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EVALUATION OF
I CHOOSE MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS!
YEAR 1 OF THE PROJECT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *I Choose Miami-Dade County Public Schools!* (hereafter referred to as the *I Choose!* project) is funded by a grant from the Voluntary Public School Choice Program. The *I Choose!* project is designed to “expand a program of public school choice” in selected transportation zones, which are referred to as “Choice Zones.” Under the auspices of the grant, the longitudinal evaluation of the project is being conducted by the district. This initial report on the evaluation includes baseline data for the 2002-03 school year, or year 1 of the project. The intent of the report is to describe demographics, achievement level, and participation of students in Choice Zone 1.

To date, the evaluation has yielded several results. Year 1 was devoted to planning. The boundaries of Choice Zone 1 were identified, and the strategy for increasing options in the zone was developed. Nine schools in Choice Zone 1 were targeted for program improvement, and a review of the established programs with themes that are being considered for these schools was conducted. In addition, eight schools outside of Choice Zone 1 were identified that serve similar student populations to those of the targeted schools. The targeted and comparison schools were found to have similar levels of parental awareness of available options and similar proportions of transported students. With few exceptions, the pairs of schools also exhibited similar levels of parent satisfaction with academic performance and similar levels of student performance on the *Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT)*. For the duration of the evaluation, the comparison schools will be used to gauge the performance of the targeted schools in Choice Zone 1. This strategy will be extended to Choice Zone 2, when its boundaries are identified and targeted schools are selected.

INTRODUCTION

The Division of Schools of Choice of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) was awarded a grant in 2002 from the Office of Innovation and Improvement of the United States Department of Education. Funding for the grant is provided by the Voluntary Public School Choice Programs (VPSC). The MDCPS grant proposal, which is titled *I Choose Miami-Dade County Public Schools!* (hereafter referred to as the *I Choose!* project), is designed to “expand a program of public school choice” in two of the district’s transportation zones. The proposal is based on the premise that providing students with a selection of instructional themes consisting of high-quality programs will lead to greater satisfaction, and in turn improved academic achievement. This anticipated outcome would be the product of both allowing students to select instructional themes that interest them, and improving the quality of the programs’ academic instruction. The improvement of academic instruction alone, without the element of choice, is unlikely to have as much impact on the students’ academic achievement. This report details the evaluation during year 1 (i.e., 2002-03 school year) of the *I Choose!* project. It consists of a brief description of the grant proposal followed by a presentation of data for year 1. Subsequent annual reports will present data on the project’s implementation and its impact.

The idea of offering academic choices to students is not new to the MDCPS. The district offers a wide range of educational options to over 350,000 students at over 320 regular schools. The purpose of the *I Choose!* project is to greatly expand the district’s voluntary public school choice program. This will be done by dividing the district into smaller geographic areas, which are called choice zones. Each choice zone will offer various options to participating families for educating their children without costly and time-consuming transportation over long distances. The VPSC funding will be utilized to underwrite two choice zones in the MDCPS.

Choice Zone 1 was identified during year 1 of the project. This zone, which is located in the center of the district, contains 61 schools that are served by two of the district’s six Area Community Centers for Educational Support Services (i.e., ACCESS Centers). The specific schools in Choice Zone 1 are listed in Appendix A. Within Choice Zone 1, nine schools have been targeted for major program development and district recruitment support under the *I Choose!* project. Each will receive \$150,000

per year. In general, these targeted schools are underenrolled due to a declining inner city population. Also contributing to this decline is HOPE VI, a housing reconstruction program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This program has required families to relocate outside the attendance boundaries of many of the targeted schools over the past four years. This relocation has resulted in a severe underutilization of these schools. Table 1 presents the utilization percentages of the targeted schools in Choice Zone 1 during year 1. In addition to the targeted schools, a number of schools will receive support for program enhancement consisting of \$35,000 per year. Incidentally, the location of Choice Zone 2 and the schools to be targeted within it will be identified during year 2 of the project (i.e., the 2003-04 school year).

