# SCHOOL CHOICE AND UNIVERSITY-MODEL® SCHOOLS:

# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Abstract

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This qualitative phenomenological study fills a void in the existing research on school choice by including the University-Model® school to the literature. Through purposeful sampling, seven parents of students enrolled in grades 3rd-6th at a University-Model® school in the North Texas area were selected. The study is guided by Simon's (1955) satisficing theory to explore parents' decision-making process in choosing a school for their child and their level of satisfaction with the UM school experience. Additionally, through the study's findings, the researcher put forward that parents' decisions are determined by observing children's development of self-regulatory skills as proposed by Zimmerman's (1998) self-regulated learning theory.

Eleven common themes derived from the analysis of interviews. First, parents chose a UM school for their children for reasons such as faith-based education, the smaller class sizes offered by the school, the ability to have more time with their children, and affordability of overall investment of money and time. Second, when discussing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the academic and social experiences presented by participation in a University-Model®

school parents referred to various forms of partnerships (i.e., teacher-parent, parent-parent, parent-student, etc.), academic rigor of the curriculum, supportive social environment, and students' opportunities for development of self-regulation skills. Finally, an examination of parents' intentions to continue to enroll their children in a UM school, revealed that most of the participants planned to continue their children's education at the UM school and strongly valued the various forms of flexibility provided by the model. However, their decisions show they understood the importance of differences in children's personality in making in-person/satellite day environments successful for each child.

Based on these key findings, the researcher examined directions for future research and implications for policy and practice. For example, research exploring students' perceptions of their self-regulatory skills development and study habits as part of the in-person/satellite day design of the University-Model® would enrich the current study based on parents' observations. Furthermore, research on the University-Model® design is relevant to the education community by bringing to attention alternative ways to help students become independent learners who can engage in studying, even when in-person classroom instruction is not available (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic).

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Since Friedman's proposal of school vouchers in 1955, there has been a constant discussion of school choice and the parental right of selecting which K-12 institution their child attends (Forman, Jr., 2005). Public and private sectors have both been a part of the development of education settings through the years. The first recorded enrollment statistics in public schools were available in 1870 followed in 1880 by private school enrollment statistics (NCES, 1993). In the early 1990s, charter schools joined the educational system (NEA, 2021). The National Alliance Public Charter Schools (NAPCS, n.d.) reported that charter schools are public schools that have more flexibility in the design of their classes yet remaining compliant to state standards. Between 2000 and 2016, the growth of charter schools in the United States reached 500% (NCES, 2019). In addition, homeschool enrollments have also increased between 1999 and 2016, going from 0.9 million students to 1.7 million students (NCES, 2019). With such growth and diversity of the school system, it becomes evident that many parents have been searching for alternative K-12 institutions for their children, beyond the traditional public or private school options.

As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the most recent 2016 enrollment statistics for the four school types are: 47.3 million students in public schools, 5.8 million students in private schools, 3.0 million students in charter schools, and 1.7 million students being homeschooled. The differentiation between these schools becomes exacerbated, as parents weigh priorities and desires for their child's education when selecting an institution. According to the NCES (2019) in 2016, 28% of parents had considered another school than the one in which their child was enrolled, which suggests they explored various options. Three

primary factors are suggested by literature as guiding parental considerations when selecting a K-12 institution for their child: religious aspects, campus location, and students' performance in the school (Egalite & Wolf, 2016; Kisida, Wolf, & Rhinesmith, 2015; Lincove, Cowen, & Imbrogno, 2018). However, the parental quest for a right school model for their children did not stop here.

University-Model®, a school model that has been expanding since its first introduction in 1993, has been rooted in the homeschooling idea. To introduce this new model as a school choice alternative, I will discuss the issues and concerns parents face when making their decisions.

## Background of the Problem

### Factors Affecting Parental Decisions

Although the U.S. Department of Education classified private schools into one sector to simplify enrollment statistics, some researchers, like Cohen-Zada and Sander (2008), have carefully considered the differences between two types of private schools, nonsectarian and religious schools. These researchers found a strong association between family church attendance and the children attendance of a religious private school, which suggests religious affiliations as the primary reason some parents choose such institutions as their child's instruction path. Furthermore, the authors found that Catholics seek Catholic schools, Protestants desire Protestant schools, while households with no religious affiliation typically choose nonsectarian private schools.

A second factor parents consider in selecting a school is the location of the campus. According to NCES (2019), for 20% of public-school students, parents stated they moved to the specific area so their child could attend the designated school. Forman, Jr. (2005) claimed that many parents valued education vouchers as they provide all children better opportunities,

regardless of whether parents can afford to pay for the school or to buy a home in the area where a desired school is located. Many districts have also recognized the impact vouchers have on the educational alternatives (i.e., public, private, and charter schools) provided to parents and the transition to open enrollment, which allows students to attend public schools outside the school their home address is zoned to attend. For instance, in a state comparison report, Wixom and Keily (2018) found that 47 of the 50 states in the United States have incorporated some form of open enrollment in K-12 education. Additionally, charter school enrollment statistics have quickly escalated because there is no zoning restriction for charter schools and parents appreciated the freedom to choose a specific school for their child. Likewise, parents who select private school as their choice are not delegated to a certain campus. Selecting a school other than the assigned public school in the district in which the students live, often requires students and parents to commute to and from campus. However, enrollment statistics continue to suggest that parents are willing to make sacrifices, whether by moving to a certain area for a desired campus or by commuting to a certain school (Denice & Gross, 2018).

The third factor parents consider when selecting schools is student performance in each setting. There are mixed findings in the current literature with respect to student performance when comparing public and private schools. Utilizing data from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD, 1993), O'Brien and Pianta (2010) compared how classroom processes varied by school type in 840 first-grade and 848 third-grade classrooms. However, the researchers found little variation in student performance between the two school types, public and private. Carbonaro (2006) and Lubienski, Lubienski, and Crane (2008) went further and claimed that public schools even appear to have better academic performances than private schools in many areas. On the contrary, Horowitz and Spector (2005) reported

statistically significant higher GPA for students who attended religious private schools than their public-school counterparts, although students who went to nonsectarian private schools performed very closely to those in public schools. Lubienski et al. (2008) explained, however, that higher achievement was associated with smaller class sizes, which is predominant in private schools.

Despite the mixed research findings, some of the unwavering variations between the two school sectors include smaller teacher-to-student ratios in private schools, more athletic options in public schools, and the financial investments that parents must make when choosing a private school for their child. According to NCES (2019), the reported student-to-teacher ratio in 2015 was 16:1 in public schools and 11.9:1 in private schools. Additionally, some private schools lack better facilities for sporting events and are more focused on academics. Lastly, the national average of private school tuition cost for the 2020-2021 school year was notably $11,173 (Average Private School Tuition Cost, 2021).

**Self-Regulatory Skills**

Along with these external factors that parents consider when making decisions about the public and private sectors, researchers have also found that parents care about the type of instruction that better contributes to shaping student behaviors. For instance, parents are aware of the importance of self-regulation skills on student outcomes (O'Brien & Pianta, 2010) as well as professional career (Zimmerman, 1998).

Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) defined these skills as "time management, setting goals, effort and persistence in completing difficult tasks, and self-monitoring one's performance" (p. 198). Unlike various other skills that can be learned over time in social settings, such as walking, talking, and coloring, self-regulatory skills are learned from actual instructions received from

other individuals. This instruction comes from parents, teachers, and even peers. Although researchers have emphasized the importance of self-regulatory skills, few teachers utilize specific methods that aid students in developing these skills throughout their academic journey and become independent learners (Zimmerman, 2002). Furthering his study, Zimmerman also found that the lack of self-regulatory skills development can leave students doubting their own abilities, feeling discouraged, and sometimes even giving up on certain subjects or school altogether. Therefore, when making decisions on their child's schooling, parents could be influenced by school models that encourage the development of useful self-regulatory skills.

**University-Model® School**

Zimmerman's (1998) work on students' need of self-regulatory skills to become efficient learners strongly aligns with the philosophy of the University-Model®. In 1992, a group of homeschooling parents designed the school model, as they were disillusioned with the public, private, and homeschooling sectors (B. Freeman, personal communication, August 27, 2020). According to Turner, Jr. (2001), "the immediate goal is quality, cost-effective, college-preparatory education accomplished in a way that gives parents more time for imparting the faith and values they hold precious" (p. 24). The design of the University-Model® (UM) schools focused on three areas: a) maximize parental involvement and mentorship opportunities (character development program), b) offer extracurricular opportunities for students (student activities program), and c) provide strong academic environments, with college-simulated scheduling of courses (academic program). This triad is overseen and supported by an administrative team (program support). In practice, UM is a combination of private school (on T/Th or M/W/F, depending on grade level) and satellite school (or homeschool on the days not attending school). In 1993, UM launched its first campus in Arlington, Texas and since then has

experienced tremendous growth throughout the United States (Map and Directory of Schools, 2021).

## Statement of the Problem

School choice discussion has been on the rise since Friedman's proposal of school vouchers in 1955, and the debate on effective schooling led to extensive research and policy development (Forman, Jr., 2005; Lubienski et al., 2008; O'Brien & Pianta, 2010). The latest model of schooling, the University-Model®, continues to expand and provide parents, students, and educators an alternative to traditional academic settings. Despite the experienced growth over the last two and a half decades, the issues surrounding the choice of this model remain under researched. School choice has been studied through different lenses, from parents' right to decide on children's education to the deepening of racial and socioeconomic inequality (Butler, Carr, Toma, & Zimmer, 2013; Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008; Prichard & Swezey, 2016; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Parents' perspectives are very broad ranging from immediate desire for best student outcomes to long-term effects provided by various school models, or from the social and emotional engagement of their children to the flexibility some models bring to the family. The University-Model® schooling appears to offer these additional features that could play a role in the school choice decisions. Particularly, research is lacking to show whether the University-Model® schools are successful in providing a flexible, yet rigorous academic experience for those involved (i.e., students, parents, teachers). Furthermore, research is lacking in examining parents' personal experiences of what the model provides to their children and themselves, as well as understanding the reasons that led parents to making this school choice.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the reasons that led seven elementary school parents' decision in selecting a University-Model® (UM) school for their children. Building on the work of Herbert Simon (1955) and his development of the satisficing theory, the researcher identified the leading aspects the participating UM parents considered when choosing a school for their children, the satisfaction with their selection, and their intention to continue their children's education in a UM setting.

## Research Questions

Three research questions were addressed in the study:

1. Why did parents choose a University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children?
2. To what extent are University-Model® school parents satisfied or dissatisfied with the academic and social experiences of their children and themselves as co-instructors?
3. What are the parents' intentions to continue with a University-Model® school as their school of choice or change to another school type?

## Method

A phenomenological approach was utilized to examine parents' lived experiences and satisfaction in selecting a University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children. Through purposeful sampling, seven parents were interviewed from Team Academy (pseudonym). Data collected through interviews was analyzed to understand commonalities of parents' decisions as they prioritized and searched for the desired school model that would enhance the academic and social experience of their children. The study was designed to primarily examine the perspectives of parents with students enrolled in grades 3rd through 6th because students in those grades remain dependent upon adult guidance. However, participants were asked to share their

experiences with the UM school as a family unit using prior experiences with younger and/or older children they also have enrolled in the UM school.

## Theoretical Framework

The satisficing theory (Simon, 1955) is applicable to this current study as UM families are satisfied with and find the UM school model to suffice their needs. Parents conducted personal research, considered school alternatives, and selected the UM school as the optimal solution. They have chosen to be committed to the school by having to pay for tuition as well as designating one parent to stay-at-home or work part-time to receive the title of "co-instructor," as he or she also facilitates the child's learning along with the assigned teacher. In addition to Simon's (1955) satisficing theory, Zimmerman's (1998) self-regulated learning theory supplemented the interpretations of findings in relation to parents' observations of students' behaviors during satellite days. I anticipated that students' display of self-regulation with study habits, structuring environments, managing time, among other skills were observed by parents.

## Role and Background of the Researcher

The "schooling" I experienced as a child included my entire family meeting at home for lunch every day at 12:30pm. School was over for the kids, mom was done with her part-time job (working at the private school we attended), and dad would come home from work for a family lunch gathering. In addition to doing my homework, my afternoons included soccer outside with my brothers or across the street in the dirt soccer field with a few of the neighborhood kids, sitting in the hammock with my sisters, or a walk downtown to my dad's store where I would often help him sell clothes or organize the shoe sections. Until we moved from Brazil to the United States in December of 1998.

When my oldest son was approaching kindergarten, I began to question my entire academic trajectory, as I reflected on my experiences in two very different environments. First, why were my credits ahead when I moved to the U.S. from a third world country? I skipped a year and a half of schooling based on the credits I arrived with in the United States. Second, how much time is not used properly in American schools if students have to spend almost eight hours at school? I had lunch with my family every single day and enjoyed the afternoons playing, like a child should, and I was still able to do my homework and perform well in school. Knowing my own school experience and as a parent being confronted with making a decision for my child, I began to gather more information about ways to maximize learning and engagement in schools. I finally decided to explore options that best fit the values and philosophy that my husband and I held and desired for our children's educational experience; so, as a parent, I decided to read more about school choice in the United States.

As a professional, I was a public high school teacher during the first five years of my oldest son's life. The summer before Levi started kindergarten, I quit my teaching job and gave birth to our second child, Titus. Levi started his academic journey at a charter school because I wanted something more than I had encountered in traditional U.S. public schools, as a student and as a public school teacher.

More specifically, when I left Brazil in December of 1998, I had just completed fourth grade. Because of the different school year schedule in the United States, December was in the middle of the academic year. After the counselors analyzed my transcript, they gave me a choice to join the second semester of fifth grade (because of my age) or sixth grade (because of my credits). I chose to jump ahead a year and a half of school. When visiting with a school counselor my sophomore year of high school, she discussed an opportunity to graduate one year early and

receive a $2,500 scholarship to a community college. Once again, I took up the offer to skip another year of school and graduated 14 days after my 17th birthday. Even at a young age, I recognized the expectation placed on me as a student was extremely low, as I skipped fifth grade, the first semester of sixth grade, as well as 12th grade altogether, which makes me think students are not challenged enough during elementary and secondary education.

My perspective of schools in the United States was not altered by my experiences as a teacher. During my teaching years, educators were often challenged to provide students multiple opportunities to turn in late assignments and re-take tests. Many parents blamed teachers for various issues and asked for extensions or modifications to help their child pass the class. Core teachers had to "teach to the test": a common expression used to exemplify how teachers have little freedom in the content they teach because of standardized tests and test developers' expectations.

With these being my personal academic encounters with the U.S. school system, I chose a charter school for my son that was expanding to my hometown, as I liked what I learned when I researched it and heard during a tour. The principal at my son's charter school was phenomenal. His vision was similar to mine, and I felt so confident in his ability to lead his teachers, staff, and students. That wonderful principal held up his end of the bargain, and Levi had a wonderful beginning to his academic career. However, certain aspects at the charter school started to conflict with my personal beliefs, and we began to search for our next step. For instance, during Levi's kindergarten year, I was asked to be on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) board. Because of that, I was highly involved with the charter school and aware of several decisions the administrative team (superintendent and the board for the charter school) were making. Many of the financial decisions were very alarming, and I questioned the state reporting

aspects and overall ethics of the decision makers that impacted the future of the school, educators, and students. Although I appreciated the academic structure at the charter school more than our traditional local public schools, I disliked the unethical decisions I encountered at this particular charter school.

Along with the concerning instances I became aware of at the charter school, I had also started to really miss being with Levi. A third son joined our family, and the three of us (Titus, Micah, and I) enjoyed our days together, while dad was at work and Levi at school. Most days, Levi would get in the car and ask, "so, what did you guys do today?" I began to notice he missed being with us too.

The school search for my sons was led by three reasons: 1) being disappointed with my personal public school experiences as a student and teacher, 2) disliking the leadership team's decisions at the charter school (the primary alternative to traditional public school), and 3) wanting more time with my children. Although there is no perfect school model, these areas became non-negotiables as I searched for alternatives.

This is when we found a local University-Model® school, where Levi started third grade. He attends school from 8am-3:15pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays and stays with us at home on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (satellite days). He receives assignments from his highly qualified teachers to complete on the days he is not at school, and I assume the role of co-instructor during the satellite days.

He gets to learn life-skills, like scrambling eggs, and assuming responsibilities like taking out the trash, feeding his dog, and making his bed. All without the rush of getting these things done before leaving for school every day. He is closer to his little brothers, who are five and seven years younger than him. He plays on the trampoline with them, builds LEGO with them,

and helps feed them. Not just on the weekends. When dad comes home for lunch during the week, Levi gets to enjoy that too. He gets to be a kid. He is also learning to be a responsible kid—one who understands what is required of him and how important his role is to the entire family. His self-regulation skills are strong, unlike some of the high school students I previously taught. He is only nine years old.

In her book *Unschooled*, McDonald (2019) wrote that, "Unschooling is simply living, and allowing your children to live, without the specter of conventional schooling and school-like thinking. It is the act of fusing living and learning, of seeing them as one and the same" (p. v). Although McDonald was speaking of solely the homeschooling approach, or unschooling, technically, I believe that the University-Model® also provides the "simply living" that she was referencing. It provides us with opportunities to build upon our child's interests, which always equates to full engagement and rich learning. We have zoo memberships, as the kids are interested in reptiles—and mom and dad are not budging on acquiring one. Levi watches soccer videos and practices the skills learned throughout the day. Titus loves building, so we have lots of LEGO and encourage his passion and creativity. Micah enjoys books and animals, and he has a shelf devoted to his animal books in the family library. Although Titus and Micah have not entered school age yet, we embrace everyone's interests and build upon each of them as a family on a daily basis, not just in the evenings or on the weekends.

I appreciated this piece in Holt's (2017) book, *How Children Learn*:

> What is lovely about children is that they can make such a production, such a big deal, out of everything, or nothing. From my office I see many families walking down Boylston Street with their little children. The adults plod along, the children twirl, leap, skip, run now to this side and now to that, look for things to step or jump over or walk

> along or around, climb on anything that can be climbed. I never want to be where I cannot see it. All that energy and foolishness, all that curiosity, questions, talk, all those fierce passions, inconsolable sorrows, immoderate joys, seem to many a nuisance to be endured, if not a disease to be cured. To me they are a national asset, a treasure beyond price, more necessary to our health and our very survival than any oil or uranium or—name what you will…. Gears, twigs, leaves, little children love the world. That is why they are so good at learning about it. For it is love, not tricks and techniques of thought, that lies at the heart of all true learning. Can we bring ourselves to let children learn and grow through that love? (p. 288)

For our family, a University-Model® school has been the perfect balance of structure and freedom. Of added time and priceless memories. Of increased self-regulation opportunities for our sons. Of bringing to our home the best academic experience possible, as I, the co-instructor, have agreed to partner with highly-qualified educators in teaching my son the knowledge and skills my husband and I value, with what Levi chooses to devote his extra time to—an extension of free play, creative outlets, and self-directed learning.

