concerns about speaking up when there was a question or problem they encountered during their child's schooling. Parents stated that they sometimes feared that the school stakeholders would retaliate against their child. Parents also felt fearful and intimidated to speak up when talking to someone who had more education and knowledge (Bridges et al., 2012). This finding could also be explained by the fact that this researcher served as primary researcher and a current employee of the district. Participants may not have felt comfortable going into great detail relaying negative stories about a program and district that they felt has provided a great opportunity for children and families.

Parent research participants were aware that differences based on race exist in the world, and some believed that these differences would appear in their child's educational setting through the VST program. Most parents did not voice high concern about this issue, as Mr. Cross believed it would prepare his children for the world as they transitioned into adulthood. Mr. Paul was the only parent who made specific statements of how he attempted to combat racial stereotypes. Mr. Paul stated that he and his wife ensured that his daughter attended cultural events, received classical piano training, and interacted with families with similar values in the city. What many parents did mention was their strong connection to church groups, congregations, and reinforcing concepts of self-pride. While parents may not realize this as purposeful buffering of discriminatory practices or racism, researchers define this as racial socialization (McKay et al., 2003).

Racial socialization includes values of “religiosity and cultural pride” to help cope with perceptions of racism and promote a positive self-concept (McKay et al., 2003).

While this issue seemed to be accepted in the minds of the parents participating in this study as an inevitable part of life for their children, it can also dissuade the participation of other African American parents. Research states that a block to participating at school could be the perceptions of racial discrimination in schools. A study related to the parental involvement of urban African American parents found that “parental perception of racism had a significant association with interactions between parents and children in the home, and with levels of at-school parental involvement” (McKay et al., 2003, p. 111).

It is therefore the responsibility of schools to provide an education that affirms who children are as learners and as individuals. On one end schools take a stance of color neutrality or colorblindness that negates the differences that make us great as individuals. At the other end, there are schools that celebrate color and culture in very shallow ways that sometimes further propagates racial stereotypes and beliefs. A balance must occur within schools, however difficult it may seem to achieve. Eaton (2011) touts the great potential that diverse schools hold, but challenges teachers, parents, administrators and society to ensure true integration through fair and honest academic and discipline policies

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the case studies of parents and student participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program. The questions asked of parent and student

participants focused on their experiences with the program, but also asked specific questions related to teachers and administrative staff. The researcher believed that the addition of teacher and administrator perspectives would have provided another level of insight to this study.

Further research is also needed based on de-limitations and limitations of the studies that are further explained in Chapter 1 of this study. Out of approximately 1,700 student participants of the Voluntary Student Transfer program in the Midwestern School District, only six parents and four students participated in the study. One may conclude that the parental styles of these parent and student participants closely mirror the ideals and values of the participating district, as they as they all attended institutions of higher learning, and play what would be deemed active roles in their children's education. It is important to note that parent participants of the VST program are demographically, economically, and socially diverse. Because the participants of this study represent a small percentage of the participants in the VST program, further studies should be conducted to include more perspectives within the research district. Conjunctively, the sample size for this study is delimited to one district in the Midwestern United States. Further research should be conducted to include parent and student perspectives from other districts who continue to participate in the Voluntary Student Transfer program.

In June 2013, the Missouri State Supreme Court upheld a state law that required unaccredited school districts to pay the tuition costs of students who transferred to local accredited school districts in the case of *Breitenfeld v. The School District of Clayton* (Breitenfeld vs. The School District of Clayton, 2013). This ruling now empowers students from local unaccredited districts to transfer to other districts in the partially

accredited St. Louis Public School District, and fully accredited St. Louis County, St. Charles County, and Jefferson County School Districts. According to local media outlets, there have been mixed emotions related to these transfers. Representative Mark Parkinson of St. Charles County stated, “It is a slap in the face of every family living in the Francis Howell School District to be forced, without consent, to accept students from outside the district” (Schlinkmann, 2013, para. 8). Grayling Tobias, superintendent of Hazelwood School District offered more welcoming words to students and families who will choose to transfer to neighboring districts. “The most important thing is that we are going to follow the essence of the law,” Tobias said. “We want to do what’s best for kids” (Crouch, 2013, para. 13). Because of these recent developments mandated by state law, additional research studies could be conducted on the students, parents, teachers, district administrators and varied stakeholders to gain information related to their perspectives and experiences.