Table 1
Utilization of targeted schools in Choice Zone 1,
year 1

School name	Location code	Utilization%
Earlington Heights Elementary	1561	58
Lillie C. Evans Elementary	1681	32
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary ^a	2761	132
Liberty City Elementary	2981	52
Lorah Park Elementary	3041	75
Melrose Elementary	3181	65
Ada Merritt Elementary ^b	3191	-
Poinciana Park Elementary	4501	62
Brownsville Middle ^c	6031	115

Note: The utilization percentage was calculated by dividing student membership by assigned capacity of the buildings, excluding portable units. The source is *Profiles, 2002-03, School Operations*. Year 1=2002-03 school year.
^aThis school, which enrolled PK-3 in 2002-03, enrolled only PK-2 in subsequent years.
^bThis school was being reconstructed in 2002-03 and reopened in 2003-04.
^cThis school opened an addition on its campus in 2003-04.

A variety of educational options were available to regular students in Choice Zone 1 during year 1. The website of the Office of School Choice and Parental Options lists seven. They include: (a) magnet programs/schools, (b) charter schools, (c) controlled choice schools, (d) a commuter school, (e) National Academy Foundation (NAF) Academies, (f) Opportunity Scholarships, and (g) Satellite Learning Centers. Table 2 lists the seven options and identifies those that are implemented respectively in targeted schools in Choice Zone 1, all schools in Choice Zone 1, and all schools in the district. A review of the table reveals that, with the exception of the commuter school, every option is currently available in Choice Zone 1. The commuter school has yet to be implemented in the district. But, with the support of the VPSC funding, it will be implemented in Choice Zone 1 during year 2 of the

project. Finally, it should also be noted that, while not listed in Table 2, a number of other educational options are available for both exceptional and at-risk students.

Table 2
Educational options of schools in Choice Zone 1 and the district, year 1

Educational option	Choice Zone 1						District schools		
	Targeted schools			All schools			District schools		
	El. ^a	Mid.	Sr.	El. ^a	Mid.	Sr.	El. ^a	Mid.	Sr. ^b
1. Magnet Program/School:									
Arts		1		1	3	3	5	7	6
Careers						6			22
Humanities							2	2	
International				1			5	4	3
Math/Science/Technology	1	1		1	1		4	5	2
Montessori							4		
2. Charter School				4	2		15	8	2
3. Controlled Choice School	2			9			14		
4. Commuter School									
5. National Academy Foundation (NAF) Academy						3 ^c			11 ^c
6. Opportunity Scholarships	1			4		1	4		1
7. Satellite Learning Center ^d				1			4		
Total number of schools offering options ^e	3	1	0	18	5	7	54	23	27
Total number of schools	7	1	0	43	10	8	225	61	37

Note: The sources of data are the program website and district records. Year 1=2002-03 school year. El.=elementary; Mid.=middle; Sr.=senior.
^aThis category includes schools that are K-8 centers.
^bThis number includes William H. Turner Technical Arts High School.
^cThis number includes senior high schools that house two academies each, making a total of 3 academies at 2 schools in Choice Zone 1 and 13 academies at 11 schools in the district as a whole.
^dAlthough each Satellite Learning Center is linked administratively with a school, they are counted separately in this table.
^eThe total number of schools offering options may be less than the sum of the options, since more than one option may be offered at a single school.

The original and largest choice program of the MDCPS is the magnet program. There are a total of 71 magnet programs/schools throughout the district. Of the nine schools targeted by the *I Choose!* project in Choice Zone 1, two (Lillie C. Evans Elementary School and Brownsville Middle School) offer this option. Indeed, 13 of the 61 schools in Choice Zone 1 offer at least one magnet program.

Charter schools comprise the second largest choice program of the MDCPS. In year 1, there were 25 charter schools in the district. In Choice Zone 1, there were six. Although none of these are targeted by the *I Choose!* project, three of them will receive program enhancements; they include: Liberty City Charter School, Mater Academy East Charter, and ASPIRA Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School.

Controlled choice schools are clusters of elementary schools with contiguous attendance zones that have been merged into a single zone. All students residing within this expanded zone are free to enroll in any of the schools in the cluster. In the interest of offering a true choice, each of the controlled choice schools ideally develops a unique instructional theme. Most of the 14 controlled choice elementary schools in the district are located within Choice Zone 1. Two of these schools (Earlington Heights Elementary School and Melrose Elementary School) are targeted by the *I Choose!* project.

National Academy Foundation Academies prepare senior high school students for careers in finance, travel and tourism, and information technology through a theme-based, contextualized curriculum approach. Districtwide there are thirteen academies at eleven senior high schools. Three of the academies are at two of the Choice Zone 1 schools.