## Relevance and Significance of the Study

This study extended the literature on the well-established but under researched University-Model®. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, districts were forced to quickly improvise on ways to complete the school year from March until May or early June using modalities they have never experienced before. Although managing to complete the school year, the spread of the virus continued throughout the summer of 2020, leading many administrators and policy makers to question the best solution to respond to continuous outbreaks. As districts explored options to proceed in the following academic school year, hybrid schools were a

popular discussion. Hybrid schools align closely with the University-Model® school. However, hybrid schools cannot be mistaken as University-Model® schools, as they do not abide by equivalent certification and accreditation standards.

In June of 2020, Denisa Superville published an article in *Education Week* where various hybrid options were proposed: 1) In-person attendance for students with specialized needs (special education, English-learners, low-income, homeless/foster care students) and full-time remote learning for all other students; 2) Core subjects only for in-person sessions (math, English, science, history) and electives taken online; 3) Elementary school in-person, Middle and High School remote; 4) Split schedule AM/PM and electives held online or on Saturdays in person. Despite the route districts take in educating children during the pandemic, it is evident that it will not follow the traditional ways that the United States has handled school for years. Therefore, this study is not only contributing to the literature by exploring the UM community and the University-Model®, but it is also important for informing all other traditional models (public, private, hybrid, charter, and homeschool) on the advantages of UM teaching and learning strategies, as every single school and home have experienced the shock and transition forced upon them during the pandemic of 2020.

## Key Terms

**Homeschooling.** There are various ways that parents approach *homeschooling* as the education of their children within the walls of their homes. Some parents are extremely structured by providing school rooms and certain rules. Others allow their children to stay in their pajamas and do schoolwork whenever they wish. Because of the variety of parenting styles—and teaching styles in this case, the notion of *homeschooling* is associated with the students essentially learning at home from a parent.

**Satellite Days.** These are the days students work at home. Parents are their child's academic facilitators and have access to the child's teacher for assignment clarifications when needed. There is no perfect design for these days. Some parents create schoolwork schedules for their children, while others allow for very flexible environments. Nevertheless, *satellite days* are school days at home.

**Traditional Schooling.** For the purposes of this study, the term *traditional schooling* will be utilized for full-time, five-days a week schools— including public, private, and charter schools.

**University-Model® (UM) School.** UM is a combination of part-time, in-person school days and part-time satellite days. The school was designed as a college preparatory K-12 education, where parents become facilitators in their child's education, alongside highly qualified teachers, the primary educators. Turner, Jr. (2001) defined UM as:

> Students take challenging, age-appropriate courses of study that are set in a *university-type scheduling of classes*—either on Monday-Wednesday-Friday or Tuesday-Thursday. Outside of class, the students work to develop *sound study habits* and the kind of *strong work ethic* they will need for success in college (p. 1).

Each campus is overseen by a school board, has an administrative team, and belongs to the National Association of University-Model® Schools, Inc. (NAUMS, Inc.) umbrella. Additionally, parents are not decision-makers of their child's curriculum. Academic decisions are made by UM professionals, and UM parents are merely facilitators on satellite days. UM should also not be confused with a co-op for homeschooling families.

**Unschooling.** Karl Wheatley (2009), an education professor at Cleveland State University, defined parents that *unschool* their children as those "who primarily or entirely let

them learn about whatever they are interested in and use little or no formal adult-chosen curricula" (p. 28). Essentially, these parents build on their children's interests and develop "lessons" around such interests. In other words, *unschooling* means children-led learning rather than adult-designed lessons.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Parents' rights for school choice have been on the rise since Friedman's proposal of school vouchers in 1955 (Forman, Jr., 2005). Consequently, enrollment numbers in various types of schools have shifted with more school models being introduced. In this chapter, I provide an overview of school choice research and the private versus public school debate, selected literature on child development with focus on students in grades 3rd-6th, and a thorough analysis of the University-Model®– including the vision, context, and components of the school model. I particularly focus on research on parents' involvement and the opportunity to play a significant role in the academic and social development of their children. Finally, I present the theoretical approach for this study.

## School Choice

There are various school sectors that parents may choose as their children's educational settings, although financial constraints may limit their choice as described in the following example. During an interview regarding homeschool, Sherfinski (2014) presented the case of a homeschooling mother who shared her inadequate knowledge in certain areas as well as how financial situation limited her abilities to provide the desired academic environment for her two sons. One of her struggles was the lack of Latin fluency considering she chose a Classical and Christian homeschooling method for educating her children. An aspect that differentiates Classical education from other curriculum is the emphasis placed on original educational practices, the use of Latin language being one of them. The interviewee shared her desire to purchase an advanced Latin curriculum for one of her sons, while the price tag of $500 was her entire curriculum budget for the year for both of her boys. Therefore, the lessons proceeded,

regardless of the lack of expertise in the language, and likely limited benefit for the children. This suggests that financial constraints may limit the choices parents can make for children's education. Additionally, it suggests there may be limited academic experiences for students that are solely homeschooled, despite parental efforts and desires.

Although well-intended, this mother's scenario aligned with Tom Nichols' 2019 book, *The Death of Expertise*. Nichols (2019) questioned the transmission of knowledge in the modern society where vast information is available via the internet. Individuals can YouTube how to change tires as well as learn a foreign language. Wikipedia has become a "reliable source" despite the ability for any "expert" to alter the available information. In addition, various social media outlets have become platforms for individuals to share their expert advice of political views and provide their "professional" WebMD diagnosis. Although this may not apply to many homeschooling environments, the language barrier experienced in the particular mother's scenario created a limitation to making available to her children essential characteristic of the Classical curriculum. This restriction was one of the leading reasons considered by the individuals designing the University-Model® School. Parents would remain active participants in their children's education, as is desired by most homeschooling parents; however, parents would no longer experience the pressure of being the primary experts in all components of their child's academic development.

To support the families exploring alternative models of education, Hirsch (2015) founded the Core Knowledge Foundation to create guides for parents of children at different grade levels. In the introduction of his book, *What your Third Grader Needs to Know*, the author, a professor at University of Virginia, said:

> All children are different. Like the idea that skills are more important than knowledge, there is a warm, intuitive appeal to the idea that we should tailor schooling to allow every child to find what most excites and engages him and let those interests drive his "child-centered" education. But again, this ignores some fundamental facts about how we learn. (p. xxix)

As researcher of unconventional education, Hirsh countered the *unschooling* method of solely relying on "child-centered" education. He recognized there are developmental factors that need to be considered, one of which being that children lack the maturity to incorporate in instruction when emphasizing their interests.

When examining traditional public and private schools, Egalite and Wolf (2016) reviewed empirical research on school choice and found that nearly one fourth of public school parents relocated to a desired school district to ensure their children attend 'good schools.' Similarly, Snyder and Dillow (2015) found that 11% of families with financial capabilities exercise their freedom of school choice by sending their children to a private school when their zoned public school is dissatisfactory. In a study of private school choice, Kisida, Wolf, and Rhinesmith (2015) analyzed survey responses from 954 schools and found that the three leading characteristics parents shared that distinguished their choice of private school or the nearby public school were: religious education (54%), better learning environment (33%), students receiving more attention for their unique needs and the second being related to smaller class sizes (both reasons at 31%).

During a nine-month longitudinal study, Bell (2009) interviewed 48 parents before, during, and after they selected a school for their child in a Midwestern city. The researcher found that of the 48 parents, "33 conducted a [school] search and 15 did not" (p. 198). A majority of

the parents who did not conduct a school search prior to enrollment (9 of the 15) stated that "no other school offered what they wanted" (p. 198). For the 33 that did conduct a search, the leading reasons for choosing a school were: holistic reasons ("child's overall well-being", p. 199) (69%) and academic reasons (58%).

It is also important to consider the impact of school choice during catastrophic events. Lincove, Cowen, and Imbrogno (2018) analyzed Louisiana's educational system post-Katrina. In their words, "since the city reconstituted its school system after Hurricane Katrina, public schools have faced competition from charter and private schools, many of which accept vouchers to allow low-income students to attend" (p. 220).

## School Experiences During COVID-19

More recently, COVID-19 has tragically impacted students, parents, educators, as well as schools' enrollment. Kamenetz, Treviño, and Bakeman (2020) reported that:

> Orange County, Fla., has 8,000 missing students. The Miami-Dade County public schools have 16,000 fewer than last year. Los Angeles Unified – the nation's second largest school system—is down nearly 11,000. Charlotte-Mecklenburg in North Carolina has 5,000 missing. Utah, Virginia, and Washington are reporting declines statewide. (para #1)

In Texas, most schools are providing parents a choice for their students to attend school in-person or virtually. Although many parents consider the virtual option an inconvenience, several have no alternatives (for health-related reasons). Furthermore, numerous private school parents do not believe private education is as valuable virtually while continuing to pay, so they have switched to public schools or considered other options, like homeschooling for the year.

With these transitions, researchers have also started to discuss the effects of COVID-19 on student learning and development. For instance, during the first few months of the global

pandemic, Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) anticipated the impact of school closures due to COVID-19 to be academically detrimental to children. The authors utilized a 2015 study, in which Lavy (2015) compared various instructional times students receive in different countries, and how this would impact outcomes. Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) discussed that increased overall instructional time positively impacts test scores:

> One more hour per week over the school year in the main subjects increases test scores by around 6% of a standard deviation. In our case, the loss of perhaps 3-4 hours per week teaching in maths for 12 weeks may be similar in magnitude to the loss of an hour per week for 30 weeks. So, rather bizarrely and surely coincidentally, we end up with an estimated loss of around 6% of a standard deviation again. Leaving the close similarity aside, these studies possibly suggest a likely effect no greater than 10% of a standard deviation but definitely above zero. (para #4)

Further, Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) considered how differently families have conducted "school" during the pandemic. They discussed that homeschooling has been more of a consideration to some. They went on to note:

> While many parents around the world do successfully school their children at home, this seems unlikely to generalize over the whole population…consequently, this episode will lead to an increase in the inequality of human capital growth for the affected cohorts. (para #7)

Similarly, Kuhfeld, Soland, Tarasawa, Johnson, Ruzek, and Liu (2020) analyzed reports "on the effects that (a) summer vacation, (b) weather-related closures (e.g., Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans), and (c) out-of-school time due to absenteeism have on learning" (p. 549) to make projections on the impact of COVID-19. According to their study, the most affected content area

will be mathematics, and sixth and seventh grade students will have the largest learning gaps. On the contrary, the researchers found that "losing ground over the summer would not be universal, with the top third of students in reading making gains during a typical summer" (p. 560). Nevertheless, these are mere projections, as race, socioeconomic status, virtual or in-person attendance, quarantine times, along with many other factors will also influence student outcomes during this global pandemic and its uncertainties.

*The New York Times* published a special report on education in October 2020. Included in the report is the section on *Learning*, where students', teachers', and parents' voices about their experiences during the pandemic are presented (see Appendix A).

Overall, "COVID-19 has changed everything. We are seeing the challenges to learning all too clearly now…people across the educational spectrum [are] working to be creative problem solvers" (Tugend, 2020, p. L1). People everywhere are experiencing the academic impact of COVID-19. Grandparents have become tutors, parents have tried to juggle working and teaching, students have learned new technologies, and educators have made accommodations.

School districts' policies on re-opening campuses have varied. Some districts are requiring students to wear masks the entire time, others only ask students to wear them when they are in common areas. Schools have provided virtual learning options, while others transitioned to hybrid methods. Some schools check students' temperatures daily, others use a quarantine method after possible exposures. With these academic uncertainties, many parents have also started to explore alternating school options which suggests parents' interest in school choice may not always be the result of long-term beliefs but can also be stirred by current circumstances.

## Child Development and Academic Experiences

Nevertheless, adequate child development is an essential consideration when making school choice. Jean Piaget's research on children's cognitive development is leading the field. He began work by studying "biological influences on 'how we come to know'" (Huitt & Hummel, 2003, p. 1). Particularly, Piaget "noticed that young children's answers were qualitatively different than older children which suggested to him that the younger ones were not dumber…but, instead, answered the questions differently than their older peers because they thought differently" (Huitt & Hummel, 2003, p. 1). With this observation, he proposed four cognitive child development stages: 1. Sensorimotor stage (birth until about 2 years); 2. Preoperational stage (2 years until 6 or 7 years); 3. Concrete Operations stage (6 or 7 years until 11 or 12 years); 4. Formal Operations stage (11 or 12 years through adulthood). Kohnstamm (2017) wrote that academic psychologists had been exposed to Piaget's research since his early works; however, it was not until the 1960s that Piaget's findings began to be explored in the United States.

My current research focuses on the parents of students in the 3rd through 6th grades, which includes students in the concrete operations stage ranging between 8 years to 11 or 12 years old. As observed by Piaget, during this phase, individuals' thoughts are becoming more logical and opinions are beginning to be recognized, rather than considering every thought to be a fact (Ormrod, 2006). Further, tremendous development that allow students to understand various mathematics and scientific concepts, such as "conservation of liquid or pennies" and reversibility take place (Ormrod, 2006, p. 28). Additionally, Kohnstamm (2017) defined operational children as those "who need no help" (p. 115). These students are considered to have acquired enough knowledge during the earlier stage (preoperational stage), that they have

developed strong self-efficacy and self-regulation skills to manage by themselves the acquisition of knowledge.

Although students experience tremendous developmental growth during the concrete operations stage, they continue to lack the maturity to understand more abstract concepts. Ormrod (2006) stated that these individuals continue to "have trouble understanding abstract ideas and struggle with problems involving multiple hypotheses or variables" (p. 29). These competences are developed in the final cognitive child development stage, which is formal operational thought.

In a recent study, Simons, Metzger, and Sonnenschein (2020) researched elementary aged children in grades 1st-6th and their perceptions of "paying attention, ignoring distractions, persisting on tasks, organizing, and planning" (p. 38) in a classroom setting. The researchers found that more 5th and 6th graders reported "trying to increase motivation" (p. 37) than their younger counterparts. Further, a higher number of 3rd and 4th graders discussed maintaining their desks and folders organized than 1st and 2nd graders. Finally, more 5th and 6th graders showed awareness of the importance of goal setting and executing sequenced actions than the other grade levels. These findings further suggest the developmental variations between age groups, as self-regulation skills varied per grade levels and must be consistently taught and established throughout the elementary years.

**The Importance of Self-Regulation Skills**

In his 2008 manual *More than a Job! Helping your Teenagers Find Success and Satisfaction in their Future Careers*, Lapan (2008), a professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, discussed the vital roles of parents in guiding their children through the process of selecting a career. He designed five steps to assist parents in the process: Targets,

Examples, Assessments, Mutual Actions, Plan for Success! (TEAMS). In the first step (Targets), Lapan suggested that parents should "help the teenagers become proactive, resilient, and adaptive adults" (p. 15). He defined this primary phase as follows:

> First, it is an advantage if your children can size up situations and chart independent course of action (be proactive). Second, young adults who can bounce back from adversity will be better prepared for the challenges that they will inevitably face (be resilient). Third, women and men who develop career plans based on significant exploratory behaviors will better understand themselves and be more likely to find valued goals and a direction to which they can enthusiastically commit themselves (be adaptive; Blustein, 2006; Lapan, Aoyagi, & Kayson, 2007) (p. 15).

Although Lapan's (2008) research area was primarily centered around parental influences on teenagers' college and career exploration, the information provided to parents also supports Zimmerman's (1998) research of self-regulation skills. Zimmerman, an education professor and researcher at The City University of New York, proposed the self-regulated learning (SRL) theory and, for decades, has researched individuals' behaviors in learning environments. Throughout his career, he has collaborated with various researchers, including social cognitive psychologist Albert Bandura, psychology professor Darshanand Ramdass, and educational psychologist Dale H. Schunk.

In his article, Zimmerman (1986) stated that "self-regulated learning theorists view students as metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process" (p. 308). He further explained these areas:

> Metacognitively, self-regulated learners are persons who plan, organize, self-instruct, self-monitor, and self-evaluate at various stages during the learning process.

> Motivationally, self-regulated learners perceive themselves as competent, self-efficacious, and autonomous. Behaviorally, self-regulated learners select, structure, and create environments that optimize learning. (p. 308)

Essentially, self-regulation is one's ability to "self-generate thoughts, feelings, and actions for attaining academic goals" (Zimmerman, 1998, p. 73). In the same article, the author listed the following areas of self-regulation skills as the most studied: a) goal setting, b) task strategies, c) imagery, d) self-instruction, e) time management, f) self-monitoring, g) self-evaluation, h) self-consequences, i) environmental structuring, and j) help seeking.

Later, Zimmerman (2002) wrote that "self-regulation is not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills" (p. 65). In her book, *The Year of Learning Dangerously*, Cummings (2012) described that she "never actually learned how to learn—which is, after all, the ultimate goal of primary education" (p. 8). She continued with the connection into adulthood that, "an adult is rarely confronted with a pop quiz on Ponce de León, but every time an adult faces a new challenge, he either put his shoulder into it or he runs away" (p. 8).

Similarly, when students are taught organizational tactics, such as creating to-do lists, roadmaps, and outlines to gather information prior to writing a paper, as well as the various benefits of finding a quiet place to study, they are better equipped to reach academic success. In a study of students' emotional and behavioral self-regulation and academic achievement, Edossa, Schroeders, Weinert, and Artelt (2018) found that the development of self-regulation skills in children between the ages of 5 and 11 are considerably beneficial to students' academic success. Similarly, Blair (2002) found that school readiness starts as early as the infant and toddler years; that a home environment as well as preschool education "designed to reduce stress and foster

emotional competence" (p. 119) help with the initial self-regulation students need for academic success.

Studies have also suggested that elementary school students can benefit from self-regulation training activities in the classroom and at home (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011) and through independent work (Ormrod, 2006). In addition, Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) found that middle and high school students benefited from being shown how to manage time, control emotions, and monitor motivations during homework completions. Among other benefits, these self-regulation skills have an effect that helps students' transition to college and career. Despite these findings, teachers continue to under equip students with adequate self-regulation skills (Zimmerman, 2002).

**College Transition Challenges**

The transition to college can be a challenging time for young people for various reasons. Studies show that a primary reason is the lack of academic and emotional preparations students have upon beginning their college trajectory (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2010; Kennedy, 2013; Kenny, 1987). In a national study comparing the 1972 and 1992 high school cohorts, Bound et al. (2010) found that college completion rates declined over the two decades from 50.5% to 45.9%. A potential explanation for this decline "is a compositional shift in the preparation of students attending college" (p. 130). When comparing the type of college attended in relation to the degree completion, the authors also found that students who enroll at two-year higher education institutions and non-top 50 public universities tend to have lower degree completion rates than those in private institutions.

When studying the impact of self-efficacy in first year college students, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) discovered that individuals who enter college confident of their academic

abilities tend to outperform those who hold lower confidence in their potential. The researchers also suggested that optimistic students adjust more easily and perform better academically than their counterparts. Although "self-efficacy plays a significant role in performance and expectations for performance" (p. 61), the authors stated that high school grade-point average (GPA) should also be considered when examining students' college transition, suggesting that prior academic performance impacts students' college performance as well.