Summary

The quest to obtain a free and appropriate public education has been and continues to be a struggle for many parents and students living in urban settings, yet the narrative voices of these stakeholders are consistently shunned in favor of quantitative statistics of test scores, drop-out rates, and socioeconomic status. This research study highlighted African American parents who are active agents within their children’s education and are willing to combat negative stereotypes and experiences to provide their children the best education that is within their reach. Conjunctively, student participants

are willing to carry the burden of busing in order to attend a higher quality school, which they believe will positively impact their future success.

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Appendices

Appendix A

VST Family Day Protocol

Good evening Midwestern School District Parents! I am so happy to be here with you this evening. I would like to thank Charlotte Ijei for allowing me to be here. My name is Rosalyn Harper and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University. I am in the final year of the program and am in the process of gathering participants for my research study. My research revolves around student and parent participants in the Voluntary Student Transfer (VST) program, so I need your help. I am inviting you to participate in my study.

I am passing around a questionnaire for each parent that explains who I am and what my research seeks to do. Your involvement in this research will be simple. There are two levels of participation to this research. If you agree to participate on the first level of research, fill out the questionnaire, omitting your name and contact information at the end, and return it to the basket identified during my introduction. If you would like to participate in the second level of research, please include your name and contact information. I will then contact you so that I may set up an interview in order to ask more in-depth questions regarding your experiences with the VST program. The interview would be scheduled at the nearest public library to your home at a time convenient to. After the interview, I would call if I needed further clarification from the information that you provided on the questionnaire and interview. Your total participation time would not exceed two hours.

At the end of the questionnaire you may also indicate whether you agree to allow your child(ren) to participate in the research. If you choose to allow your child to participate in this research, I will contact you in order to set a time to interview them regarding their experiences with the VST program. Your child's total participation time would not exceed two hours and would take place at the nearest public library to your

home at a time convenient to you. You and your child's interview will be conducted separately.

Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time. You also have the option not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Neither you, nor your child will be penalized in any way if you choose to withdraw participation and your identity will kept confidential.

Once you have filled out the questionnaire and indicated how you would like to participate, please return the questionnaires to the basket. Does anyone have any questions that I can answer? If you would like to speak to me privately, I will be here all evening to answer questions. You may also contact me using the information that is on the top sheet of the questionnaire. Thank you in advance for your time and participation in this research study.

Appendix B

Lindenwood University

School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Dear Parent,

My name is Rosalyn Harper and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University, under the guidance of Dr. Tim Delicath. I am in the final year of the program and am in the process of gathering participants for my research study. My research revolves around student and parent perspectives, beliefs and experiences as participants in the Voluntary Student Transfer (VST) program. I am inviting you to lend your voice to this study.

There are two levels of participation to this research study. Attached is a brief questionnaire. If you agree to participate on the first level of research, fill out the questionnaire, omitting your name and contact information at the end, and return it to the basket identified during my introduction. If you would like to participate in the second level of research, please include your name and contact information. I will then contact you so that I may set up an interview in order to ask more in-depth questions regarding your experiences with the VST program. The interview would be scheduled at the nearest public library to your home at a time convenient to you. After the interview, I would call if I needed further clarification from the information that you provided on the questionnaire and interview. Your total participation time would not exceed two hours.

At the end of the questionnaire you may also indicate whether you agree to allow your child(ren) to participate in the research. If you choose to allow your child to participate in this research, I will contact you in order to set a time to interview them regarding their experiences with the VST program. Your child's total participation time would not exceed two hours and would take place at the nearest public library to your home at a time convenient to you. You and your child's interview will be conducted separately.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise using my contact information included below. You may also call my faculty supervisor, Dr. Tim Delicath at 636-949-2264. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

Sincerely,

Rosalyn Harper, Principal Investigator

Cell: 618-531-1178

E-mail: rmh829@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

Parent Questionnaire
Level 1 Participation

Please list the grades and years of participation of your children who participate in the Voluntary Student Transfer (VST) Program:

Grade of Child (1)_____ Years of Participation in VST_____

Grade of Child (2)_____ Years of Participation in VST_____

Grade of Child (3)_____ Years of Participation in VST_____

Grade of Child (4)_____ Years of Participation in VST_____

Please answer the following questions.

1. How did you learn about the VST program?
2. Who made the decision for your child to participate in the VST program?
3. Why did you want your child to participate in the VST program?
4. Before the 2011-2012 school year, have you had previous experience with the VST Program? _____ Yes _____ No
If yes, has the program met your expectations? _____ Yes _____ No

Level 2 Participation

If you are willing to participate in individual interviews with the researcher please complete information below:

Name _____ Contact Number _____

Best Time to call _____

Are you willing to allow your child(ren) to participate in individual interviews? __ Yes __ No

I have read this form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my child's participation in the research described above.