Under the Opportunity Scholarship Program, students living in the attendance zones of schools deemed deficient by the state may choose to enroll in other public schools or selected private schools. All five of the district schools currently deemed deficient are in Choice Zone 1. One of them (Lillie C. Evans Elementary School) is targeted by the *I Choose!* project.

Finally, Satellite Learning Centers are designed to offer classes in the initial elementary grades at the parents' workplace. The centers are staffed by MDCPS teachers. Each center is associated with a regular elementary school in the area. Students generally matriculate in the associated school, when they complete the highest grade offered by the center. One of the district's four Satellite Learning Centers is located in Choice Zone 1. However, it is not targeted by the *I Choose!* project.

In addition to these educational options, which are administered by the Office of Schools of Choice, there are also about 50 alternative schools throughout the district that are administered by the Office of Adult/Vocational and Alternative Education. Although students are assigned to some alternative schools for disciplinary reasons, most of the schools accept students who enroll voluntarily. All serve students who fit an at-risk profile, and almost all offer a middle or senior high school curriculum.

Clearly, there are numerous educational options available to students in Choice Zone 1. In fact, the percentage of schools offering such options is greater in Choice Zone 1 than it is in the district as a whole. They are respectively 49.2% (30 of 61 schools) and 32.3% (104 of 322 schools). However, the extent to which these options are distinct from one another is often unclear. Furthermore, the

awareness of these options may not be widespread. More to the point, it is not known how many of the Choice Zone 1 families have availed themselves of these educational options.

The *I Choose!* project is designed to address such issues. The specific objectives of the project are detailed in program documents. These objectives include:

1. Expand the variety of school choice options available to families in Choice Zones 1 and 2.
2. Implement marketing and student selection procedures in Choice Zones 1 and 2 that promote educational equity.
3. Provide equitable and cost-effective transportation options in Choice Zones 1 and 2.
4. Improve the academic achievement of students in Choice Zones 1 and 2, particularly those in the schools deemed deficient by the state.

DESIGN OF THE EVALUATION

The intent of the *I Choose!* project is to enhance the educational options in two choice zones of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS). The project also intends to improve the delivery of instruction in the targeted schools within each zone, and in turn the students' academic achievement. The present evaluation addresses these two basic issues. The specific focus of the evaluation is delineated by a series of questions, which were derived from the project's stated objectives. The questions are:

1. Have the educational options in Choice Zones 1 been expanded? Have they in Choice Zone 2 (objective 1)?
2. Does the strategy for marketing the project equitably target all families in Choice Zone 1? Does it in Choice Zone 2 (objective 2)?
3. Are the student selection procedures of the project equitable in Choice Zone 1? Are they in Choice Zone 2 (objective 2)?
4. Are the transportation options equitable throughout Choice Zone 1? Are they in Choice Zone 2 (objective 3)?
5. Are the transportation options in Choice Zone 1 cost-effective for the MDCPS? Are they in Choice Zone 2 (objective 3)?
6. Have students enrolled in the targeted schools of Choice Zone 1 exhibited academic improvement? Have they in Choice Zone 2 (objective 4)?

To address these questions, the evaluation drew data from several sources. A primary source was district records, which included *Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT)* scores, demographic data, and transportation data. Part of the district records were the responses to the *School Climate Survey*. This survey is administered each school year to gather information on the perceptions that students, their parents, and school staffs hold concerning their schools. A copy of the 2001-02 Parent Form, which was used to address evaluation questions regarding satisfaction with programs and student achievement, appears in Appendix B.

The *Teacher Survey* was developed specifically for this evaluation. It is comprised of general questions about program development and marketing, as well as specific questions about unique characteristics of existing programs. The survey forms were forwarded to a total of 421 teachers in district programs. The *Parent Survey*, which was also developed specifically for this evaluation, is comprised of questions addressing transportation to school and awareness of public school options. A copy of the survey in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole appears in Appendix C. The survey was forwarded to a total of 3,226 randomly selected parents. Other sources of data included interviews of staff and reviews of program documents. They provided information regarding the choice options currently available in the district, and future plans for *I Choose!* programs, recruitment, selection, and transportation.