In a study of 173 first-year college students at a prestigious university in the Northeast, Kenny (1987) examined the impact of parental attachment on college transition. The sample consisted of individuals coming from well-educated and affluent families. These individuals "reported moderate to low levels of stress at separation and described their parents as quite available to them, understanding, accepting, respectful of individual differences, and encouraging of independent strivings" (p. 26). Further, these students remained close to their parents when needing boosts to their self-confidence as well as a source of help. The students who had healthy relationships and found a sense of security with their parents were less anxious and held lower stress levels about the college transition. These results suggest that parents equipped their children with self-regulatory skills of emotional detachment regarding the college transition that instilled a sense of security and readiness.

In a more recent study, Villatte, Marcotte, and Potvin (2017) examined the depression reporting among first-year college student with a sample of 389 first-year college students (231 females and 158 males). The researchers identified several factors leading to depressive symptoms:

> 1) the absence of personal goals, 2) a high level of anxiety and 3) of dysfunctional thoughts regarding success, 4) a lack of emotional adjustment to college, 5) being

> female, 6) receiving little warmth and encouragement of autonomy from one's mother and 7) from one's father, and 8) being attracted to members of the same or both sexes (p. 114).

The researchers reported that 59.6% of the students were "not depressed," while 27% had mild depressive symptoms, and 13.4% of them had scores high enough to be considered "depressed." Collectively, these findings propose that academic and emotional stability play essential roles in students' lives as they begin their college journey, and that parents as well as educators are pivotal pieces of preparing and supporting students for college success (Bound et al., 2010; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Kennedy, 2013; Kenny, 1987; Villatte, Marcotte, & Potvin, 2017).

## University-Model® Schools

### Vision and Context

Child development and academic experiences, such as enhancing self-regulatory skills and easing the college transition, have been on the forefront of many parents' decisions in providing an adequate education for their children. It is not surprising that a group of parents pursued the goal to create a school model that would target areas they strongly valued during homeschooling experiences, while equipping their children for college and adulthood. Consequently, in 1992, the University-Model® (UM) was introduced by a pilot school in Arlington, Texas. UM is a private school where students attend in-person part-time and also do schoolwork at home (Turner, Jr., 2001). With the primary intent of providing strong academic environments with college-simulated course schedules, the creators of the model believed it was the right blend for everyone involved: parents, students, and educators (Turner, Jr., 2001).

Parents receive the title of co-instructors and remain the primary influencers and mentors in their children's lives during their academic years and experiences.

On most UM campuses, Kindergarten through 6th grade students attend school on Tuesdays and Thursdays and receive assignments from the teachers to be completed at home on the other days. Secondary students, those in grades 7th through 12th, go to school on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and likewise, have assignments to complete at home on remaining days. Further, students in the 9th through 12th grades have opportunities to register for extra classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, resembling the college schedule they will soon encounter (Turner, Jr., 2001).

The developers' vision in creating this type of model was to increase parental influence and mentorship during school ages, to provide parents the opportunities to spend more time with children and engage in their academic experiences, and for students to have more opportunities to develop self-regulation skills in preparation for the demands of college (Turner, Jr., 2001). While flexibility and parental influence were pivotal characteristics in the development of the model, UM originators wanted to ensure students received an excellent education, while developing their academic and emotional stability and maturity in preparation for college. The UM school founders understood that only a partnership with qualified certified teachers is likely to maintain the high academic standards.

Since the first Texas flagship school opened its doors in 1993, there have been 88 additional campuses launched nationwide. Currently, there are 33 campuses in Texas, and 25 other states also have University-Model® schools. Moreover, there is one international campus in Asia. An association was established in 2005 to oversee and support the numerous campuses—National Association of University-Model® Schools (NAUMS, Inc.). According to

its website, the organization is “dedicated to the mission to build dynamic University-Model® school communities worldwide” (About UMSI, 2021).

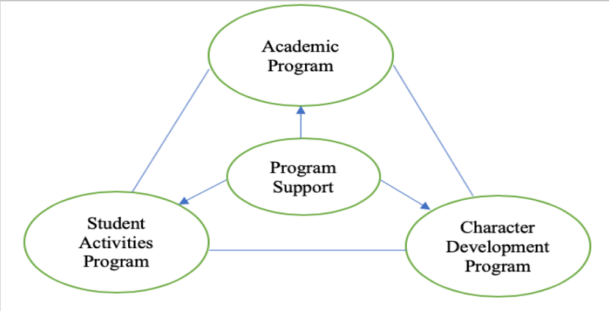
During a phone interview with Barbara Freeman, CEO of NAUMS, she shared that in 2017, NAUMS, Inc. included the doing business as (DBA) name of University-Model® Schools International (UMSI), as it continues the mission of supporting the various campuses worldwide (personal communication, August 27, 2020). Mrs. Freeman also mentioned NAUMS oversees and ensures that all University-Model® schools abide by certification standard requirements and accreditations, and thus put in place an accountability system across all campuses that utilize the model’s design.

**Components of University-Model® Schools**

Turner, Jr. (2001) discussed three main components of the model, which are illustrated in Figure 2.1: academic program, character development program, and student activities program. These components receive program support from the administrative team.

Figure 2.1

*Design of University-Model® Schools*




*Note*. From Turner, Jr., J. W. (2001). *Character driven college preparation: Parents & teachers in partnership through university-model schooling*. Ft. Worth, TX: GPA Ministries, Inc.

**Academic Program.** According to Turner, Jr. (2001), "the academic program oversees the entire system of courses, teaching personnel, and standards patterned in many ways after a typical university" (p. 28). The homeschooling parents that designed the model primarily wanted their children to be well-equipped academically for college, which was exemplified by the part-time in-person, part-time satellite school combination—similar to college schedules. UM classes are also offered by semester credit and provide students' advancement if content areas have been mastered. Further, coursework is designed to "gradually decrease parents' academic (direct teaching) responsibilities while increasing those of the student (dependent and independent study) as he or she progresses through the grade levels" (Turner, Jr., 2001, p. 30). Finally, teacher to student ratio also differentiates UM schools from some of the other traditional schools, with a "student/teacher ratio limits set at 16:1 for elementary grades, 18:1 for junior high, and 20:1 for senior high" (p. 31).

The University-Model® emphasizes the academic development of students by providing challenging classes with college-simulated schedules. According to NCES (2018), Texas public school students were required to attend school for a total of 7 hours a day, or 1,260 hours per year in 2018. While House Bill 2442 (TEA, 2017) changed that requirement in 2019 to provide districts some scheduling flexibilities, it remains robust at 420 minutes a day (35 hours per week) or 75,600 operational minutes per year. Meanwhile, the instructional time spent by students at the UM school is on average about 5 to 15 hours per week (About the University-Model®, 2021). The flexibility afforded to parents and students during satellite days provide opportunities to personalize instruction accordingly for each child. Additionally, the ability to utilize moments where students are highly engaged, take breaks as needed, and minimize distractions are factors that make satellite days successful for parents and students alike (McMullen, 2017).

UM is conducive to environments that are highly flexible, emphasize self-regulation skills, and resemble colleges, as students are encouraged to be more independent and disconnected from the classroom teacher on a daily basis (Turner, Jr., 2001). When comparing UM students' college readiness to traditional private school individuals based on Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) scores, Brobst (2013) found a strong correlation between the type of school attended and the students' academic college readiness in favor of University-Model® schools. While the researcher did not discuss assumptions for this correlation, as Kunzman (2019) found, a homeschooling environment provides parents the ability to educate children as desired and emphasize certain skills prioritized by the family, leading to students' independence and academic success.

Similarly, when analyzing the development of emotional and behavioral self-regulation in children, Edossa, Schroeders, Weinert, and Artelt (2018) found that "the development of self-regulation during childhood positively contributes to the academic achievement of children at the end of primary school to a considerable degree" (p. 199). With satellite days being a significant piece of a University-Model®, students establish and incorporate healthy study habits, time management, and self-monitoring self-regulatory skills daily.

**Character Development Program.** This component was heavily influenced by parents' desires to remain the primary individuals to influence their children's lives, even while they attended a different academic setting than homeschool. Turner, Jr. (2001) listed the following areas included in this component of the model (p. 32):

1) Keep parents confident, competent, encouraged, and involved with their children
2) Reinforce values that the parents are on record as teaching in the home

3) Enforce the behavior and discipline policies of the school from a character development point of view

For instance, parental influence in the academic lives of children, which falls under the character development program, has been researched for decades (Brown & Iyengar, 2008; Jeynes, 2007; Wang, Wildman, & Calhoun, 1996). In their study, Reynolds, Mavrogenes, Bezruczko, and Hagemann (1996) found that parental influence was of similar importance as students' cognitive readiness for academic work. When considering the impact of varying parenting styles on student achievement, Brown and Iyengar (2008) said that "children often need the influence of a particular parent when faced with challenges of academic achievement" (p. 31). Further, the authors discussed that students' independence and achievement are positively impacted when both parents agree about parenting and disciplining decisions (Brown & Iyengar, 2008).

McMullen (2017) conducted a multiple case study to examine the effects of the University-Model® schools' parental influence in children's lives and found that the schools heavily relied on a "unique partnership between parents and teachers, families and the school" (p. 62). In fact, the researcher stated that a University-Model® school cannot operate without partnership between these essential people (i.e., teachers and parents) and that this interaction is a requirement to the academic success of a UM student. The character development component of the model was prioritized in the design of the model to increase opportunities of more time spent between parent and child, even during their school years.

**Student Activities Program.** Students' academic performance is prioritized in UM schools, and students must meet satisfactory standards to participate in extracurricular activities.

The designers of the model believed that incorporating extra activities was a vital piece of providing a holistic school experience to students.

This area is essential to University-Model® schools as it provides a major variation from other private and charter schools as well as homeschools. The developers of the model desired for students to have a full school experience with various extracurricular opportunities. Most UM schools offer competitive sports, choir, music, theater, among other programs. The developers valued this component of school activities because it provides opportunities to "help develop students by accessing desires, interests, aptitudes, and motivations that they already have" (Turner, Jr., 2001, p. 36). Moreover, students are motivated to maintain satisfactory academic standings to participate in the activities they enjoy.

**Program Support.** Finally, these three areas of the model (academic program, character development program, and student activities program) are under the program support umbrella. Turner, Jr. (2001) defined program support functions as "administrative, business, and property management" (p. 27), specific of each campus.

**Self-Regulatory Skills and University-Model® Schools**

UM students have extensive opportunities to develop excellent self-regulatory skills throughout their academic trajectory, which can be summarized by all three components of the school model (Turner, Jr., 2001). As previously presented, suitable self-regulation skills complement students' academic success. Zimmerman's (1998) theory of self-regulation learning (SRL) informed a large portion of this study, as UM is favorable to parents in supporting their child's development of self-regulatory skills.

Zimmerman (2008) shared that "unlike measures of mental ability or academic performance skill, SRL refers to the self-directive processes and self-beliefs that enable learners

to transform their mental abilities into academic performance skill" (p. 166). Bong and Skaalvik (2003) discussed that children with positive self-beliefs display a higher level of cognitive, social, and emotional engagement in academic settings. In addition, students display their level of self-regulation skills during homework completions, self-monitoring of learning, and goal setting (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Zimmerman, 1998, 2002).

Through activities included in the character development program component, students are learning these skills and strategies from their parents daily, whether during home-based schoolwork or house chores. Through the student activities programs, students are challenged to develop various self-regulatory skills as well, as they have to self-monitor, manage their schedules, and set individual goals. Lastly, all self-regulatory skills are emphasized in academic program dynamic—at school and at home.

## Research on University-Model® Schools

The interest in University-Model® schools has expanded tremendously since the model's introduction in 1992. Despite the growth, limited research has been published to examine how this model differs from all other traditional models—public, private, and charter schools, as well as homeschools—currently, there has been one book, two journal articles, and four dissertations written on UM.

In 2001, a highly involved individual with UM schooling, Turner, Jr., published a book titled *Character Driven College Preparation: Parents & Teachers in Partnership Through University-Model Schooling*. In the book, Turner, Jr. (2001) provided a description of the core characteristics of the model, the various roles of parents and teachers, as well as his personal family story. Although his children are no longer in school, his contribution to UM continues as an employee of NAUMS, Inc.

Barker (2012) conducted dissertation research to study students' structural and psychological barriers and parent involvement in the middle and high school grade levels of University-Model® schools. He designed a quantitative study utilizing a survey, where 12 of the 16 invited University-Model® schools participated. Among other findings, was that parents greatly enjoyed being academically involved in their children's lives. In addition, according to survey responses, some of the primary benefits of this educational model included more family time, opportunities for parental involvement through the high school grades, college preparation for students, and increased time management skills of students.

The following year, Brobst (2013) published her dissertation, in which she analyzed academic indicators of college readiness of seniors enrolled in UM and traditional Christian schools. In her quantitative study, Brobst (2013) utilized SAT (writing and composite) and ACT (composite) scores from six Christian schools to measure indicators of graduates' college readiness. There were several factors found to be statistically significant predictors of students' scores; some of those factors included prior academic achievement, gender, and school type attended. Among the findings, the author reported that "UM students scored 32.081 points higher…than traditional, comprehensive Christian high school students on the SAT Composite, when controlling for gender and prior academic achievement" (p. 133). Brobst (2014) published a study based on her dissertation the following year in *The International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*.

With parent involvement being one of the leading components of University-Model® schools, McMullen (2017) conducted a multiple case study that investigated "how University-Model schools engage, involve, and partner with families in the instructional process" (p. 5). She selected two UM sites, and examined data collected through interviews, documents, and videos

analysis, as well as personal observations. The three primary themes developed through the study were that educators at University-Model® schools "establish the partnership, promote co-instruction, as well as communication" (p. 5), important findings to understand how school-parent partnerships works.

In 2017, an assistant professor at Georgia Gwinnett College conducted a survey of UM families in five states. Wearne (2017) administered the survey to ten schools and received responses from 386 parents. Demographically, the researcher reported his participants' characteristics as "married (95.7%), white (92.4%), have an undergraduate degree or higher (83.7%) …and an income above $100,000 (61.1%)" (p. 6). Further, most of these parents had experienced a traditional school model prior to joining a UM and primarily valued the flexibility the family gained through the switch in schools. Finally, 75.4% of the participants responded they were "very unlikely" to leave the school.

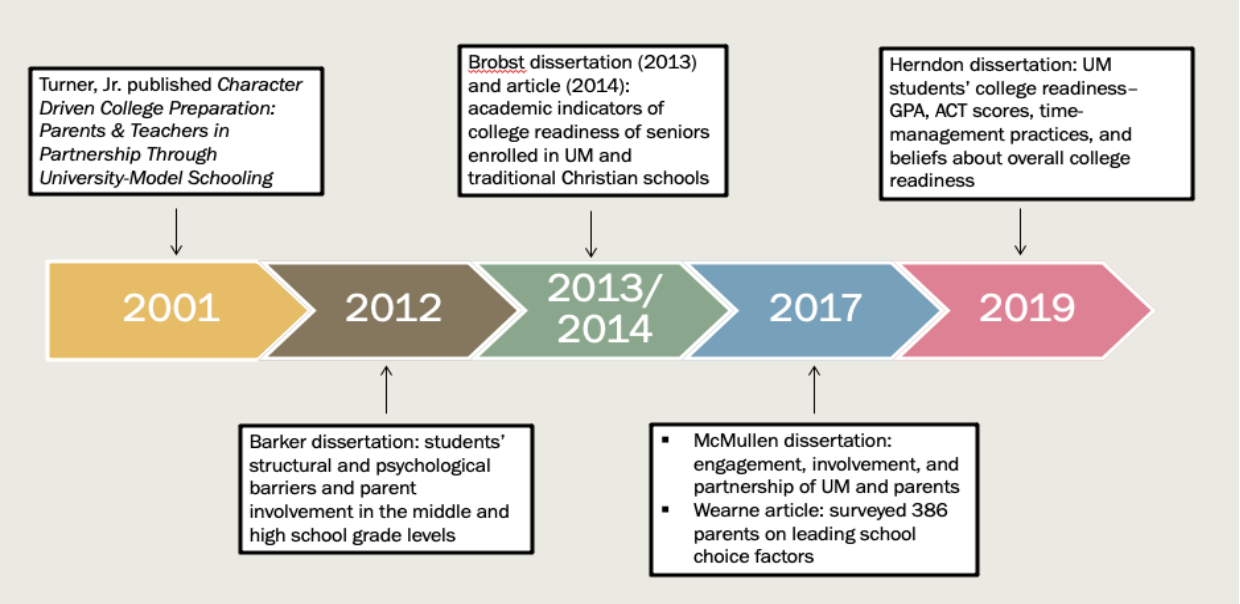
The final dissertation work was conducted by Herndon (2019). He chose to further Brobst's (2013) initial exploration of UM students' college readiness. In his study, data was collected from over 170 UM graduates in 15 different schools. He requested these individuals to self-report on the following variables: GPA, ACT scores, time-management practices, and beliefs about overall college readiness. Among his findings were that first-year college freshmen who graduated from a University-Model® school had significantly higher GPAs than students from traditional schools although ACT scores were identical. Additionally, Herndon (2019) reported that the results validated more than just academic factors as indicators of UM students' college success. Rather, the researcher credited the educational model that is a partnership between educators and parents, a combination of satellite days and traditional school, that

essentially, “is producing academically strong, well-prepared, and well-adjusted college freshmen” (p. iii).

In summary, there are very few studies on UM schools although the model has been embraced across the nation. Most of the research focused on UM students’ college readiness and how the model relies on a partnership between parents and educators. There is a clear gap in the literature, as shown in Figure 2.2, regarding how parents make decisions on enrolling their children in UM schools, reflecting on their own experiences and the experiences of their children while in the program, and on their level of satisfaction with the school choice. This makes the current study particularly important for both research and practice.

Figure 2.2

*Current University-Model® Literature*




## Theoretical Framework

Two theories framed this study, Simon’s (1955) satisficing theory and Zimmerman’s (1998) self-regulated learning theory. The satisficing theory primarily guided the study, while self-regulated theory provided helpful concepts to interpret study findings. In particular, at this

stage of my research, Zimmerman's theory appears to match my observations as a parent and researcher.

**Satisficing Theory**

In 1955, Herbert Simon introduced the term "satisficing" to describe individuals' moment of contentment with a choice when they are essentially ceasing their search for a certain desired outcome. Later, Caplin, Dean, and Martin (2011) defined the theory as "a process of item-by-item search, and the existence of a 'satisficing' level of utility attainment of which would induce the decision maker to curtail further search" (p. 2899). Although utilized mostly in economics to explain decision making processes (Caplin, Dean, & Martin, 2011; Simon, 1955), the theory has emerged into other fields as well.

Although Simon's (1955) theory was originally developed through an economical lens to evaluate stock purchases and various investment decisions (Mosley, 1976), researchers found the theory also applicable in other fields. For instance, Barge and Gehlbach (2012) utilized satisficing theory to assess the quality of survey data, Brooks (2006) studied electoral politics through a satisficing theoretical approach, and Agosto (2001) investigated young adults' online decisions about finding satisficing content.