Parent Participant's Signature Date Parent Participant's Printed Name

Child's Printed Name

Signature of Investigator Date Investigator's Printed Name

Appendix C

Rosalyn Harper
Lindenwood University Department of Education

Case Study of the Voluntary Student Transfer Program: The Perspectives of African American Students and Parent Participants in one Midwestern School District

Interview Protocol:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study! I am here today to get a better understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of the families that participate in the Voluntary Student Transfer Program (VST) in Midwestern School District School District. I am going to ask you to respond to several questions about your experiences as a participant in the VST program. In your responses, please feel free to as open and honest as possible.

I want to reinstate that your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time. You also have the option not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Neither you, nor your child will be penalized in any way if you choose to withdraw participation.

Thank you again for your participation! I will begin the interview by asking you the first question:

Parent Interview Questions

1. How did you learn about the VST program?
2. Who made the decision for your child to participate in the VST program?
3. Why did you want your child to participate in the VST program?
4. What are your thoughts about your child's education?
5. What has educating your child been like for you as a parent? What sorts of feelings do you have regarding your experiences?
6. How has the experience of sending your child to school in Midwestern School District compare to what you thought it would be?
7. What experiences have made you feel part of the school community or not part of the school community?

8. Describe your experience in the Midwestern School District community?
9. Do you view your experience with the VST program as a worthwhile experience?
Why or Why not?
10. Do you view your child's experience in the VST program as a worthwhile experience? Why or Why not?
11. What are the expectations of teachers at your child's school? Do they differ for different groups of students?
12. Reflecting on your experiences at each school level, what have been your experiences with teachers and staff at your child's elementary school?
 - a. Middle school?
 - b. High school?
13. What have been your experiences with the administrators at your child's elementary school?
 - a. Middle school?
 - b. High school?
14. What supports did you and your child receive as a result of participating in the VST program?
15. During the first years of participation, how did your child adapt to the new environment?
16. How do you believe your child was accepted when he/she began participating in the program?
17. How has that evolved or changed over the time of your participation?
18. Have you ever considered discontinued participation in the VST program?
19. Are you or your child a part of any support programs that are provided through the VST program?
20. How do you believe participating in this program will help your child in the future?

21. How are your child's relationships with children in your neighborhood who do not participate in the VST program?
22. Has your child experienced pressure from children in your neighborhood related to participating in the VST program?
23. What are the challenges to participating in the VST program?
27. What are the benefits to participating in the VST program?

Appendix D

Rosalyn Harper
Lindenwood University Department of Education

Case Study of the Voluntary Student Transfer Program: The Perspectives of African American Students and Parent Participants in one Midwestern School District

Interview Protocol:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study! I am here today to get a better understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of the families that participate in the Voluntary Student Transfer Program (VST) in Midwestern School District School District. I am going to ask you to respond to several questions about your experiences as a participant in the VST program. In your responses, please feel free to as open and honest as possible.

I want to reinstate that your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time. You also have the option not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Neither you, nor your child will be penalized in any way if you choose to withdraw participation.

Thank you again for your participation! I will begin the interview by asking you the first question:

Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences with the VST program.
2. Whose idea was it to participate in the VST program?
3. Why did you want to participate in the VST program?
4. What was it like coming to school in Midwestern School District?
5. Are you happy with your education?
6. How has the experience of coming to school in the county compare to what you thought it would be?
7. What experiences have made you feel part of the school community or not part of the school community?

8. How do you view your experience in the VST program?
9. What expectations do teachers have for you in this school? Are they the same for all students?
10. Reflecting on your experiences at each school level, what have been your experiences with teachers and staff at your child's elementary school?
 - a. Middle school?
 - b. High school?
11. What have been your experiences with administrators in elementary school?
 - a. In middle school?
 - b. In high school?
12. What supports did you receive as a result of participating in the VST program?
13. During the first years of participation, did you have problems adapting to the new environment?
14. How were you accepted when you first began participating in the program? How has that evolved over the time of your participation?
15. Are you a part of any support programs that are provided through the VST program?
16. How do you believe participating in this program will help you in the future?
17. How are your relationships with children in your neighborhood who do not participate in the VST program?
18. Have you experienced pressure from children in your neighborhood related to participating in the VST program?
19. Have you ever considered discontinued participation in the VST program?
20. What are the challenges to participating in the VST program?
21. What are the benefits to participating in the VST program?