Question 1 addresses the expansion of options in the zones. It is the intention of the *I Choose!* project to replicate and/or expand programs that have a proven track record. To facilitate this endeavor, the evaluation reviewed a number of existing programs. The following aspects of these programs were scrutinized: equity of admissions procedures, program implementation, parents' satisfaction, and students' academic achievement. Relevant data were drawn from the analyses of enrollment characteristics, responses to the *Teacher Survey*, responses to the *School Climate Survey*, and students' *FCAT* scores. Programs that manifest a high level of quality will be recommended for replication. Beyond the issue of program replication, Question 1 ultimately addresses the diversity of educational options available in Choice Zones 1 and 2, as compared to zones not targeted by the *I Choose!* project. For this purpose, both the quantity and quality of educational options implemented in the choice zones are being monitored by the evaluation.

Questions 2 and 3 address the recruiting procedures of the programs supported by the *I Choose!* project. Procedures for ensuring equitable access to educational options have been cultivated in the MDCPS over many years. The implementation of such procedures for the programs in Choice Zones 1 and 2 are being monitored. The amount of choice exercised by students in year 1 was determined through the *Parent Survey* and an analysis of district records.

Questions 4 and 5 address the equitable provision of transportation within Choice Zones 1 and 2, and the cost-effectiveness of the effort to the MDCPS. The *Parent Survey* addressed the question of equitable provision of transportation. Improved cost-effectiveness should be accomplished by the implementation of a computerized routing system that will replace the current map and routing

system, which is obsolete. In addition, the location of attractive educational options within the choice zones should encourage parents to enroll their children in programs closer to home. A comparison was made of the amount of student transportation among programs within each of the choice zones in year 1 of the project.

Question 6 addresses the improvement in academic achievement associated with the enrichment of program quality and diversity under the *I Choose!* project. The establishment of new educational options at the targeted schools requires skill and commitment on the part of the staff. The *I Choose!* project will provide professional development for the teachers in the form of a summer workshop. The effectiveness of this training will be evaluated through the *School Climate Survey*, and also through program reviews at the schools.

More importantly, the academic achievement of the students in targeted schools is being monitored. The progress of these students will be compared to that of similar students in schools not affected by the *I Choose!* project. Particular attention will be paid to the academic achievement of students enrolled in schools deemed deficient by the state. Both the *FCAT* scores and the parental perceptions of their children’s achievement will be utilized in assessing the academic impact of the *I Choose!* project. A summary of the sources of data and the specific evaluation questions that they address is displayed on a matrix in Table 3.

Table 3
Sources of data for the evaluation questions

Evaluation question	Project objective	Sources of data				
		Staff interview, focus groups	Program reviews	District records	Teacher Survey	Parent Survey
1. Expansion of school choice options	1	X	X	X	X	
2. Educational equity in marketing	2	X		X		X
3. Educational equity in selection	2	X		X		
4. Equitable transportation options	3					X
5. Cost-effective transportation	3	X		X		
6. Academic achievement	4			X		

Note: See page 7 for the full text of the questions.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation of the *I Choose!* project is a longitudinal study. The data collection to date has spanned year 1 of the project (i.e., the 2002-03 school year), which was a planning year. This report contains baseline data. The data are used to address the issues raised in the evaluation questions listed in the Design of the Evaluation section. These issues include: (a) expansion of school choice options, (b) educational equity in marketing, (c) educational equity in selection, (d) equitable transportation options, (e) cost-effective transportation, and (f) academic achievement. Each issue will be individually examined.

Expansion of School Choice Options

It is the intention of the *I Choose!* project to replicate and/or expand programs that have a proven track record. The development of educational programming for schools in Choice Zones 1 and 2 includes two activities. The first is the review of established magnet programs in the district. The second is the identification of programs suited to schools in the two choice zones. The programs that were examined included: (a) International Baccalaureate/International Education, (b) International Studies, (c) Montessori, (d) Professional Development Schools, and (e) Calvert Model. The following are descriptions of the curriculum of each program. Table 4 identifies the schools in Choice Zone 1 tentatively selected to replicate each program. The schools in Choice Zone 2 that are targeted for program improvement will be identified during year 2 of the project.