In relation to this study, Prichard and Swezey (2016) applied the theory of satisficing to discuss school choice decisions where "participants search for a school and stop once a school meets their minimum requirements" (p. 17). In their study, the researchers interviewed "13 Christian parents with children who are, or have, attended public schools, Christian schools, or homeschools" (p. 10). Factors influencing participants' school choice selection included "their own school experiences, financial constraints, customary enrollment patterns, and socioeconomic

status" (p. 20). Participants also strongly considered their child's school preferences and social desires when choosing a school.

Simon (1955) discussed six terms that guided his theoretical approach, and, in his words, referred to "models of rational behavior" (p. 102):

1. A set of behavior alternatives (alternatives of choice or decision) …
2. The subset of behavior alternative that the organism "considers" or "perceives." That is, the organism may make its choice within a set of alternatives more limited than the whole range objectively available to it….
3. The possible future states of affairs, or outcomes of choice…
4. A "pay-off" function, representing the "value" or "utility" placed by the organism upon each of the possible outcomes of choice…
5. Information as to which outcomes in S will actually occur if a particular alternative is chosen…
6. Information as to the probability that a particular outcome will ensue if a particular behavior alternative is chosen… (p. 102)

**Self-Regulated Learning Theory**

While Simon's (1955) theory was the primary theoretical lens guiding this study because it applies to the process involving parents' search and future planning, as I gathered perspective from parents (and as a parent), I found that Zimmerman's (1998) self-regulated learning theory strongly aligned with the differences as learners between the UM students and traditional students. In a University-Model® school, students can develop self-regulatory skills during in-person days as well as satellite days, with opportunities for healthy academic behaviors to be

established in their natural environment, in addition to a classroom setting under the teacher's oversight.

**Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Brown (2004) shared that Simon's (1955) model describes how individuals cease their search once an option becomes sufficient in various ways, rather than seeking absolute perfection for their choice. In the case of the UM families, parents have established certain nonnegotiable standards and selected to be financially and personally invested in their children's schooling, which led them to conduct research on various types of private schools. They stopped their search when the nonnegotiable standards were met, even if better solutions could have been available. According to Hindle (2009), the term satisficing was introduced by Simon as "a combination of two words: 'satisfy' and 'suffice,'" (para # 1) which suggests the decision making consists in an optimal process of finding a solution that responds to most desired conditions and satisfies the search sufficiently.

More specifically, guided by Simon's (1955) six terms of rational behavior (as described in the section introducing his theory), I anticipate the following process steps are part of the UM parents' lived experiences, so I will structure the interview questions around these themes:

1. Parents have the ability to choose the school their child attends.
2. Parents must consider the available choices in alignment with their personal finances, child's needs, and work schedules.
3. Parents reflect on possible child outcomes.
4. The value of the choice can be considered in two ways: a) does the parent believe that the choice is financially valuable? b) what are the philosophical values of the desired academic outcome for their child?

5. Parents must contemplate if the UM is feasible for the child and themselves (e.g., does the child require special education services? Do parents understand the co-instructor role?).
6. Parents should consider if the child is compliant and if the organizational abilities of the parent are adequate.

In addition, I anticipate Zimmerman's (1998) self-regulation skills to be mentioned by parents of UM students because they acted as co-instructors in the school model and observed their children during in-person school and satellite days. As the literature suggests, UM students are better prepared for college, benefit from increased partnership with their parents, and are taught various skills that will help them beyond their K-12 schooling years. Further, these students have more flexible schedules that adjust to their needs and aids in learning time management skills, developing healthy study habits, and becoming self-motivated. Zimmerman's viewpoints are crucial in understanding whether parents of UM students value the extent of self-regulated learning related to their school choice or are primarily focused on the flexibility of the UM schooling that could be advantageous for the family.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided first an overview of school choice literature and particularly parents' expectations across the private and public school spectrums. Then I discussed child development research in the context of the current study, focusing on Piaget's four developmental stages for children and the concrete operations stage related to children in grades 3rd through 6th, the notion of self-regulated learning, and a discussion on college transition issues. I also brought these elements together by introducing literature on a new model of schooling, University-Model®, followed by the alternative this model provides to educators, parents, and

students. Additionally, I shared the importance of self-regulation skills for the school model, and how the University-Model® is designed to incorporate the development of these skills in students.

Finally, I shared the theoretical framework of this study, based on Simon's (1955) satisficing theory, that guided the manner in which I collected data to explore the essence of parents' choice and satisfaction levels with a University-Model® school and their intent to continue. The study is also guided by Zimmerman's (1998) theory of self-regulated learning and I expect to confirm my assumption that parents view the self-regulated learning promoted by the UM schools as crucial to their children's development and college preparation.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODS

This is a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach that reveals the school choice decision-making process, the parents' experiences with the UM, and the impact of these experiences on parents' satisfaction and future schooling plans for their children. A well-established University-Model® school in the North Texas area was the research site. The participants had their children enrolled in the elementary grade levels at the school, which include grades 3rd through 6th.

## Research Design

According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), "through close examination of individual experiences, phenomenological analysts seek to capture the meaning and common features, or essences, of an experience or event" (p. 1374). I chose a phenomenological approach for this study because I sought to capture the lived experiences of parents as they searched for the ideal school for their child. More specifically, I wanted to examine why parents chose a University-Model® school, since the model requires a significant time commitment from the parent as they become co-instructors during satellite days.

For phenomenological studies, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested various actions to appropriately explore the phenomenon. A phenomenological approach is suitable for this study because all the participants have encountered the same life experience (parents of UM students) and can share insights on the major steps that led their school choice and satisfaction with the model. Data collection took place via semi-structured interviews so that participants' family lived experiences (i.e., parents, students, siblings) could be extensively documented.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "the more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants" (p. 153). This observation led the selection of the participants, ensuring all participants had been engaged in a similar process with respect to selecting UM as their school of choice at some point during their child's academic career, but also acknowledging the process might have been experienced differently (e.g., some parents may have chosen traditional schooling prior to UM). These similarities and differences helped the researcher explore the phenomenon extensively.

## Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in this study:

**RQ 1:** Why did parents choose a University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children?

**RQ 2:** To what extent are University-Model® school parents satisfied or dissatisfied with the academic and social experiences of their children and themselves as co-instructors?

**RQ 3:** What are the parents' intentions to continue with a University-Model® school as their school of choice or change to another school type?

### Research Site

One University-Model® school was considered the research site for the study. By limiting the site to one school, organizational differences due to variations of campus procedures among schools were removed so the study was centered only on differences and similarities generated by parents' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the school received the pseudonym Team Academy.

The site selected has been in operation for over a decade and is located in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. It is a K-12 campus, with approximately 70 employees. With competitive sports and fine arts, the campus is well-equipped for offering the students many options for extracurricular activities. Primary (K-2$^{nd}$) and Elementary (3$^{rd}$-6$^{th}$) students attend school on Tuesdays and Thursdays and have satellite days on the other weekdays. Secondary (7$^{th}$-12$^{th}$) classes are offered on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and students also have options to attend other classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, along with completing their satellite days assignments. Furthermore, this research site was selected as a convenience for the researcher since my family is also associated with a University-Model® school.

**Research Sample**

Considering Piaget's child development stages, students are becoming academically independent by 3$^{rd}$ grade, as their reading and writing abilities as well as basic mathematical concepts of addition and subtraction have been mostly developed. These considerations guided the desired grade level of students and the selection of parents to participate in the study. Parents had children attending the selected UM campus in grades 3$^{rd}$ through 6$^{th}$, so that all students share similar schooling experiences in relation to the school itself, as well as developmentally.

A recruitment e-mail was sent to all parents of students enrolled in grades 3$^{rd}$ to 6$^{th}$ (Appendix B). Seven co-instructors (i.e., parents) were selected as study participants and were sent a consent to participate (Appendix C). Of the seven, three individuals have only experienced the University-Model® method of schooling. They joined the school when their child began their academic career as a Kindergartner and have remained committed to the model. The remaining four participants have experienced other traditional models of schooling throughout their child's academic journey prior to joining a University-Model® school, including public, private, charter,

and homeschool. Two of these participants were husband and wife and chose to be interviewed together. Because of the varying backgrounds of the participants, two sets of interview questions were designed to better reflect their interaction with the UM. One set was designed for the three parents that have been with a UM, and the second for the other four parents from various traditional backgrounds.

The sample was selected through purposeful sampling, which is defined as intentionality in the selection of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This strategy is beneficial to this study because the seven participants have experiences with selecting UM as their school as well as the partnerships between teachers and co-instructors (i.e., parents), and choose to return their children to the same school each year. Therefore, the purposeful sampling followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) suggestion for qualitative studies to "intentionally sample a group that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (p. 148). Table 3.1 introduces the participants.

Table 3.1

*Participants*

| Pseudonym | Sex | # of Children | Works Outside the Home | # of Years at UM | Previous Traditional School Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Michelle | F | 1 | No | 5 | No |
| Anne | F | 3 | Yes | 4 | No |
| Jill | F | 1 | Yes | 6 | No |
| Bob | M | 3+ | Yes | 4 | Public, private, charter |
| Sue | F | 3+ | Yes | 4 | Public, private, charter |
| Clayton | M | 3+ | Yes | 6 | Private |
| Jessica | F | 3+ | No | 1 | Homeschool |

**Data Collection and Storage**

A gatekeeper was identified at the research site, with whom I communicated for information needed about the school itself. The gatekeeper only provided information regarding the research site, not about the phenomenon being studied. Understanding the school dynamic, however, was an important piece of fully understanding the phenomenon being examined because it was informative of the context of schooling.

I requested assistance from the gatekeeper in providing a list of parents of students that met the grade requirement ($3^{rd}$-$6^{th}$ grade). I was provided a spreadsheet with student name, grade level, parent names, parent emails, date when student joined the school, number of siblings, and their grade levels. I emailed all the contacts received and compiled a list of participants to schedule interviews.

Moustakas (1994) suggested that researchers conducting phenomenological studies begin "with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere" (p. 114). Five of the six interviews were held via Zoom and allowed for a few minutes of rapport to be established between the interviewer and the participant. The sixth interview with Bob and Sue, the married couple, was conducted in person and rapport was also established prior to the interview. I disclosed a frame with the expectations for the conversation, the ethical considerations of the study, and how the collected data would be utilized in the future (Appendix D). These meetings were designed to be 45-minutes in length, with eight structured interview questions that align with the research questions (Appendices E and F). Along with the eight open-ended questions, a few of the questions had pre-designed follow-up questions while others allowed for unstructured follow-up questions. Prior to presenting the questions, the researcher read a pre-written frame for the interview. Further, the interviewer asked the

participant to provide a pseudonym to be utilized during the research process to ensure his or her privacy as best practice suggestions from Creswell and Poth (2018). Interviews were recorded utilizing my personal cell phone and were sent to a web-based transcription service. Once transcriptions were returned, I stored all collected data in a folder on my computer, which requires a password to access.

**Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations**

After receiving the transcribed interviews from the web-based transcription service, I verified the transcribed content with my recordings of the interviews to ensure the information was transcribed accurately, which is an essential step in data interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I reminded my interviewees that pseudonyms would be utilized during data analysis and all personal information would remain confidential. Ethical considerations were continuously at the forefront of the study. Building rapport with participants so they felt comfortable to share accurate and honest perceptions, disclosing recording information prior to initiating the recording, and sharing how collected data would be stored were some of the essential practices in this qualitative study.

**Trustworthiness**

A pivotal role of a researcher in a phenomenological study is to bracket him or herself. According to Moustakas (1994), "in phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection" (p. 47). This strategy is crucial when studying a phenomenon, as the researcher "sets aside, as far as is humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 314).

Kornbluh (2015) also suggested various strategies to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, including understanding the population being studied, conducting member checking, and comparing themes. My role in this phenomenological study was to extensively explore the phenomenon: school characteristics parents are searching for when looking at school alternatives, parents' satisfaction with their school choice, particularly a University-Model® school, and their intent to continue with the school throughout their child's academic trajectory. To accomplish this accordingly, my primary task was to thoroughly understand the parent participants' lived experiences. By building rapport with participants and introducing the direction of the study, I established a professional relationship that ensured the trustworthiness of the researcher, as I also discussed my personal biases and goal to remain neutral in my approach during the interviewing process. Further, by disclosing my intentional unbiased practices during the interview process, I seek to establish trustworthiness with the readers.

While interviewing, I also noted many participants reflecting on the interview questions outwardly. As emphasized by van Manen (2017), "the phenomenological term 'lived experience' does not refer to any kind of deep experience, fundamental event, or hidden source of meaning—on the contrary, lived experience is just the name for ordinary life experience as it carries us on in its lived everyday current" (p. 811). Some of the interview questions highlighted certain topics that some participants had not previously considered. However, many of the decisions (i.e., what parents desired from a school, various co-teacher duties, etc.) or the importance of self-regulation skills (i.e., students' great study habits being established, independence from the teacher, etc.) had been seen as everyday occurrences.

## Reflexivity

My positionality may come with biases, as I am a co-instructor at a local University-Model® school and have a son that is in the same age-group being studied. As the theoretical framework guiding this study suggested, my husband and I conducted our personal research when considering the most appropriate and "satisficing" educational experience for our son as well as ourselves—a school that supported our Christian beliefs and gave us more opportunities to remain the primary influencers in our children's lives, even though it also required a financial commitment and sacrifice on our part. Therefore, I may have biases related to my own experience with respect to the UM schooling, the decision-making process, the pros and cons relating to the model, and future plans. To overcome these biases, I ensured the interview questions were neutral in nature and my interviewing strategies were not leading the participants to respond in certain ways.

## Institution Review Board (IRB Approval)

A consent form was submitted to the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB) in September 2020. I worked alongside my dissertation committee to submit all required forms and obtain IRB approval (Appendix G). In addition, consent forms approved by the IRB were provided to the research site and individual participants prior to data collection. A secondary consent form was received from the research site, which cannot be attached as an appendix to protect the school's confidentiality.

# Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research design utilized to conduct this phenomenological study. I specified the site selection and described the research sample selected through purposeful sampling. My involvement as a co-instructor at a UM school facilitated the

participant recruitment, although it may contribute to biases that I had to overcome. I also shared information on data collection and storage, including interview planning and protocols, as well as data analysis strategies. In addition, I discussed the ethical and trustworthiness considerations, followed by my reflexivity statement as researcher, and I included the Institutional Review Board approval.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the reasons that influenced Elementary school parents' decision to select a University-Model® (UM) school for their children's education. In this chapter, I first describe how parents approached their participation in the study through a family unit lens and how they experienced a learning curve in understanding their roles in the University-Model® school. Then I present common themes established during the analysis of collected data, organized by research questions. The chapter ends with a summary of key findings.

## Participant Approach of Topic

The study was designed to primarily examine the perspectives of parents with students enrolled in grades 3rd through 6th as students in those grades remain more dependent upon adult guidance. However, participating parents were asked to share their experiences with the UM school as a family unit using prior experiences with younger and/or older children they also have enrolled in the UM school. This approach was expected and encouraged, as honesty and openness from the participants is recommended in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During interviews, parents of multiple children constantly reminded themselves to answer interview questions according to the one child that met the grade criteria for the study, but were also encouraged to speak of their past, current, and future experiences of all their children's academic trajectories in relation to the UM school. Parents with older children shared certain habits their kids have developed overtime, such as time management skills and academic independence, crediting maturity alongside the school model's design.

Parents of younger children, on the other hand, spoke of difficulties in differentiating between child development aspects, gender differences, and learning variations as they have been involved with the instruction during satellite days. Nevertheless, regardless of age, the uniqueness of each child as a learner was extensively recognized by these parents as they acknowledged certain learning disabilities or personality differences in their children and the role of such variances in addressing their schooling needs. A total of seven parents participated in the six interviews. One couple chose to be interviewed together and face-to-face. The others were interviewed via Zoom and participated individually. All interviews were around 45 minutes and individuals were asked to choose a pseudonym to be utilized throughout the study to protect their confidentiality. The participants are presented in the next sections grouped by their experience with UM schools only or other school types.

**University-Model® School Only**

Three parents had children who only attended a University-Model® school. Two of these mothers have one child in the school. The other mother has several children enrolled in the school. From a workforce perspective, one woman is a stay-at-home mother, and the other two work part-time and have flexible schedules to accommodate satellite day duties.

**Michelle.** Michelle's only child stayed home with her until he reached Kindergarten. Although her son's preference was to be homeschooled, she wanted him to have other authoritative figures in his life as well as socialize with peers. Michelle is a stay-at-home mother and loves the extra time she gets with her son. Her experiences were shared through the lens of co-teaching her one child.

**Anne.** Anne and her husband initially planned to homeschool their three children; however, they were both working parents. In order to adapt to the UM school, Anne leaves her

schedule open for her children on satellite days and works on the days her children go to school in-person. Anne's perspectives included having children in different grades, along with differentiating by gender and age in the learning process during satellite days.

**Jill.** With only one daughter, Jill wanted to have as much time as possible with her. This school model allowed for that quality time as well as for her to continue to manage the family's business while her daughter is at school. During satellite days, on the other hand, she is fully dedicated to co-teaching.

### Previous Experience with Traditional Schools

Four parents have experienced traditional school backgrounds for their children. All school types were represented in the participants' experiences: public, private, charter, and homeschool. These households also ranged from having one stay-at-home parent to both parents shuffling their work schedules to tend to their children's needs on satellite days. Bob and Sue were the couple interviewed together.

**Bob.** As a father of several children, he shared to love and value the uniqueness each child brings to the family dynamic. He also discussed the importance of male representation in schools. Being a competitive and driven person, Bob's comments showed that he exposes his children to environments where they are challenged to think creatively and allowed to pursue their interests. Their children have also attended public, private, and charter schools.

**Sue.** Sue was the valedictorian in her class and has always loved learning. She left her career in higher education to be more present in her children's lives. With several children, her input showed that she is intentional in cultivating environments for each child to flourish in his or her own way within their home. Currently, she works part-time on the days her youngest is at

school. Sue is Bob's wife, and they were interviewed together. In the study, I present most often their opinions, but occasionally, each one offered their separate perspectives.

**Clayton.** Clayton and his wife were public school alumni, but their children have only attended private schools. They both work full-time so they have to set up opposite work schedules to accommodate their children's needs. The kids previously attended a traditional private school. Their exploration of a change in schools began after his oldest child approached them about transitioning to a University-Model® school to gain more flexibility for various responsibilities. After allowing the switch and being pleased with the outcomes for their child, they decided to transfer more kids to the school. They also have a younger child that is not of school age yet.

**Jessica.** Jessica was homeschooled as a child and chose to homeschool her children as well to maintain simplicity in their schedules. She did, however, grow weary of being the bearer of the academic responsibilities with multiple children. In the UM, she was excited to find professionals to partner with as she remained involved in her children's academic lives. Her children ages range from elementary grades to having graduated from the UM school.