Appendix E**Conclusion of Interview Protocol:**

Thank you so much for taking time to participate in this research project. After I have concluded my research, you will receive a summary of my research findings. I will do everything in my power to protect your privacy. Your identities will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that results from this study and the information that I collect will remain in my possession in a locked file. If you have any questions, or concerns, please feel free to contact me using the information on your copy of the research consent form.

Case Study of the Voluntary Student Transfer Program: The Perspectives of African American Students and Parent Participants in one Midwestern School District

Rosalyn Harper
Lindenwood University Department of Education

Appendix F

Lindenwood University
School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Dear Parent,

My name is Rosalyn Harper and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University, under the guidance of Dr. Tim Delicath. I am in the final year of the program and am in the process of gathering participants for my research study. My research revolves around student and parent perspectives, beliefs and experiences as participants in the Voluntary Student Transfer (VST) program. I am inviting you to lend your voice to this study.

Your involvement in this research will be simple. Upon agreeing to participate, you will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences as a participant in the VST program. Your total participation time will not exceed two hours. Your responses will be audio-recorded.

Approximately 60 parents and students will be interviewed for this research. After I have concluded my research, you and your child will receive a summary of the research findings. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research; however, participants may experience uncomfortable feelings from answering certain questions. Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time. You also have the option not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Neither you, nor your child will be penalized in any way if you choose to withdraw participation.

While there are no direct benefits to participating in this study, your involvement will help contribute a great deal of knowledge about the experiences of parents and students that participate in the VST program in Midwestern School District School District.

I will do everything in my power to protect your privacy. While your responses will be audio-recorded, your identities will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that results from this study and the information that I collect will remain in my possession in a locked file.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise using my contact information included below. You may also call my faculty supervisor, Dr. Tim Delicath at 636-949-2264. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

Sincerely,

Rosalyn Harper, Principal Investigator

Cell: 618-531-1178

E-mail: rmh829@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to *my* participation in the research described above.

Parent Participant's Signature Date

Parent Participant's Printed Name

Participant's Phone Number _____ E-mail _____

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to *my child's* participation in the research described above.

Parent Participant's Signature Date

Parent Participant's Printed Name

Child's Printed Name

Signature of Investigator Date

Investigator's Printed Name

Appendix G

Lindenwood University
School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Assent for Participation in Research Activities

My name is Rosalyn Harper, and I am from the School of Education, at Lindenwood University. I am asking you to participate in this research study because you are a student who participates in the Voluntary Student Transfer Program (VST) in Midwestern School District School District.

PURPOSE: In this study, I am trying to learn more about your thoughts, feelings and experiences as a student who participates in the VST program.

PARTICIPATION: I will ask you questions in and you will talk to me about your thoughts. I will audio-record your answers so that I can go back and listen to them, but your identity will remain anonymous. If I have questions after you go home, I may call to ask follow-up questions. I should take no more than two hours of your time.

RISKS & BENEFITS: Your safety and well being are important to me. The questions that I ask are all about your feelings, thoughts and experiences with the VST program. You may feel uncomfortable answering certain questions, but you can skip any questions you do not want to answer. If you choose to participate in this study you will be giving people information that can help other students in similar programs. This is a very important and special job.

COMPENSATION: I have already asked your parents if it is ok for me to ask you to take part in this study. Even though your parents said I could speak with you, you still get to decide if you want to be in this research study. You can also talk with your parents, grandparents, and teachers before deciding whether or not to take part. No one will be upset if you do not want to participate, or if you change your mind later and want to stop. Remember, you can also skip any of the questions you do not want to answer.

You can ask questions now or whenever you wish. If you want to, you may call me at 618-531-1178 or e-mail me at rmh829@lionmail.lindenwood.edu.

Please sign your name below, if you agree to be part of my study. I will give both you and your parents a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Vitae

Rosalyn Harper Goodwin attended Lincoln Senior High School in East St. Louis, Illinois. In 1995 she entered the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. She received her Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education in May, 1999. During the years following, she was employed as an educator at Marvin Elementary School in the Ritenour School District. In June, 2006, she received her Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Illinois, and later became an Education Consultant for the Illinois State Board of Education and Progress Monitoring Coach in St. Louis County. While working as a Progress Monitoring Coach, Rosalyn Harper Goodwin began attending Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri. She will obtain a Doctorate of Education in Instructional Leadership in December 2013. Rosalyn Harper Goodwin currently serves as an online faculty member for the University of Phoenix and an educator in St. Louis County.