International Baccalaureate/International Education Programs

The International Baccalaureate/International Education Programs, which are implemented in one elementary and three middle schools, are modeled after the programs developed by the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) in Switzerland. The program at Frank C. Martin Elementary School is an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IBPYP), which is recognized by the IBO. The program is characterized by an inquiry-based approach. Advanced instruction in the core curricular areas and the arts is enhanced by a cross-disciplinary strategy. Students are provided experiences designed to develop intercultural awareness, tolerance, and respect. Moreover, students who are 8 years old or older receive instruction in a foreign language. In the fifth grade, a personal inquiry project is undertaken by each student as the culmination of the program.

Table 4**Established programs and the Choice Zone 1 schools selected to replicate them**

Choice Zone 1 schools	Established Programs: Schools					
	International Baccalaureate: F. C. Martin EL.	International Education: Ammons Mid. N. Dade Mid. P. de Leon Mid.	International Studies N. Dade CML El. Sunset EL.	Montessori: J. Good El. P. R. Miller El. Pine Villa El. Scott Lake El.	Professional Development: Dr. C. Finlay El. H. S. West El.	Calvert Model: Barclay. El. ^a C. Woodson EL. ^a
Earlington Heights El.	☞					
Lillie C. Evans El.					☞	
M. L. King, Jr. El.				☞		
Liberty City El.						☞
Lorah Park El.			☞			
Melrose El.			☞			
Ada Merritt El.	☞		☞			
Poinciana Park El.					☞	
Brownsville Mid.		☞				

Note: Bold print designates a school that will serve as a model in the replication of its program in a Choice Zone 1 school. El.=elementary; Mid.=middle.
^aThis school is located in Baltimore, Maryland.

The middle school programs at Ammons, North Dade, and Ponce de Leon are in earlier stages of development than the elementary program. In fact, the program at North Dade Middle School will not be fully implemented until the 2003-04 school year. Although these programs are modeled after the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IBMYP), they are not officially recognized by the IBO. Therefore, they are designated International Education Programs. Nevertheless, like the IBMYP, the programs offer advanced coursework in the core curricular areas with an emphasis on both the interrelationship of the disciplines and intercultural awareness. Foreign language instruction is designed to allow students to attain sufficient proficiency to carry on conversations. A cross-disciplinary theme of health and social education is implemented that informs students of potential hazards and prepares them to make informed choices. In addition, the curriculum develops competence in information technology and study skills. Cross-disciplinary projects are undertaken by each student under the supervision of a teacher.

International Studies Program

The International Studies Program, which is implemented in North Dade Center for Modern Languages and Sunset Elementary School, offers a bilingual curriculum that is comparable to those of European countries. In addition to studying French, German or Spanish in grades 1 through 5,

students in these schools receive instruction in two of their four core courses in the foreign language. Native language speakers provide instruction in the foreign language. The schools have agreements with the governments of France, Germany, and Spain that provide for the automatic enrollment of qualified students who emigrate from these countries. In this manner, the schools encourage a culturally diverse student population. The schools are outfitted with advanced communication technologies that allow students to participate in such activities as videoconferencing and virtual field trips. It is also possible for fifth grade students to participate in cultural and educational experiences abroad.

Montessori Program

The Montessori Program is implemented in four elementary schools: Joella Good, Phyllis R. Miller, Pine Villa and Scott Lake. The program adheres to the standards of an educational program with a long history of implementation throughout the world. Classes are composed of students from various grade levels, ranging from Kindergarten to grade 5. Students pursue activities that they select from available options. The teachers carefully structure the options to meet the specific developmental needs of the students. The classrooms are rich in materials that are designed to promote inquiry and independent discovery.

Professional Development Schools

Two elementary schools in the MDCPS are designated Professional Development Schools. Henry S. West has been affiliated with the University of Miami for almost 50 years. Dr. Carlos J. Finlay, Jr., which is affiliated with Florida International University, is a relatively new school. Each school functions as a center for collaborative research among teachers, student teachers, and teacher educators. This environment benefits both teachers and students by exposing them to state-of-the-art practices in curriculum and instruction.

Calvert Model

The Calvert School, a private school in Baltimore, Maryland, has developed its curriculum over more than 100 years of operation. In recent years, the Calvert Model has been implemented successfully in two public schools in that city, Barclay Elementary School and Carter G. Woodson Elementary

School. The model has also been adopted for home-schooling by over 10,000 families worldwide. The Calvert Model curriculum possesses many characteristics that are currently popular. For example, the teaching of reading features formal instruction in sight words and phonemic skills, as well as reading for meaning and enjoyment. Mathematics instruction involves the use of drills for the practice of basic facts, as well as manipulatives for the understanding of concepts. The content areas, which include history, literature, geography, science, art, art history, and music, are comparable to E. D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum (McHugh and Stringfield, 1998).