## Common Themes

When analyzing the data, I utilized coding procedures suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). The authors recommended "lean coding," a process that "begins with five or six categories…and expands as review and re-review of the database continue" (p. 190). I began my data analysis and organized information in T-charts, one side for parents having also "traditional" backgrounds and the other side for "UM only" backgrounds. I then created five categories as initial codes that correspond to the aims of my study and were targeted through my interview questions. The five categories that guided my interview protocol questions were 1)

Expectations, 2) School choice decision, 3) Satisfaction, 4) Self-regulatory skills, and 5) Long-term goals, and are described in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Framework of Data Collection*

| Initial Categories | Descriptions |
|---|---|
| Expectations | Parents' school expectations (school and child school experience) |
| School Choice Decision | Factors parents considered during the school search and UM choice |
| Satisfaction | Parents' level of satisfaction with the choice of UM school |
| Self-Regulatory Skills | Skills of planning, focusing on the task, controlling behaviors, etc. that parents witnessed developing in their children |
| Long-Term Goals | Parents' aspirations for children's academic and/or life trajectories (that may affect intentions to continue with UM school) |

After coding collected data according to these five established areas, I identified 33 sub-categories of information that were grouped in eleven common themes. Although participants' backgrounds varied, parents' perceptions of aspects taken into account when choosing a school for their children, their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the model, and their future academic intentions for their children allowed the researcher to identify these eleven common themes associated to the three research questions (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

*Common Themes*

| RQ1: Why did parents choose a University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children? | RQ2: To what extent are University-Model® school parents satisfied or dissatisfied with the academic and social experiences of their students and themselves as co-instructors? | RQ3: What are the intentions to continue with a University-Model® school as their school of choice? |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Faith-based | 1. Partnerships | 1. Planning to continue |
| 2. Small class sizes | 2. Academic rigor | 2. Personality differences |
| 3. More time with children | 3. Social environment | 3. Flexibility |
| 4. Investment | 4. Self-regulation skills | |

**RQ 1- Why did parents choose a University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children?**

Evidence of a strong school community was an important factor for parents as they searched for a school for their children. The family ability to afford the overall investment (i.e., financial and time investment) in this type of schooling was also a major consideration. These were the leading reasons invoked by UM parents to explain their school choice. Four common themes were further identified when analyzing the data: faith-based school, small class sizes, more time with children, and investment, as supporting participants' decisions.

**Faith-Based School**

Participants greatly desired a faith-based school environment for their children. During his K-12 years, Bob attended public schools, but his wife, Sue, attended a traditional private Christian school. Despite their mixed K-12 educational backgrounds, they agreed early in their parenting years they wanted their children to attend Christian schools. They shared that has been

a primary factor in their school search for all of their children, as they transitioned from one Christian traditional private school to the University-Model®, which is also faith-based.

Clayton and his wife attended public schools; however, their children have only attended Christian schools, as the wife was very much against any other alternative. When I asked him about her reasoning, Clayton shared:

> One of my kids wanted to go to a public school, but my wife was very much against it because he shared some stuff with her that happened in a class that his friends told him about. She's dead set against a public school setting. And we both attended public schools ourselves, but she will not allow our kids to. (Clayton)

While Michelle's child never attended preschool or any other daycare setting prior to kindergarten, she was attracted to the University-Model® primarily because of its faith-based environment as well as it being a combination of in-person and satellite days, with an appealing design of new concepts being presented at school and practiced at home.

Jill's daughter, on the other hand, attended a Christian private preschool setting prior to kindergarten. As the time for kindergarten registration approached, Jill shared she was uneasy about sending her daughter to a non-faith-based setting. Her decisive moment to search for an alternative to a public school came when she attended her child's final lunch at her Christian preschool.

> About the time I needed to register my child for kindergarten, I was at her Christian preschool, and the kids sang their little prayer, and I remember thinking, 'this is the last time she's ever going to sing a worship prayer at her school lunch table.' And at that moment, I decided I wasn't going to register her for kindergarten in a public school. (Jill)

Jessica and Anne were both homeschooled as children. They shared with the researcher that it was extremely important to find education environments where their children could learn certain faith-based content that aligned with personal beliefs they have also instilled in their children.

In general, every participant disclosed the desire to find a faith-based setting as a large influencer of their school search. Not only were parents seeking their children to be exposed to Christian curriculum, but they also wanted to be with "parents that shared similar beliefs" and, in turn, with children that were being raised similarly to theirs.

**Small Class Sizes**

As their children approached kindergarten, several of the participants had considered full-time homeschooling for various reasons. Anne, who was interested in homeschooling her children, expressed that, as parents, they are now content with choosing to send their children to a University-Model® school because it is "a small community" in which adequate spacing was however ensured for each age group. For instance, in many private schools, lower and upper grades share the campus, including common spaces, such as the gymnasium, cafeteria, and hallways. For them, the separation of the older from the younger students was important, as they struggled to imagine their little kindergartener towered by a teenager in the halls.

With an only child, Michelle shared that, although homeschool was a serious consideration for her, she really wanted her son to be part of a formal educational setting to interact with other authority figures (i.e., teachers, administrators, school nurse, etc.) and have opportunities to create friendships with other children his age. Despite her desire to have her son immersed in a school environment, she said that "a valuable thing for us [because of the design of a University-Model® school] is the one-on-one time we still get. It's excellent for him

because he is shy, so he doesn't ask a lot of questions [at school]. We'll go over things at home, and then he gets it!" She believes these moments are valuable especially during the elementary school years, when habits and foundational concepts are being established. The combination of her son learning from a teacher, having social interactions with peers twice a week, and being at home with her for satellite days for further instruction is altogether extremely beneficial for him and important for her.

Jill attended a private school until 8th grade and expressed how that shaped her attraction towards smaller educational settings. She added, however, that smaller size environments provide kids with "a small worldview, and a little bigger [setting] helps them feel a little more normalized in high school." Nevertheless, she continues to value smaller class sizes for her daughter's instruction because she expects more individualized services.

Participants with more than three children or those who may have experienced other school settings expressed their views about the smaller class sizes from a comparative perspective. Bob and Sue, whose child joined the school from a traditional academic setting, stated that "it is so much harder [there] and takes so much longer for the kids to develop relationships because they have so little time with each other specifically on a structured time and the classes are so small." Additionally, Clayton credited his son's request to switch from a traditional private school to the UM school to the fact that "he just got tired of being with the same kids for so many years." Bob, Sue, and Clayton recognized that smaller class size is a feature for all private schools. And, although these participants did not seek out a school primarily for the smaller size classrooms, they appreciated this characteristic of the University-Model® school.

Smaller class sizes and a small school were preferred by the participants. Whether it was a desire for a more sheltered atmosphere for their children or to have them exposed to fewer influences, parents considered this factor in their school search.

**More Time with Children**

The design of the University-Model® school during its early developing stages was centered around parents' desire to spend more time with their children, even during their school-aged years. In agreement to this foundational schooling concept, participants in the study shared how much they treasure the increased amount of time they have with their children, the opportunity to remain the primary influencing people of their lives, and the chance to contribute to their education. The combination of the part-time school setting supplemented by time at home during satellite days was described as "the perfect marriage."

After conducting the six interviews, I believe Jill's statement of wanting to "squeeze every drop out of life and out of motherhood that I possibly can" summarized participants' viewpoints. Jessica, for example, shared that when her oldest child reached kindergarten and she also had an infant, she decided to "keep life simple and not break up anyone's sleep schedule." That mentality led her to homeschool all of her children until the 5$^{th}$ grade. Then, she found the University-Model® school to "partner with" and has been so pleased with the conjunction. She also added that "fifth grade is very much self-done" and that her child could do all the work independently. While that is the case, she said that she "enjoys doing it with him. It's a time for the two of us right now, which we haven't ever had."

Michelle has always cherished her time at home with her only son and said that "the model is perfect for us—we can spend a lot of time together at home, so I can figure where his strengths and weaknesses are in regard to academic studies and learn together." Similarly, Anne

sought out that extra time with her children, and considered homeschooling; however, she found homeschooling to be challenging as her and her husband enjoy their work and want to pursue their careers. She said:

> This model gives me a couple of days where I can work, but it [also] gives us the involvement in our kids' education that we're looking for. It's a good marriage between both worlds—activities for the kids in a school-based environment, but we also have a lot of input with what we want to do at home. (Anne)

The continued insight in her children's lives, as well as in their academic trajectories, is extremely valuable and worth the many sacrifices she makes on satellite days, parenting, and co-teaching all her children. She refrains from doing laundry or taking work phone calls on satellite days to be fully devoted to instructing her kids. She further added that her husband also works from home, which gives them many family moments they would not otherwise have.

Bob and Sue's perspective varied from the other parents. Rather than focusing on how much time they gain with their child, they said they believe "a lot of time at school is wasted, whether it's recess or nap time or things she could get done at home. Some things at school are just fillers." They were not necessarily looking to gain more time with their child when opting for the model, but rather optimize the use of time for their child. Nevertheless, they highlighted to "like the additional time with her."

The issue of time was a strong area of parent engagement during the interviews. Parents perceived time in multiple ways—desiring to be with their children, having to make sacrifices to create time to include this collaborative schooling environment in their schedules, judging the time wasted at traditional school, using time to provide more individualized instruction for their child, or simply avoiding the chaos of getting everyone and everything ready for school on a

daily basis. Based on their specific lived experiences, parents who chose a University-Model® school have different perspectives on the relevance of the time management phenomenon.

**Investment**

During the interviews, the theme of investment concerned two aspects: money and time. Although more time with their children was highly desired and cherished by parents, it is evident that the role of co-teacher proved to be sometimes a burden that required continuous sacrifices and adaptation. Anne also confirmed that home days can be difficult, as there are other things she wishes she could do, "like work." However, she had to intentionally plan to help her children.

From a financial perspective, Anne shared that they "couldn't afford the tuition of other faith-based schools in the community. But this tuition ended up being about what we were paying in childcare costs from the early childhood years. We already had that in the budget." Likewise, Jill shared that the private education can be "cost prohibitive."

> But when I checked the University-Model® school, I was shocked at the price. It seemed like prorated private school—like I was paying for the two days a week that my kid is there. And it sounded kind of dreamy: I'd get the quality time I wanted, but also have my sanity two days a week without her. She would get the socialization. I really liked the idea of her having other teachers besides me. For me, it was the best of both worlds. And gosh, I've not regretted it one day since. We have been extremely happy and Lord willing, we'll be there through 12$^{th}$ grade. (Jill)

Furthermore, Jill has learned her child has learning differences (i.e., the child learns differently than others do), which can present a challenge. After testing and creating a plan to best serve her needs, the school integrated an extra day of instruction with the learning specialist

on a satellite day (Wednesday), included in the tuition. Based on her overall experience thus far, the investment has been well worth the price.

Although not specific to the actual model, Michelle shared that she has friends who attend other University-Model® schools in the area, and "when comparing notes, I'm always thankful for the one we attend, even though, it's a huge investment financially." This comment suggests possible differences in the quality of instructional delivery among University-Model® schools.

Bob and Sue's vantage point was centered around how families are involved and engaged if they chose this model. "We like knowing that each child in her class has a family that is significantly invested in their lives. We like to be around kids that have parents that are invested."

On the contrary, Clayton who is a businessman is always looking for the best investment. Because his wife has always had anti-public-school sentiments, their children have attended the traditional local Christian private school. After he was approached by one of his kids to switch schools, he began to explore the opportunity. "We started looking at it and realized we could send three kids to the University-Model® school for the price of sending two kids to the private school they were attending." Their kids have enjoyed the transition and the extra time at home, but when considering his 6th grader, he said that "when comparing apples to apples, if the traditional school was the same cost, he would probably be at a five-day a week school." As he described his family's full schedule, it became evident why he would lean towards a traditional school. He and his wife have alternating days at home and every week is a different schedule. It is a lot of work for them to include co-teaching for their 6th grader, as they have other children also pulling away to get their attention.

While participants analyzed the model through various lenses, it was evident that money and time were also a consideration to the family unit. Not only are parents financially investing in their child's education, but these parents are shuffling and prioritizing their entire lives to optimize the investment.

**RQ2- To what extent are University-Model® school parents satisfied or dissatisfied with the academic and social experiences of their students and themselves as co-instructors?**

When asked questions related to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the model, parents often included areas related to the actual school their child attends rather than the concepts of the model itself. Nonetheless, four themes were established: partnerships, academic rigor, social environment, and self-regulation skills.

**Partnerships**

Two aspects of partnership have been addressed by the study participants. First, they talked about the partnership between the teacher and parent that was essential to the University-Model® school. However, some participants referred to the partnership among parents as being an element that attracted them to the school. Partnership between the classroom teacher and the parent is important in a child's education in general.

**Teacher-parent partnership.** In a University-Model® school the teacher-parent partnership is a requirement as they are both responsible parties in educating the child. Although a cohesive teacher-parent partnership is essential in every UM school, this study only highlighted the partnerships established at the specific research site. Further, parents discussed differences in teacher communication styles and expectations between grade levels, emphasizing that parents experience a learning curve at the beginning of each new year as they partner with a new teaching team in charge with their child's grade level.

As a new school year begins and in all academic settings, students and teachers go through a transition period during which they learn about each other. In a University-Model® school, however, parents are also included in the transition process and they may represent a stability factor. In Anne's experience, the teachers' expectations have varied from year to year, but "they're all very patient," because they expect all to go through a transition. Jill stated that:

> The first month of school is a learning curve. It's rough at first because you've got a brand new teaching team who is now working with 25 or however many parents. I do not envy our teachers at all. I don't envy their job because all of us parents must be cut a little from the same cloth to want this model for our kids, but there's no two parents alike. And they've got to be a little bit flexible. (Jill)

However, parents expressed contradicting opinions related to communication. Clayton voiced his pleasant experience saying that his son "has been learning to do stuff on his own but has also learned that he can ask his teachers questions. The teachers are available, and their communication is very good." On the contrary, Michelle's experience has been slightly different:

> My non-academic issue is just a lack of communication skills from the teacher. For those of us who have been here since kindergarten or several years, we see a big difference in the teachers and that's always going to happen, but some years have been really smooth and others a little bumpy. Some years the workload has been a bit unmanageable, but it's something we've been able to push through and see as a challenge. But I think communication is such an important aspect of being a co-teacher that kind of makes or breaks how the year goes. (Michelle)

Moreover, several participants shared they considered homeschooling in the past, but they were overwhelmed by the pressure of choosing the appropriate curriculum for their child.

This pressure was relieved by their selection of a school that orchestrates those details for them by taking a partnership approach and yet is structured in a flexible manner. As Anne shared:

> One of the reasons we chose to do this model versus homeschool is curriculum development and selection. I don't have to do that. I get a checklist, and I don't have to think and worry about it. There's a paid professional looking over all the assessments, and I'm the co-teacher. I really appreciate the accountability that this model provides. It is nice to be able to make a phone call to discuss concerns with teachers and have a professional that can speak into the education of my child. (Anne)

Likewise, Michelle was distressed when considering various curriculum options prior to enrolling her child in the University-Model® school, but relieved that "the academic curriculum [at the school] is pretty consistent." Jill's perspective was similar:

> Although I wanted to homeschool, I was intimidated about a lot of aspects of that concept. There are homeschooling parents that run a tight ship and it's like their business. They're really admirable. And then there are the ones that are borderline unschooling their child. And I feel like that's such a disservice to the kid. Personally, I was overwhelmed with the responsibility of choosing curriculum. I didn't want to go to a convention and have 400 science choices. Choosing curriculum, lesson planning, and testing…(Jill)

Jessica "was just getting tired" after years of being a homeschool mom. "I needed something that would come along beside us to support the homeschool idea. It's been helpful to have the other teacher to kind of place the blame." Anne emphasized that:

> [This model] gives parents more insight into what exactly the kids are learning. If they read a book together in class over a three-week time period the parents are there reading

it along with them, whereas in traditional school settings they wouldn't necessarily do that. (Anne)

A collaborative environment between the professional educator, parent, and student is what makes the UM school different from a traditional school environment. This partnership is an essential part of a student's successful learning experience.

**Parent-parent partnership.** While partnership between the teacher and parent is vital to the function of a UM school, parents also rely on each other for support with co-teaching responsibilities. The interviews revel that parents created a collaborative environment amongst themselves as well. Participants said there are Facebook groups where they share ideas during satellite days and often make afterschool plans for social gatherings. Parents believed that this aspect of the school is very beneficial because "they are not alone in the process of co-teaching," and strongly valued these friendships.

Although most parents were satisfied with the various opportunities to collaborate with other parents, Sue was frustrated because she could not benefit from many of the parent gatherings, as they were typically conflicting with her work schedules. She shared that "they do it on the days the kids are in school, which are the days that I work." She did not discuss if this conflict had been shared with other parents, but she did mention that COVID-19 impacted most normal activities and collaborative gatherings among the parents, and she hoped things would soon resume. Regardless of such time conflicts, there was agreement that a supportive environment among parents is a desired initiative, in addition to the partnerships created with teachers and school personnel.

**Academic Rigor**

Although parents expect that focus on academics is the mission of all education settings, participants in this study made a specific point about the value they attached to academic rigor. Bob and Sue said they left a previous school because "it was a lot of filling out worksheets." They voiced the concerns of how COVID-19 has impacted education as a whole, so they are not evaluating this past year as an indicator of how the school will operate going forward; however, they are hopeful they will see more "project-based type of work, as opposed to filling in the blanks." In their opinion, students' creativity and critical thinking can be enhanced in a more academic challenging environment.

In addition to this academic pursuit, Bob and Sue have also been concerned with the quality of teachers' preparation they have generally encountered in the private schools attended previously by their kids, saying that "the pay is different [higher] in public schools, so it can be a challenge to staff private schools with quality teachers." However, they maintain their commitment to private schools as a preferred setting over public schools and believe their children are still receiving a rigorous academic experience.

Because of her experience with homeschool curriculum, Jessica has certain expectations about the content she wants her kids to learn, some of it beyond what is being taught at school. Sometimes, she supplements her children's lessons received from school to add the desired content; however, she said "I still blame the teacher for the assignments" if the kids complain about it. Nevertheless, she praised the rigor of the UM school and said that "once the kids get older, the transition to college is flawless—there is no transition." From her experiences with her older children, the only difference between University-Model® school and college is that they

have “more teachers and more people [in college]. But the level of academic requirement is the same.”

Jill claimed that if her daughter had been in a public school, “she would be a C student at best and failing certain classes. But because she is in a really rigorous school, she’s thriving!” She recalled her personal experiences as a high school teacher with “42 students per period for six periods. It wasn’t possible to educate appropriately.” She credited the smaller and more individualized instructional environment for her daughter’s positive academic outcomes thus far.

Growing up overseas, Anne’s personal academic experience in the United States was a negative one and made her determined her children did not encounter similar experiences:

> I grew up overseas. When we got back to the United States, I was the smartest person in my class. My teachers would kick me out of class or send me to the library because they didn’t have anything to teach me. I had already learned the content years before and the school in America didn’t have anything to add. That set up a whole cascade of weirdness because, not only did I have cultural issues, adding the academic ones on top of that was hard. I didn’t want my kids to be in an environment where they’re the smartest ones in their class their whole lives and then get to high school and they’re not ready for challenges. We are really happy with the school. It’s challenging the kids. (Anne)

She included her husband’s own experiences as a child about “others being very negative about his academic achievement but praising others for sports or artistic successes.” Collectively, they sought an environment that would “celebrate academic achievement” and where their kids would be “surrounded by people who will challenge them.”