Carter G. Woodson Elementary School, which adopted the Calvert Model in 1994, is located in a primarily African-American neighborhood and has a free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) participation rate of over 90%. Prior to the adoption of the model, the students at the school had a consistently low record of achievement. Both the students' achievement and the enrollment at the school increased after the implementation of the new program (McHugh and Stringfield, 1998).

Replication of Programs

Established programs that manifest a high level of quality should be considered for replication. In order to assess such programs, the following aspects of each were scrutinized: (a) the equity of the program's admissions procedures, (b) the implementation of the program, (c) the parents' satisfaction with the program, and (d) the students' academic achievement. Data on these aspects of the program were derived from district records, including the *School Climate Survey*, and several forms of the *Teacher Survey*, which was developed specifically for this review. The results of the review are summarized below.

With regard to equity of admissions, the data revealed that procedures that encourage equitable participation are in place. With a few exceptions, teachers in each of the established programs generally felt that student recruitment and assistance services are equitable. As a result, the student populations of the established programs are similar to the population of the district as a whole. Yet, most of the established programs serve higher proportions of gifted students and lower proportions of disadvantaged students. Such factors would give the programs an academic advantage over most of the district's schools.

With regard to program implementation, the teachers generally perceived both common elements and unique elements of the programs to be implemented. However, in a number of programs, a few teachers felt that some of the unique elements were not fully in place. The elements identified by these respondents were sometimes curricular. More often, however, they were technological or organizational. Nevertheless, failure to properly implement such elements is unlikely to undermine the core program.

The assessment of the parents' satisfaction with the established programs focused on a number of issues addressed in the *School Climate Survey*, including safety, academic standards, and inspiring teachers. The results revealed that the parents' perceptions of such issues are either similar to or more favorable than those of parents from most district schools. The highest levels of satisfaction were reported at Frank C. Martin and Carlos J. Finlay, Jr. Elementary Schools, and Ammons Middle School.

Finally, the examination of the students' academic achievement revealed that superior achievement appeared to be associated with advantageous demographic characteristics. Of the seven programs that exhibited superior academic achievement, six had student populations with demographic advantages. The sole exception was the Montessori program at Phyllis Ruth Miller Elementary School.

In conclusion, there appeared to be little difference in the quality of the established programs. Moreover, the differences in academic achievement of the students were generally linked to the demographics of the population. The Montessori Program at Phyllis Ruth Miller Elementary School was the only exception. The academic achievement of the students in this program may be influenced by implementation factors that were not addressed in this review. The program clearly merits a closer study. For a detailed exposition of the review, including the *Teacher Survey* and data analysis, see *I Choose Miami-Dade County Public Schools! Review of Selected Established Programs* (Hanson, 2003).

Choice in the Targeted Schools

As previously noted, nine schools in Choice Zone 1 have been targeted to receive major program improvements. In order to gauge the impact of the *I Choose!* project on these schools, their performance will be compared to that of comparable schools. This tactic, however, is not applicable to Ada Merritt Elementary School, since it will not open until the fall of 2003. As such, there is currently no data on this school's student body on which to base the selection of a comparison school. For the

remaining eight targeted schools, the following factors were taken into consideration in selecting the comparison schools: (a) the academic achievement of the students, (b) the students' demographic characteristics, (c) the location of the school, and (d) its total student enrollment. The achievement levels and demographic characteristics of both the targeted schools and the comparison schools are displayed in Table 5.

The Composite Performance Index (CPI) is the primary measure of the students' academic achievement presented in Table 5. The CPI is derived from the students' scores on the 2002 *Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT)* Reading, Writing and Mathematics subtests. The CPI is similar to the index used by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) to determine school grades. Both indices are based on the current *FCAT* scores, improvement over the previous year's scores, and the progress made by the lowest achieving students. However, while the FDOE index is derived solely from the criterion-referenced component of the *FCAT*, the CPI is derived from both the criterion-referenced and the norm-referenced components of the test (Levitt, Shay, Hanson, Naya, and Urdegar, 2003). A review of the table reveals that the differences between each targeted school and its comparison school ranges from 3 CPI points for Brownsville and Westview Middle Schools to 45 points for Lillie C. Evans and Westview Elementary Schools. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School had neither a school grade nor a CPI, because it only enrolled students through grade 3. Most of its students were not old enough to be tested on the *FCAT*. Its comparison school, Nathan B. Young Elementary School, was selected because of the similarity of its grade 3 test scores and demographic characteristics.