Parents’ perspectives varied when they discussed the academic environment of the school. Nonetheless, study participants were soundly aware of their overall satisfaction

pertaining the school as well as the model, particularly in the areas of curriculum and instruction, students' academic achievement, and overall academic experiences.

**Social Environment**

Parents' perspectives varied tremendously with regard to the amount of time kids have at their disposal to interact socially in a University-Model® setting. Although Clayton's son was encountering the model for the first time, Clayton said that "he made friends as he walked in the door." Michelle's child, on the contrary, continues to ask to be homeschooled a few times per year. However, she shared that:

> Even though he wanted to stay home [when he started kindergarten] and had no problem being home full-time, I felt like he needed a social aspect of being in a classroom, having a teacher that wasn't me, having other kids around him, learning to cooperate, and interacting in a classroom setting. And the social aspect is excellent. (Michelle)

Jessica has introverted and extroverted children. Her experience as a homeschooling mother of different personalities led to her belief that the social interaction is good for introverts and extroverts alike.

> My social kids preferred homeschooling because they got to choose their friends. They could get together with the particular people they wanted to. Now going to school, they're stuck with the people there. My other less social kids love it at school because they wouldn't have sought out their friends. Being with people two or three days a week is a much better situation because they get that people fix, but it's not too much and it's less work for them. (Jessica)

Anne shared that some of her kids "feel behind all the time. The teachers have affirmed they're not, but I think the lack of daily feedback from peers can play a role in some of these things."

With multiple children, Bob and Sue believe each child's personality influences tremendously their attitude toward the social environment of the UM school. They said that "it is so much harder, and it takes so much longer for the kids to develop relationships because they have so little time with each other specifically on a structured time and their classes being so small." While Sue attended a traditional private school and experienced a smaller classroom environment herself, she said that the families from the University-Model® school are just different, and she liked that. When sharing her observation, she emphasized that parents also influence their children's social behaviors:

> I have seen that the families in this model are family centric. They are content constantly pulling their kids into themselves rather than pushing their kids to others. And when you have a child that really needs to socialize, it is a challenge. (Sue)

The family centric environment of each home adds to the school model, and this can be perceived through two lenses—negatively by impacting kids' social exposures or positively since parents remain the primary influencers in a child's life. Some participants believed that only having part-time interactions with their friends hindered their children's abilities to establish solid friendships. On the other hand, most participants valued the limited time their children spend with friends, as parents continue to have opportunities to influence their children's lives and did not see that their children struggled from not having enough time to socialize with their friends.

**Self-Regulation Skills**

Parents' perspectives of academic and work habits acquired by the University-Model® students was pivotal in this study. In general, the school model's design is based on more time spent at home for the child, which in turn, increases opportunities for children to create good habits in their homelife without attaching the practice of habits to the monitoring provided by a school authority. By having to learn and practice without a daily classroom teacher, students essentially develop self-regulation skills and become academically independent. Jessica said:

> There are opportunities for them to learn time management because they don't have a teacher with them every day of the week. They are becoming self-teachers. I think the model definitely teaches them how to think, learn, and be independent. (Jessica)

Participants expressed their beliefs that self-regulation skills also help students reach academic independence with respect to parents. Michelle emphasized that her son "does better when he is by himself" because otherwise, "he's automatically relying on me." She has been more intentional about transitioning him towards independence with his schoolwork and developing self-instruction as "he definitely wants more help than he really needs," as well as time management, saying that when "he sets certain goals for himself he tries harder." Michelle also expressed that "his independence didn't kick in soon enough" because she translated her role as co-instructor as being available to him as his teacher. Further, "[it is] just the two of us, one-on-one, it just kind of got lost on me for a while, and I was helping him more than I should."

Although a parent is always present, their attention is typically divided between various tasks. In Jill's words, "I like to multitask. But I constantly remind myself that this is my primary job." Parents of older children, like Bob and Sue, shared that they have witnessed their kids become "very independent and be extremely successful in this environment." Similarly, Clayton

said his oldest son often gets his work done immediately when he gets home from school on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday so he can have Tuesday and Thursday off altogether. His daughter, on the other hand, "doesn't even look at her assignments until the morning of satellite days," which are designated to schoolwork.

When considering the age group of students (grades 3rd-6th), parents' perspectives varied greatly. Anne, a mother of multiple younger children, shared that:

> My kids are still young, so it's hard for me to separate self-regulation skills and development. Also, I've got both genders and developmental abilities are different. We don't have a space big enough to separate the kids, and they are not independent enough to work on their own yet. I feel like an octopus some days! But I will also say that even with COVID, it has been no different in our house—the juggling is something we have always done. (Anne)

Clayton said that "satellite days are a lot of work" with his younger son and "it's just more difficult than a traditional school." In his opinion, the model "is really good getting into high school age where kids can begin to work and really need time management skills." Bob and Sue's experience has been frustrating with their 5th grader:

> She is our youngest child, and she's not as motivated. We have asked grandma to come and do math with her because we were getting frustrated. But other than that, we let her take the lead and do her own work and show us when she's done. Our goal is for our kids to be independent. But sometimes, it can be a really negative experience because all I know to do is let her take the lead and then come behind her and correct her all the time or lead her through corrections, which makes her feel like she can't ever meet mom's expectations. (Bob and Sue)

Anne also shared to struggle with "the kids being distracted by their toys," but said they are intentional about their space in order to reduce distractions. She also mentioned a slight concern about "having room for issues [academically] because half of the teaching is done by a non-professional."

On the other hand, Jessica and Jill were concerned with their children's inability and/or desire to ask for help when struggling with assignments. Jessica had not previously experienced this reservation since her children were homeschooled. Now, she is concerned that "none of my kids will ask a teacher for help and would rather get the question wrong than asking for help," regardless of their age. Jill believed that her daughter's learning differences have "gotten her self-conscious about having to ask for help." Nevertheless, both mothers explained that they practice the skill of 'asking for support' when their children are at home and hope to see progress in this area when the children are at school.

Despite the struggles, parents were adamant that their kids will benefit from being in an environment where good habits are practiced daily. One of the parents, a pediatric professional by trade, claimed that one "can most definitely see kids coming out of a University-Model® school or homeschool with better study skills and abilities, being more prepared for college, which is a more independent learning environment, because that's what they've been doing all along."

**RQ3- What are the intentions to continue with a University-Model® school as their school of choice?**

Three common themes support the third research question. The study findings show parents' intention to continue at UM schools, particularly because of a good personality fit and convenient flexibility of the program.

**Planning to Continue**

Parents' reference to "time being wasted at school" and "traditional school children coming home with 3 hours' worth of homework after being at school for 8 hours" revealed leading reasons for parents to continue their children's schooling at Team Academy. Anne questioned the efficiency of traditional school days and the amount of homework children bring home and claimed that "we need family time! And that's one of the things I love about this model."

Overall, parents are "happy with the school" and "really do love the University-Model®." Michelle said that, although they re-evaluate their decision to return to the school each year, they find that:

> We reap the benefits of this model, going forward and for his future as well. If we sent him to traditional school, I think he would present as a good student because he has all these good habits he developed being in a University-Model® school. But I feel in many ways that he wouldn't develop in the same way as he has this far in a traditional setting. (Michelle)

She added that she has overheard her son tell his friends who attend traditional schools that "he feels sorry for them." Recognizing that lack of maturity plays a role on such comments, Michelle still claimed to believe her son personally comprehends the flexibility of the model. Jill strongly emphasized her satisfaction with the model by saying that she "can't think of another school in the entire metroplex" she would choose over her current one.

> I don't have a plan B. This is it! I would be devastated if, for any reason, we ever had to change. I am really committed to the school, and I feel their commitment to us. Even with all the uncertainties of COVID, I really trusted the leadership in every single thing. I

know they're committed to praying everything through and they've gained my trust. I'm super happy. (Jill)

Jessica believes that the model is a "great preparer" and is even "more adamant about it in those upper years." Clayton shared his "wife wants our kids there and that's all there is to it." They considered various options but decided to "stay local for the school as the kids really like it." Personally, he stated "it is a very big balance and I've had to do some self-checking not to push my son off too much. Being more involved with him, but letting him do his stuff, but also being available." While Anne is a supporter of the model, she warned that "it certainly isn't for everyone."

A fundamental limitation of the model is parents are now responsible for making and meeting these education goals until the kids can be responsible enough. It certainly isn't for everyone because it's not always easy. I think that the number of kids they have in a University-Model® school and how close they are in age also is a consideration for whether certain families will be successful in the model. (Anne)

Aside from the participants that plan to continue with the model, Bob and Sue have considered switching back to a traditional setting. Their plans could be related to the fact this couple has experienced a traditional school setting in the past.

We want her to be in a Christian school. We could transfer her to another Christian school, but we are pursuing whether or not she's going to go to a different private school or a charter. But I think for her, because she doesn't have the play time with the other siblings, she may need the five-days a week. She's at home by herself three days a week, and her older siblings are at school. When they're home, she's at school. She has nobody

else. Our other kids are all together, whether they go to lunch or to the park, they go together. And we can't stand that she is alone. (Bob and Sue)

Participants emphasized that their plans were most dependent upon their view of the child's current needs, rather than the efficiency or inefficiency of the model itself. The number of siblings the 3rd-6th grader had at home was a consideration for parents, like Bob and Sue, who disliked that their older children have time with each other because they are on the same satellite day/in-person school schedule, while their youngest child was left without her siblings during her satellite days. Finally, participants mentioned that the workload for co-teachers is not light and should not be overlooked. According to the participants, enrollment in a University-Model® school required a commitment from the entire family.

**Personality Differences**

Despite having an only child, Michelle shared discussions she has with friends about their children's school struggles and said that she notices "they don't know their child as a student" and how their children operate "in an academic setting." She claimed this familiarity with their own children as students is "a huge advantage" of University-Model® parents who are more aware about children's personality differences.

Clayton observed that "one child gets it done right after being at school all day, the other does it when it is needed." Anne included that "kids respond differently to their parents than they do with teachers and other authority figures." And, when attending a University-Model® school, "if the parent/child relationship is strained or if there are discipline issues going on, there is still schoolwork to get done," posing some challenges to parents.

With a very large family, Bob and Sue raved on the beauty of the uniqueness of each child. Differences among children are not a concern for them:

> Something that I have really enjoyed in having a big family, is that each of our kid is so different. One is a major people pleaser, the other could care less. One is super motivated to get everything done, while another is not. Their personalities are all so different and I love it. (Bob and Sue)

Participants felt that the UM provides a unique, individualized experience for all parents and students—socially, academically, and relationally. Whether parenting one kid or several, parents acknowledged that children's personalities play a tremendous role in how families adjust to this school model.

**Flexibility**

The flexibility the model provides to the family was also identified as an asset by participants who felt that the flexibility plays a role in the decision to continue at a UM school. Jessica described her son's satellite days as follows:

> He wakes up around 10, and I allow him to choose what subjects he wants to begin with, then we go for a walk. Then we do another subject and have lunch. He usually finishes up with science and history, which are more fun and a little bit lighter than math and language arts. (Jessica)

Anne emphasized flexibility as "one of the things I like the most [about the model]." She added that she appreciates that her kids do not have homework in addition to the satellite work, "and as long as we get the assignments done, we're good. We can move at our own pace." Bob, Sue, Jill, and Michelle said that traveling is important to their family and something they try to incorporate in their schedules. With this model, they have the freedom to bring schoolwork along, and not be limited to certain holiday timeframes to get on the road. Although "sometimes it's not ideal in some settings, it's nice to have the freedom to try things out."

Family growth is another benefit because of the flexibility provided by the UM school. When asked why she chose to exclusively homeschool her kids previously, Jessica shared that when her oldest was going into kindergarten, a new baby had joined the family.

> And I started thinking about how loading everyone in the car and driving to school would really mess up my sleep schedule. Mostly, it was due to career and all of those things, but also just not complicating life. I was also homeschooled K-6$^{th}$ as well. So, it wasn't a complete shift into something brand new. We just thought it would be the best option for our kids. (Jessica)

While her son was still young, Michelle wanted to take advantages of the model's flexibility to provide him with various breaks throughout the day. She has "learned him well enough academically" to recognize when a break is the best option to enhance learning and maximize engagement. "We do breaks, but not longer than 10-minute breaks because then it takes another 10 minutes to really focus." This is another aspect of the model that emphasizes the difference between UM and traditional academic settings.

The flexibility in the family daily schedules allows for experiences that participants shared to be priceless. As a businessman, Clayton has taken advantage of the model's flexibility and exposed his son to investment opportunities, something he claimed he would not have been able to do had his son been in a traditional school.

> I have taken my son to buy rental properties and that gave me a lot of time in the car with him to talk about investment stuff. I gave him a check register and let him run a property. It gave him an inside look at the experience. (Clayton)

Jill compared her daughter's University-Model® experience to her stepson's traditional school environment. Even though her stepson is a few years older than her daughter, he is

learning some tasks in his traditional classroom environment that her daughter has already mastered because she is at home more.

> This model capitalizes on more teachable moments in all kinds of things. My stepson is in a Skills for Living class in the public school he attends and he's learning how to cook. One day he was learning how to make pigs in a blanket—which he already knows how to make because he has made those here before. My daughter, on the other hand, can operate a stove, machines, and help me in the yard. She's taking home-economics all day in this environment. (Jill)

While emphasizing certain flexibility aspects of the model as positive, Jill noted some disadvantages when discussing the required workload assigned to students on satellite days. Several of her friends homeschooling their children take zoo or park trips during the week, and she said that in order for those things to be incorporated into her daughter's schedule, they would "have to sacrifice a Saturday or Sunday" of free time to make up for it. In her opinion, this lack of flexibility is compensated by the "quality of education they are getting."

## Summary of Key Findings

The three research questions for this study were addressed through Chapter 4 findings. Eleven common themes were established through data analysis, and participants' perspectives of the phenomenon under examination were discussed.

The first research question addressed the reasons parents sought in an academic environment that led them to the University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children. Although some of the parents only had children in elementary grades to share about, several others had multiple children in various grade levels and talked openly about their experiences as

a family unit. A summary of key findings supporting the four common themes established to address the first research question indicates:

1. Faith-based school: Participants were strongly drawn to the Team Academy for its faith-based dynamic. This factor is related to the values, beliefs, and ethical standards that parents desired to instill in their children and they thought could be reinforced in a faith-based school setting.
2. Small class sizes: Parents appreciated that the campus offered small class sizes because students received more individualized services and still had social interactions with peers and teachers.
3. More time with children: The extended time with their children and opportunities to be involved in their lives academically was important to participants.
4. Investment: Parents recognized the financial commitment as a worthy investment although they acknowledged it included time constraints throughout their daily schedules.

Research question two was designed to analyze parents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the school model. It was difficult for parents to differentiate the model from the actual school their children attend when considering their experiences. For instance, a lot of the discussion about the partnerships theme was related to the teachers they have encountered during their time at Team Academy rather than aspects related to the model in general. Similarly, their views on academic rigor were about the school itself. On the contrary, the self-regulation skills aspect and observations of their children's development were discussed from the perspective of participation in a University-Model® school. A summary of findings supporting the four common themes established to address the second research question indicates:

1. Partnerships: Included in this theme were teacher-parent (i.e., strong collaboration between teacher and parent is essential in a UM) and parent-parent partnerships (i.e., parents build a supportive community amongst themselves) experienced in a University-Model® school setting.
2. Academic rigor: Parents were strongly drawn to the academic rigor of Team Academy. They also valued the Christian curriculum and opportunities to ensure their child's comprehension of content in a one-on-one, individualized setting.
3. Social environment: Participants were pleased with their children's socialization opportunities in a UM school setting, even though it is different from a traditional setting.
4. Self-regulation skills: Parents shared the belief that the University-Model® increases opportunities for students to develop lifelong habits.

The final research question focused on parents' future intentions. Because this model requires commitments of time and money from the parents, this was an essential part of the study to understand how parents perceived the model in the long-run, including the early years when the children require more support from parents, as well as the older grades when their academic independence is expected to grow. A summary of findings supporting the three common themes established to address the third research question is presented:

1. Planning to continue: Most parents planned to continue with a UM school for their children's academic journey. However, some parents shared that they might change back to a traditional school setting because their children struggle to make friends and feel alone on satellite days (with older siblings being on opposite satellite day schedule), and because the dedication required to co-teach an elementary-aged child sometimes felt overwhelming.

2. Personality differences: Parents of multiple children observed that personality plays a huge role in how the children approach satellite days.
3. Flexibility: Participants were grateful for the flexibility the model provided to have increased family time, even though satellite days had to be exclusively focused on schoolwork.

Overall, recruiting participants from two backgrounds (parents with traditional school background and parents that have only experienced the University-Model® with their children) increased the variations in the findings, although all parents experienced a similar school choice process when deciding on a school for their children. In the final chapter, I will discuss some of the findings of this study in relation to existing school choice research.

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION

School choice has been on the rise since Friedman's proposal of school vouchers in 1955 (Forman, Jr., 2005). Although the most researched K-12 education settings are the public, private, charter, and homeschool options, research on the University-Model® schools may as well inform parents, teachers, school administrators, and policy makers. The number of schools based on this model has grown significantly (About UMSI, 2021) which supports the urgency of the current study. Consequently, within the scope of this phenomenological study, I examined the reasons that led elementary school parents' decision in selecting a University-Model® school for their children.

In this chapter, I first provide a brief overview of the study. Then I discuss five final topics that derived from key study findings. Although research on parents' and children's experiences with the University-Model® is relatively limited, the following discussion integrates these five topics within existing literature on aspects leading parents' school choice, child development and academic experiences, and observation of children's self-regulatory skills. Finally, I provide some implications for policy and practice, discuss limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and significance of this study.

## Overview

In this phenomenological study, I examined parents' school choice decision-making process, experiences with the University-Model®, and how these experiences impacted parents' future schooling plans for their children. Through Simon's (1955) satisficing theory lens, parents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their school selection as well as their intent to continue sending their children to a UM school was explored. In addition, the participants

revealed that UM schools are successful in developing students' self-regulation skills (Zimmerman, 1998) and parents have recognized the importance of these skills along the academic careers and life course stages of their children when making school choice decisions.

Team Academy (pseudonym), a UM school in the North Texas area, was the selected research site. Seven parents of children in grades 3rd through 6th enrolled at Team Academy participated in the study. For five of the participants, data was gathered through individual Zoom interviews. Two of the participants, a husband and wife, chose to be interviewed together and in-person. After data collection, recordings were sent to an online transcription service. Verification of transcribed data took place, followed by organization of findings in initial categories derived from the interview questions. In chapter four, I presented eleven common themes that describe the range of issues relevant to parents' decisions during their school search for their children. In this chapter, I discuss and interpret the findings organized in five main topics: school community, overall investment, relationships, self-regulation skills, and intentions/planning. These topics are discussed in relation to existing literature on school choice and parental involvement in private schools and to a lesser extent on UM schools considering limited research in the area.

## School Community

The overall dynamic of the school and the characteristics of the school were strong considerations for UM parents when conducting their school search. Some of the aspects defining the UM school community that played a role in their decisions were related to child development, rigorous academic environments, and religious affiliations.

### Child Development Considerations

Holt's (1967) discussion of *unschooling* and the benefits of child-centered learning was primarily emphasizing that optimal learning takes place because parents can develop lessons that respond to their child's academic interests. Hirsh (2015) countered the approach by challenging that child developmental functions should also be considered for child's learning to be at its best. Piaget's extensive research on child development leading to the proposed four cognitive stages (Huitt & Hummel, 2003; Kohnstamm, 2017; Ormrod, 2006; Simons, Metzger, & Sonneschein, 2020) have aligned with the beliefs of study participants regarding the best schooling arrangement for their children. For example, study parents valued that UM is structured to separate younger children (in preoperational and concrete operations cognitive stages) from older individuals (in formal operations cognitive stage) during in-person attendance of school by alternating days.

Several parents also stated that creating opportunities at home for many teachable moments with their children was important. Simons, Metzger, and Sonnenschein's (2020) study of children in grades 1st-6th and their perceptions of "paying attention, ignoring distractions, persisting on tasks, organizing and planning" (p. 38) closely suggested similarities with what this study's participants sought in a school. By participating in a UM school, parents valued the one-on-one environment, which is flexible and tailored specifically to their children's current developmental stage.

### Rigorous Academics

In my study, several participants had considered the homeschooling method for their children. However, they have all been hesitant because of the weight of choosing the appropriate curriculum for their children. This is similar with Sherfinski's (2014) study on a homeschooling

mother who lacked fluency in Latin but still chose a Classical curriculum to educate her children. The UM school provides a good schooling compromise, as acknowledged by study participants who believed they have some control on curriculum and methods, but also have confidence that children are receiving rigorous academic instruction through the partnership with highly qualified teachers.

Literature suggests that one major consideration for parents when searching for a school is the overall level of student performance (Egalite & Wolf, 2016; Kisida, Wolf, & Rhinesmith, 2015; Linconve, Cowen, & Imbrogno, 2018). Although research shows variations in student performance between the public and private schools (Carbonaro, 2006; Horowitz & Spector, 2005; Lubienski, Lubienski, & Crane, 2008; O'Brien & Pianta, 2010) with public schools often outperforming private schools, the parents in this study believed that the University-Model® school provided rigorous and excellent academic experiences to their children in part because all students received comparable at-home and in-school instruction, and all parents shared the value for academic rigor. Parents appreciated the school's curriculum was rigorous and teachers were thorough during instruction at school as well as when sending assignments home to be completed during satellite days.

In addition to comparing the rigor of academic experiences by school type, researchers have also compared the "hidden curriculum" being taught in different school sectors. Bring, Contreras, and Mathews (2001) defined "hidden curriculum" as socializations and content that are not overtly taught yet are enforced by teachers through various instructional expectations. Moreover, Sikkink (2004) compared variations of "hidden curriculum" being emphasized in public schools, public schools of choice, religious private schools, and nonreligious private schools. He found that these hidden civic lessons are stronger in religious and nonreligious

private schools; however, his findings also "suggest that public schools of choice do better than neighborhood public schools" (p. 363). As Wixom and Keily (2018) noted, 47 out of 50 states in the United States are offering some open enrollment options in the public school sector, giving parents a choice of which school their child attends. Essentially, as suggested by Sikkink (2004), "public schools of choice are better able to foster collective identity and a functional community among parents, students, and administrators" (p. 363). Although Sikkink's (2004) report that private schools provide the strongest level of "hidden curriculum" taught, it is important to note the value parents attach to their right to choose a school and establish a connection with other parents and families with similar ideas about education. This attitude was revealed by the shared input from the interviewed UM parents who explained why the UM school was their school choice. Further, while not identified as "hidden curriculum," UM parents recognized several values instilled in the classroom and during chapel on campus, which incorporate the character development component that is a part of all University-Model® schools.

**Religious Affiliations**

During interviews, several parents discussed the family's involvement with church, although no specific interview question was about church attendance or any faith-related aspects. Since UM schools are faith-based, parents' recognition of the importance of religious affiliation was not surprising as shown in other studies about Christian schools (Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008; Prichard & Swezey, 2016).

Parents' desire for a Christian school community for their children aligned with Cohen-Zada and Sander's (2008) research on the association between family church attendance and the children attendance of a religious private school. Study parents shared that by enrolling their children in a Christian school, they believed their chances of being surrounded by other children

who shared similar values and beliefs was higher than if children attended a nonsectarian school. Similar to Prichard and Swezey's (2016) study findings, the interviewed parents also discussed the desire for their children to have social interactions with peers; however, by placing them in a Christian environment, they believed to be successful in filtering and limiting their children's exposure to negative influences.

Further, UM school parents strongly valued that their children were allowed and encouraged to pray, read the Bible, and discuss openly about their faith in school. Every parent appreciated the rigorous Christian curriculum, students' participation in weekly chapel, verse memorization challenges, and the overall faith-based community created by students, teachers, and parents of the UM school. Faith-based education was a must for every parent in my study, similar to Kisida, Wolf, and Rhinesmith's (2015) study who found that more than half of their participants desired a religious education for their children.

## Overall Investment

There is a fundamental difference between the UM school and traditional private schools. While the latter only require a financial investment from parents, the University-Model® schools also require the investment of time and desire to assume the role of co-instructors for their children.

### Financial Investment

Snyder and Dillow (2015) found that 11% of families with financial capabilities enrolled their children in a private school when their zoned public school was dissatisfactory. This view was shared especially by the male parents that participated in the current study, who were extremely cognizant of the financial investment that was required for attending a UM school. Focus on the financial investment was particularly visible for parents with large families and

more children, signifying a large yearly financial commitment to send their children to a private school. In their personal lives, both fathers in this study were investors and business owners and believed that a private school environment was a necessary investment for their children's well-being. Similarly, Cohen-Zada and Sander (2007) found that "religious households are substantially more inclined to send their children to religious schools" (p. 99), even when the financial investment was difficult to assume, suggesting parents have balanced financial aspects and commitment to a religious education for their children.

### Time Investment

In his introductory book of the University-Model® schooling, Turner, Jr. (2001) discussed nine roles that parents play when they enroll their children in a UM school: 1) Primary teacher, 2) Co-instructor, 3) Private tutor, 4) Guide for dependent study, 5) Guide for independent study, 6) Course monitor, 7) Project assistant, 8) Parent coach, and 9) The active supporter. Throughout the interviews, participating parents shared that these were all, in fact, daily roles they assumed during their experience with the UM school. Although this school model requires a large time commitment, interviewed UM parents have embraced their roles of co-teachers and thoroughly enjoyed being active participants in their children's academic lives as well as all other areas.

## Relationships

In a University-Model® school, relationships are the foundation of the model and their manifestation is different than in traditional schools. As stated by McMullen (2017), a University-Model® school cannot operate without partnerships between essential people whose interaction is a requirement to the academic success of UM students. There are many partnering

relationships that are expected in a UM school: teacher-parent, parent-parent, parent-student, student-teacher, and student-student.

**Teacher-Parent**

When conducting her multiple case study, McMullen (2017) found that educators at UM schools "establish the partnership, promote co-instruction, as well as communication" (p. 5) with parents. In addition to expecting this level of accountability on the teachers' side, the interviewed study parents wanted classroom teachers to keep them accountable and ensure the curriculum is followed at home during satellite days. While assuming their roles as co-instructors, parents view classroom teachers as the primary source of instruction. According to participants in this study, UM teachers are very communicative, organized, and engage parents in co-instruction. They respond to text messages promptly, email answer sheets to verify (or grade) assignments and have a google classroom platform where they post assignment sheets, handouts, and announcements. The UM parent-teacher partnership leads to a stronger relationship compared to traditional private school where researchers found collaboration with parents was generally unwelcomed (Benveniste, Carnoy, & Rothstein, 2002; Xu & Gulosino, 2006) because traditional private schools preferred to have parents' trust in appropriately educating their children.

**Parent-Parent**

Because of the hands-on role that UM school parents play in their children's academic experiences, interviewed parents shared to heavily rely on collaborations with other UM parents. In Henderson and Berla's (1994) words, "when they are treated as partners and given good information by people with whom they are comfortable, parents put into practice the strategies they already know are effective but have not had the confidence or experience yet to attempt" (p. 11), suggesting that a strong sense of community is an important element needed for parents'

self-efficacy in their role of co-teacher. This sentiment was shared by parents in the current study.

**Parent-Student**

Parental involvement in the academic lives of their children has been researched for decades (Brown & Iyengar, 2008; Jeynes, 2007; Wang, Wildman, & Calhoun, 1996). In traditional settings, parents are typically encouraged to be involved in equipping their children with critical thinking strategies, setting personal academic expectations, and helping students become independent learners (Brown & Iyengar, 2008). However, in addition to these involvements, University-Model® school parents exert a continuous daily influence in their children's academic lives.

A common thread during interviews was the value of one-on-one interactions with their children during schoolwork that is reminiscent of Turner, Jr.'s (2001) advice:

> Wise parents realize that in addition to being their children's first teachers, they are also the primary guides of the process that allows additional teachers to enter and influence their children's worlds. Parents who understand this and prioritize the children's needs over their own, dedicating personal time and energy for positive involvement in their children's education, will enjoy satisfying long-term dividends (p. 16).

Similarly, interviewed parents expressed this focus to be a priority during daily interactions with their children. Participants believed their roles and influence within their children's lives would have been tremendously different if their children attended a traditional school.

Blair's (2002) finding that school readiness starts with creating environments that emphasize stress reduction as well as emotional competence for children as early as the

preschool years aligns with the parent-student relationship expected by the University-Model® design, in which parents are more involved with their children as they develop academically and emotionally. Further, Ramdass and Zimmerman's (2011) discussion that students develop various skills, such as environment structure, time management, and study habits, in the classroom as well as at home, is also supported by the model's design to allow more time for students and parents together, and it was repeatedly acknowledged by parents in the current study.

### Student-Teacher

In UM schools, the dynamic between the student and teacher differs from a traditional school environment. Students are only physically with the teachers twice a week, which leads to a detachment and independence from the teacher. Because of this, students have ample opportunities to recognize their learning preferences and styles and become independent learners. For example, Zimmerman's (2002) self-regulatory skills of goal setting, task strategies, self-instruction, time management, self-monitoring, and environmental structuring are among some of the areas that students can learn about themselves and help them become independent from the teacher, particularly during satellite days. Although teachers remain available to students during satellite days as needed, students are encouraged to utilize various resources (i.e., classroom notes, textbooks, co-teacher, etc.), rather than simply relying on their teacher for help.

## Self-Regulatory Skills

Zimmerman (2002) found that few traditional school teachers utilize methods that aid students in developing skills towards independent learning. In the current study, I examined parents' observations of their children developing self-regulation skills. Further, the students' grade level ($3^{rd}$-$6^{th}$) could be a limiting factor in recognizing children's abilities and mastery of

certain skills. However, several of the study participants also had older children enrolled in the University-Model® school and pulled examples from observing the older children as well. The parents' reporting of self-regulatory skills included: independence from teacher, ease of college transition shockers, and time management.

**Independence from Teacher**

Elementary-aged children are not ready to be fully independent in their learning. However, there are many habits that UM parents incorporated during satellite days that strengthen that independence. Similar to Zimmerman's (2002) statement that "self-regulation is not a mental ability or an academic performance skill" (p. 65), UM school parents shared helping their children explore ways to enhance their academic experiences, especially without constant dependency on a teacher or co-teacher. Additionally, Edossa et al. (2018) found that the development of self-regulation skills is especially beneficial to children between the ages of 5 and 11 and reflect on their academic success. Similarly, interviewed parents expressed intention to help their children in becoming independent learners, as they recognized their children's potential and capabilities.

Interviewed participants believed that children's effort and persistence in completing difficult tasks were evident during satellite days. This belief is congruent with Henderson and Berla's (1994) observation that "at elementary school, children whose families reinforce good work and study habits at home, emphasize the value of education, and express high expectations, tend to do well" (p. 18). Along with these habits, values, and expectations, UM school parents are also providing environments where perseverance and resistance to complete difficult tasks without the constant presence of a teacher is encouraged.

### College Transition Shockers

Studies show that a primary reason that leads students to struggle in college is that they lack academic and emotional preparation prior to beginning college (Bound, Loveheim, & Turner, 2010; Kennedy, 2013; Kenny, 1987; Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008). While this study was targeted at parents of elementary aged children, their long-term focus on college readiness was evident in the interviews, because they expressed their beliefs that their children will forever benefit from the skills being developed from a young age through participating in the UM school. One of the current study findings was that parents foresee their children being well-equipped for college because they have been incorporating self-regulatory skills, like good study habits, time management, self-consequences, and goal setting skills in their practice for many years.

Further, Kunzman's (2019) findings that homeschooling environments provide parents the ability to educate children as desired and emphasize certain skills, leading to students' independence and academic success, are confirmed by UM parents who also believe their children will benefit from similar experiences. Although Brobst (2013, 2014) only considered students' SAT and ACT scores rather than GPA to relate attendance of UM school with students' college readiness, interviewed UM parents were also very attentive to their children's emotional needs and academic experiences as a path to successful readiness for college. Similarly, Herndon (2019) credited the UM educational model for "producing academically strong, well-prepared, and well-adjusted college freshmen" (p. iii).

### Time Management

Time management was also highly praised by the parents since a flexible school schedule allows children to control how quickly they complete their schoolwork by remaining focused. In

her research, McMullen (2017) shared observations of parents' ability to utilize moments where students are highly engaged, take breaks as needed, and minimize distractions to make satellite days successful. Participants in my study reported the amount of time allotted for satellite work varied from three to eight hours. Regardless, parents witnessed their children comprehending things like, "if I want to go to my friend's house, I need to finish this first." Other studies on time management have also suggested that elementary school students can strongly benefit from self-regulation training activities at home through independent work (Ormrod, 2006) and middle and high school students from being shown how to manage time, control emotions, and monitor motivations at home as well (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).

Although only parents of children in the elementary grades were interviewed in this study, those who also had other children in secondary grade levels believed the flexibility of time was especially beneficial for their older children. Similarly, when studying first-year college students and depressive symptoms, Villatte, Marcotte, and Potvin's (2017) measure of symptoms was "the absence of personal goals" (p. 114). With secondary UM students having more flexibility with their time, interviewed parents believed their children had more opportunities to explore personal goals.

**Self-Regulated Learning Theory**

Overall, the assumption of this study that the school choice made by UM parents included their understanding of opportunities to shape self-regulation skills in their children was confirmed by my findings. Zimmerman (1998) stated that, "although teachers often constrain outside studying by assigning and grading homework, students still have choice regarding the length of their studying as well as engaging in additional forms of it" (p. 74). In the case of University-Model® schools, interviewed parents understood that self-regulatory skills go beyond

teachers assigning homework and parents supervising their children to do homework. Interviewed parents observed their children being challenged to engage in their schoolwork daily, and essentially, grow in self-motivation, self-instruction, and self-monitoring through participation in the UM school.

## Planning and Intentions

Participating parents' intentions to continue pursuing a UM education for their children varied slightly over the years, but parents demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the model. Included in Barker's (2012) study was parents' satisfaction with choosing a University-Model® school for their children for reasons like more family time, opportunities to remain involved in their children's lives through high school grades, and the opportunities to help their children with college preparations. Likewise, most of my study participants shared similar experiences and had no intentions of changing schools, suggesting a level of commitment to and satisfaction with the experience involving entire families in the University-Model®. Wearne's (2017) findings examining the perceptions of 386 parents from 10 UM schools were similar, where 75.4% of the participants responded they were "very unlikely" to leave the school, suggesting a strong level of satisfaction with the University-Model®. In this study, only one parent who had previous experiences with traditional settings suggested a change of school was possible.

Overall, interviewed parents were satisfied with their participation in a University-Model® school for various reasons. Many of these reasons were aligned with Turner, Jr.'s (2001) in the description of UM schools:

> The immediate goal [of UM schools] is quality, cost-effective, college-preparatory education accomplished in a way that gives parents more time for imparting the faith and

values they hold precious. The ultimate goal is that of producing wholesome, competent men and women of character who make positive difference in the next generation (p. 24).

**Satisficing Theory**

Simon's (1955) satisficing theory was the guiding framework to this study examining UM parents' beliefs and experiences. Parents searched for a school model that would meet their criteria, examined the pros and cons associated with the UM model, and decided to enroll their children, continuing to monitor their educational progress. Caplin, Dean, and Martin (2011) defined the theory as "a process of item-by-item search, and the existence of a 'satisficing' level of utility attainment of which would induce the decision maker to curtail further search" (p. 2899). Similarly, Brown (2004) explained Simon's (1955) assumption that individuals cease their search once an option becomes sufficient in various ways, rather than seeking absolute perfection in their selection of a school. The participants in this study were generally satisfied with their decision to participate in a University-Model® school and were unlikely to switch to a different school.

Similarly, Prichard and Swezey (2016) utilized Simon's satisficing theory to study factors Christian parents considered during the school selection decision process. They suggested that "opportunities may exist for transferability and fit through the identification of similarities in factors that are part of the theoretical model and that are consistent between contexts for which the theory fits" (p. 19). Morse (2015) defined transferability as "thick description is essential for an interested individual to transfer the original findings to another context, or individuals" (p. 1213). For my study, two primary factors closely aligned with Prichard and Swezey's (2016) research, leading to the transferability of their findings: 1) the use of satisficing theory regarding

school choice and 2) the faith-based aspect of the school model under examination, which was strongly desired by interviewed parents in my study.

Although not commonly utilized in educational research, Simon's (1955) satisficing theory was appropriate for this study. Parents' initial school considerations were reported, they continue to be exigent about their expectations as shown in their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the model, with a final decision of their future schooling intentions for their child.

While most participants' UM school experiences were satisfactory, some parents did share that in practice, the school model is not for everyone because of the time commitment requirement of being a co-teacher. Further, parents also voiced some concerns that a UM school created time conflicts because the elementary-aged child and the older siblings had different satellite day schedules, leaving the younger child at home with only mom. Altogether, aligning with Simon's (1955) satisficing theory—considering all school options and variances, parents continued to find satisfaction in the school choice.

## Implications for Policy and Practice

There are some implications for policy and practice that emerge from this research. Although the combination of in-person and homeschool setting is not ideal and functional for every household, local district policy makers and administrators should have information to provide families who may be interested in other instructional delivery options than solely what is required by the state education agency.

### Policy

While House Bill 2442 changed students' school attendance time requirement to 420 minutes a day, or 75,600 operational minutes per year (TEA, 2017), the requirement remains robust limiting after school activities or creating very busy daily schedules for families. The

extensive time spent at school also creates controversy regarding homework, with some parents believing it is essential for students to practice learned content at home and others thinking homework is unnecessary. Also, attending schools for seven hours daily during the week can hinder students who need to have a part-time job while simultaneously attending school. Less time requirement at school could aid in students' flexibility to work. Policymakers studying instructional time could benefit from research on University-Model® schools.

Further, since the introduction of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) law in 2002 and according to state assessment tests, teachers continue to be expected to provide instruction primarily over core competencies (What's So Bad About Teaching to the Test?, 2010). There is constant debate among educators who believe their creativity in the classroom is limited because of this expectation. Although state assessments are important for accountability, administrators should encourage teachers to be holistic in their classroom instruction and assessment, rather than emphasizing standardized tests to a tremendous extent. Research on University-Model® school and holistic evaluation of their students could be useful in improving accountability standards.

**Practice**

Although the University-Model® is exclusive to the Christian community, the overarching approach of the model aligns with the hybrid model. Schools that follow a hybrid schedule have a similar system of alternating scheduling in-person and at-home days (in the case of UM school, satellite days). Especially with districts exploring the various options around COVID-19 restrictions during the 2019-2020 school year, many selected a hybrid method to best serve their students. This suggests that the University-Model® school can serve as an example for perfecting the practice in hybrid school models.

As Wearne (2017, 2019) found, parents choose hybrid schools for the same reasons as this study's participants chose a UM school: "smaller class sizes, a desire for religious education, a different learning environment, or a flexible schedule, allowing more time together as a family" (p. 177). In addition, Wearne (2019) found that parents believed their children were being well-equipped for highly rated colleges by participating in a hybrid school that offered a similar school experience they would encounter in college. While the University-Model® or hybrid model are not ideal for every household, the practice of these models deserves additional study, and public school districts could consider incorporating some of these strategies to better prepare secondary students for post-secondary encounters.

## Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations related to parents' demographics, the use of parents to inform the phenomenon, the single campus site, and the religious affiliation of the research site. First, a significant demographic limitation for this study is related to the high socioeconomic status of the sample. Every participant held a higher education degree, and degree levels ranged from bachelor's degrees to doctorates. Various participants (or their spouses) were in the medical field. Therefore, parents from varying economic statuses were not represented in the study. The UM school is a private school, so it is not surprising that it attracts parents with high incomes, as shown in Wearne's (2017) study where 61.1% of respondents had an annual income of $100,000 or above. Although high economic status is also a characteristic of the parents in my study, most families have more than one child enrolled in the school, which may impact their intent to continue with the UM school. Therefore, it is possible that some parents decide to withdraw because they no more can cover the costs rather than being dissatisfied with the model.

Second, there was a limitation of racial representation since only one participant was of a race other than White. This indicates a limited demographic diversity among University-Model® schools' parents in general. Even with a sample size of 246 UM students, Brobst (2013) reported not including ethnicity as a variable in her study because the sample was 93.75% Caucasian. Additionally, Wearne (2017) reported that, of his 386 participants, 92.4% of them were white. Income homogeneity and lack of racial diversity are likely characteristics of the UM school parents, which will limit the transferability of findings that may correspond to a best-case scenario of educated parents' involvement in their children's schooling.

Third, only parents' lived experiences were collected in this study. Gathering students' perceptions of their self-regulatory skills, their own experiences, understanding of opportunities and intention to continue would be beneficial. By including students' perspectives, the phenomenon of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the model could have been further explored.

Fourth, this study examined the experiences of participating University-Model® school parents in a single setting. Although campus operation differences were avoided by only using one school as the research site, this could constitute a limitation because parents' experiences may be different at other UM schools.

Finally, in UM schools, the Christian belief is emphasized. Parents are interviewed prior to acceptance into the school, and a recommendation letter from a pastor is part of the application requirement. While this is viewed as an asset to the parents and students, it is a limitation of the sample as it eliminates families from various religious communities and representations. Although the study findings are limited to the experiences and beliefs of a relatively small population of parents, the study provided insight into the positive and negative aspects of UM schooling that can be useful to parents from all school models. All University-

Model® schools are operated under their overseers—University-Model® Schools International (UMSI). As stated on UMSI's website, "University-Model® School International (UMSI) is a global family of Christian school communities pursuing a philosophy and system of education called the University-Model® (UM)" (About UMSI, 2021). Therefore, this model is exclusive to individuals who share similar religious beliefs.

## Significance of the Study

This study is an important addition to the school choice literature because it provides parents' perspectives on the unique schooling model. To make effective policy and practice decisions, it is essential for leaders to consider parents' desires for their children's academic experiences. While a combination of in-person/at-school environment involves a parent being at home or having a flexible work schedule, as this study's participants with older children shared, very little active participation is required from the parent once students reach secondary grades ($7^{th}$-$12^{th}$). Essentially, this study is significant by suggesting that investment in children at early ages may have long term benefits by lessening the dependency on the parent as well as the teacher, and yet, providing students opportunities to develop self-regulatory skills that will make them more successful college students and professionals.

Additionally, there has been a significant awareness in the educational realm conveyed by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Students, parents, educators, and policymakers were forced to consider the most appropriate instructional arrangements to minimize disruptions in children's academic, social, and emotional development during the 2020-2021 school year. Traditional school settings have been particularly challenged because students were used with in-person instruction and placing new responsibilities on parents and children was an uncharted area. However, interviewed UM school parents did not report any major disruptions in their child's

experiences, suggesting that UM students were capable to easily adjust and continued to manage their schoolwork well through the pandemic—a variation from the reports from the public school sector. Overall, COVID-19 left many parents reconsidering their children's education with a much greater awareness of how individual learning styles would benefit from a variety of instructional modalities.

## Recommendations for Future Research

There are ample opportunities for future research in the field of University-Model® schools. One possible research direction is to conduct a longitudinal study following UM graduates and their first year in college, including not just academic outcomes (e.g., GPA), but also manifestation of study habits, as well as character and virtue development. This area could also be researched through a comparative study of UM and traditional private school graduates.

Another recommendation is to interview secondary school students ($7^{th}$-$12^{th}$ grades) through Zimmerman's (1998) self-regulated learning theoretical lens, gathering students' perspectives of their self-regulatory skills rather than parents' observations of their skills. Connecting the opportunities UM students have to develop these skills during years of maturity would enhance the discussion of Zimmerman's work.

With parental influence being such a differentiating piece between the University-Model® and traditional schools, examining students' post-secondary lived experiences and the evolution of parent-student relationship is another research avenue. Considering UM school graduates' college and/or career choices after the K-12 years would be an extension in the literature on the importance of parental influence during the school years in a child's life.

A final recommendation is to interview parents and/or students who left a University-Model® school to understand if their reasons were related to specific operations of a certain

campus, general disapproval of the UM school, learning styles of the child, or family circumstances. Past participants' perspectives would contribute to better understand the model.

## Conclusion

I initiated this research journey because of my own experience with the University-Model® and my desire to better understand what other families are experiencing as well. The study confirmed my own beliefs that parents who choose a UM school engage and invest in their children's lives in every area (i.e. their friends, teachers, school community, home) with a strong focus: to keep the family close. This research will encourage other parents to further explore the vision of the University-Model® and what the whole family can experience by participating in a school model that is different than traditional schools. Moreover, I believe the research direction of education is changing in general and hope policy and decision makers explore non-traditional alternative methods in addition to forgotten models of schooling.

This study integrated the well-established but under explored University-Model® into the research field of school choice. Throughout my research, I identified various issues with the current American educational system and the lack of adequate preparation during the K-12 schooling years that could get some answers when better understanding the University-Model® design. American parents continue to have the privilege of choosing the ideal school for their children. As alternative schooling environments expand, as shown in this study through the presentation of the University-Model®, parents, children, and educators need better information regarding various schooling options that respond to their expectations of school dynamics and enriched academic experience. Therefore, research on University-Model® schools is timely and relevant.

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## Appendix A

## Impact of Remote Learning:

## How Students, Teachers, and Parents are Copying

This is an extract from a special report on education published in The New York Times in October 2020 (Tugend, 2020) that presented students', teachers', and parents' voices about their experiences during the pandemic. The report is relevant to the current study by describing a co-teaching situation that has directly engaged parents in the schooling of their children.

**Students.** Students were asked to answer the question: "How are you coping?" Quotes from three students, followed by student's gender, grade level, and location are as follows:

1. Going to school used to excite me but sitting in front of a computer for eight hours a day does not interest me. I wish we could go back, even one day a week. Even one day a month. Even in small groups. I don't really care. (Female, 9th grade, Chicago, p. L6)
2. My grades dropped a lot last year during remote learning. I went from having 90s to 70s. I'm not proud of it, but it's true. Schools did not have enough time to organize themselves for this. However, this year there is a noticeable difference: In every class, there is a Zoom call for live instruction, and I feel very much more productive because of it. (Male, 11th grade, New York, p. L7)
3. I am surviving the semester by doing all of my assignments and taking notes during class, just like I would in a regular class. Every morning, I wake up, shower, get ready as I usually would, but then I go back to my room. (Male, 11th grade, New York, p. L7)

**Teachers.** Teachers were asked to answer the question: "How are you keeping your students engaged?" Quotes from three teachers, followed by their gender, teaching grade level, and location are as follows:

1. I've been teaching kindergarten for 20 years. I have found distance learning very tricky because I cannot see what my students are working on. I can't see them pointing to words in their book. I can't see how they are printing. I can't see what algorithms they are using while solving problems. I invented a cheap solution to this problem. It's basically a clip-on mirror that goes over a laptop's camera and it turns it into a document camera. (Male, Kindergarten, California, p. L6)
2. I am attempting to keep my middle school art students curious by being completely vulnerable with them. I cry in front of them when I'm sad or scared or frustrated. I'm transparent with them about my feelings and experiences. This encourages them to be more vulnerable and open with me and each other. (Female, Middle School, North Carolina, p. L6)
3. I am trying to encourage students to go outside and take notice of the nature that surrounds them. This can be on a large or small scale, a piece of moss, a line of ants, or their favorite spot in the woods. The assignment simply boils down to go outside, slow down, and take notice of your surroundings. (Male, 8th grade, New York, p. L6)

**Parents.** Parents were asked: "How are you dealing with remote learning?" Three answers, along with their gender and location are as follows:

1. Balance is not a thing when you are parenting, teaching, and working simultaneously. It's simply not possible to do it all or do any of it well. (Female, Indiana, p. L7)

2. The thing I do every night that makes the morning more bearable (and maybe even fun) for my kids [ages 5 and 11] is I set up our dining table with all the things they will do that day: the books we will read, their math books, their writing folders, maybe a new French workbook I ordered online…What makes this enjoyable for all of us is that we are all learning together. I am relearning math I totally forgot. (Female, Maine, p. L7)
3. The homeroom teacher won't repeat instructions on principle, so my kid spends a lot of time lost or needing help finding the page he's supposed to be on (since, you know, he's in kindergarten and just learning how to read page numbers and follow instructions). It's especially tough because our kid has no relationship with these teachers – no reason to want to listen to them or follow along aside from it being what we're telling him to do. (Female, Maryland, p. L7)

## Appendix B

## Recruitment Email

Parents,

I am a fellow co-instructor at a University-Model® school and a doctoral candidate at the University of Texas at Arlington. To meet my dissertation requirements, I am conducting a study to examine factors that guided parents' decision in choosing a University-Model® school for their child.

For this study, I am looking for individuals who are willing to have a 45-minute interview (in-person while social distancing or via Zoom) with me that will reflect your lived experiences in choosing a school, particularly a University-Model® school, for your child.

This study has been approved by the administration at Team Academy* and is being overseen by my dissertation chair, Dr. Maria Trache, an Educational Leadership and Policy Studies professor at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Please read over the participant consent and contact me at Kelly.cagle@mavs.uta.edu if you are interested in participating or need clarification. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Kelly Cagle

*pseudonym

## Appendix C

### Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to share your expertise as a co-instructor for the purpose of a research study. Please read the following disclosure and reach out to any of the individuals listed below to ask further questions to ensure you completely understand what the study and/or your participation will involve.

### Investigator

Kelly Cagle, M.Ed., a fellow co-instructor, is also a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Arlington. For the purposes of this study, she is working alongside her chairperson, Maria Trache, Ph.D., a professor at the University of Texas at Arlington.

### Purpose of the Research

This phenomenological study is designed to examine the aspects that guided your decision in choosing a University-Model® (UM) school. Further goals include to understand your level of satisfaction and your intent to continue with a University-Model® school. Although all grade levels are represented in the school, only parents of 3rd-6th students will be participating, since the focus of this study is on this transitional phase in students' lives to becoming more self-sufficient in their academic abilities.

### Research Procedures

Ten individuals will be asked to participate in the study. Five parents will only have experienced the UM way of schooling. The other five participants will have a history of traditional schooling prior to joining a UM. Each parent will be asked to choose a time for a one-on-one, 45-minute interview with the researcher, Kelly Cagle. During these interviews, you are only asked to be honest in your responses. These interviews will be face-to-face or via Zoom.

## Benefits

Your participation will benefit research on University-Model® school. Further, findings will inform change of practice in traditional schooling as policy makers have begun to explore alternative instructional methods due to the current global pandemic. In addition, you will help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of University-Model® families.

## Confidentiality

All data collected for the purposes of this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your consent. For accuracy purposes, the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. However, your personal information will remain confidential, as you will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used in the study. No information that could disclose your identity will be published. Recordings will be destroyed upon completion of this research.

## Subject Rights and Withdrawal

If you choose to withdraw from the study for any reason, please contact Kelly Cagle at Kelly.cagle@mavs.uta.edu. Your participation is voluntary and may be discontinued at any time.

## Questions

If you have further questions about the process, please contact Kelly Cagle at kelly.cagle@mavs.uta.edu or Dr. Maria Trache at mtrache@uta.edu.

## Acknowledgement of Participation

I have read and fully understand the expectations for this study. I have been informed of my rights and understand that I may ask for clarification and/or be withdrawn from the study at any time. My legal rights are not waived by my participation in this study.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Parent Signature* | *Date* | *Child's Grade* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *# of Years at UMS* | *Previous School(s)— public, private, charter, homeschool* |

## Appendix D

## Interview Frame

I am conducting a study to raise awareness of University-Model® schools, an area which is highly under researched. Although this model has been around since 1993 and has increased to 88 schools in 25 different states and one international school in Asia, research lacks in the areas of the system's efficiency, student outcomes, and parents' perspectives.

This interview will be a 45-minute session, where I hope you will feel safe to share your open and honest response. I will not disclose your name under any circumstance and will provide a follow-up of the findings, if you wish to further explore the information.

While questions are open-ended and allow you to take your responses in many directions, my research has three main areas of focus:

1) Experiences of parents in the selection of a University-Model® school

2) Satisfaction with your choice

3) Intention to continue with a UM

With that being said, I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study to raise the understanding of this school model you are vested in.

## Appendix E

## Interview Protocol—UM Background Only

**Research Questions:**

1. Why did parents choose a University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children?
2. To what extent are University-Model® school parents satisfied or dissatisfied with the academic and social experiences of their students and themselves as co-instructors?
3. What are the intentions to continue with a University-Model® school as their school of choice?

**Parent Questions (UM Background Only)**

1. What led you to Team Academy*? Please share your child's grade.
    a. What were some of the "non-negotiables" you were looking for?
2. How would you describe your satisfaction with the academic and social experiences at your University-Model® school?
3. What are some of the things you like about the model?
    a. What are some of the things you dislike about the model?
4. Talk about your daily schedule on satellite days.
    a. Do you sit alongside your child as he or she works?
5. Zimmerman (1998) listed these areas as important measurements of students' self-regulatory skills: a) goal setting, b) task strategies, c) imagery, d) self-instruction, e) time management, f) self-monitoring, g) self-evaluation, h) self-consequences, i) environmental structuring, and j) help seeking.
    a. How would you describe your child's self-regulation skills?

6. As a co-instructor, do you seek to facilitate the development of these skills, even if unconsciously?
7. Where do you see your child in long-term?
    a. What are some of your educational goals for your child?
8. Is there something you find important to share that I did not ask?

*pseudonym

## Appendix F

### Interview Protocol—Traditional School Backgrounds

**Research Questions:**

1. Why did parents choose a University-Model® school for their elementary-aged children?
2. To what extent are University-Model® school parents satisfied or dissatisfied with the academic and social experiences of their students and themselves as co-instructors?
3. What are the intentions to continue with a University-Model® school as their school of choice?

**Parent Questions (Traditional School Backgrounds)**

1. What traditional school environment did your child attend prior to Team Academy*?
    a. How long has your child been attending Team Academy*?
2. What led you to Team Academy*? Please share your child's grade.
3. What are some of the things you like about the model?
    a. What are some of the things you dislike about the model?
4. Talk about your daily schedule on satellite days.
    a. Do you sit alongside your child as he or she works?
5. Zimmerman (1998) listed these areas as important measurements of students' self-regulatory skills: a) goal setting, b) task strategies, c) imagery, d) self-instruction, e) time management, f) self-monitoring, g) self-evaluation, h) self-consequences, i) environmental structuring, and j) help seeking.
    a. How would you describe your child's self-regulation skills?
6. As a co-instructor, do you seek to facilitate the development of these skills, even if unconsciously?

7. Where do you see your child in long-term?
    a. What are some of your educational goals for your child?
8. Is there something you find important to share that I did not ask?

*pseudonym

## Appendix G

## IRB Approval


10/30/2020

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION REGULATORY SERVICES

**IRB Approval of Minimal Risk (MR) Protocol**

**PI:** Kelly Cagle
**Faculty Advisor**: Dr. Maria Trache
**Department:** Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
**IRB Protocol #:** 2021-0051
**Study Title:** *School Choice and University-Model® Schools: A Phenomenological Study*

**Effective Approval: 10/30/2020**

In-person interactions with human subjects must comply with UTA's list of permitted research activities and the related requirements under COVID-19 limitations: https://resources.uta.edu/research/regulatory-services/human-subjects/news-and-announcements.php.

The IRB has approved the above referenced submission in accordance with applicable regulations and/or UTA's IRB Standard Operating Procedures.

**Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor Responsibilities**

All personnel conducting human subject research must comply with UTA's IRB Standard Operating Procedures and RA-PO4, Statement of Principles and Policies Regarding Human Subjects in Research. Important items for PIs and Faculty Advisors are as follows:

- **Notify Regulatory Services of proposed, new, or changing funding source**
- Fulfill research oversight responsibilities, IV.F and IV.G.
- Obtain approval prior to initiating changes in research or personnel, IX.B.
- Report Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) and Unanticipated Problems (UPs), IX.C.
- Fulfill Continuing Review requirements, if applicable, IX.A.
- Protect human subject data (XV.) and maintain records (XXI.C.).

- Maintain HSP (3 years), GCP (3 years), and RCR (4 years) training as applicable.

**The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Innovation REGULATORY SERVICES**
**202 E. Border Street, Suite 300, Arlington, Texas 76010, Box #19188**

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