Demographically, both the targeted and comparison schools are among the most impoverished in the MDCPS. Nearly all the schools in both groups have FRL rates that exceed 90%. Two exceptions are Lillie C. Evans and Poinciana Park Elementary Schools with 89% and 82% FRL respectively. However, since both these targeted schools have had more than 90% FRL for over a decade, they were paired with schools at this level. Their lower FRL in 2001-02 may be due to the exodus of some low-income families due to the HOPE VI program.

Table 5

Demographic characteristics of targeted schools in Choice Zone 1 and comparison schools

Targeted School/Comparison School	Racial/Ethnic Group %			Enrollment	FRL %	LEP %	Gifted %	Utilization %
	Black	White	Hispanic					
Earlington Heights Elementary	59	1	40	473	96.6	20.9	0.4	
West Little River Elementary	65	0	34	527	94.9	21.1	0.6	
Lillie C. Evans Elementary	99	0	2	483	88.8	0.4	0.4	
Westview Elementary	87	0	11	590	92.9	10.7	0.8	
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary^b	93	0	7	367	94.3	3.8	0.3	
Nathan B. Young Elementary	98	0	2	499	91.2	2.0	0.8	
Liberty City Elementary	96	0	4	382	92.1	0.8	6.8	
North County Elementary	93	1	5	541	93.7	1.7	2.6	
Lorah Park Elementary	65	1	34	471	94.3	17.6	4.0	
Van E. Blanton Elementary	83	1	16	689	95.8	27.4	0.7	
Mehose Elementary	39	2	59	497	94.2	29.6	1.6	
James H. Bright Elementary	6	1	93	809	92.6	47.7	3.7	
Poinciana Park Elementary	96	0	3	596	81.5	1.0	5.9	
Barbara J. Hawkins Elementary	90	1	9	541	93.7	3.0	6.6	
Brownsville Middle^c	77	0	23	1,334	87.0	4.8	3.4	
Westview Middle	81	1	18	1,265	90.1	7.7	1.1	

Note: Data are for the 2001-02 school year, with the exception of utilization, which are for the 2002-03 school year. The source is *Miami-Dade County*. FRL = Free or Reduced Price Lunch. LEP = Limited English Proficient. The *I Choose!* schools are in bold type.

^aThis percentage was calculated by dividing student membership by assigned capacity of the buildings, excluding portable units.

^bThis school, which currently enrolls PK-3, will enroll only PK-2 in 2003-04.

^cThis school will have an additional building added to its campus in 2003-04.

In addition to having a high FRL, 11 of the 16 schools under scrutiny serve a very high proportion of African-American students (over 75%). In contrast, Earlington Heights, West Little River, Lorah Park, Melrose, and James H. Bright Elementary Schools serve substantial percentages of both African-American (6 to 65%) and Hispanic (34 to 93%) students. Not surprisingly, the latter schools also serve limited English proficient (LEP) students (17 to 48%). Westview and Van E. Blanton Elementary Schools, and Westview Middle School also serve substantial numbers of Haitian students, many of whom are also LEP. In general, there are few gifted students in these schools. Only Liberty City, Poinciana Park, and Barbara J. Hawkins Elementary Schools serve more than 5% gifted students. The latter school is a Magnet Gifted Center.

Geographically, almost all of the targeted schools are in the Northwestern Senior High School feeder pattern. The only exception, Lorah Park Elementary School, is located in the Miami Springs Senior High School feeder pattern, which borders Northwestern's on the west. Since students' cultural experiences may differ in a county as large and economically diverse as Miami-Dade, an attempt was made to locate all of the comparison schools in the Miami Central Senior High feeder pattern, which borders Northwestern's on the north. Four of the comparison schools, West Little River, Westview and Van E. Blanton Elementary Schools and Westview Middle School, are located in that feeder pattern. The others are in four different feeder patterns located further north and west.

The targeted schools are generally smaller than the average district school, with the elementary school populations ranging from 367 to 596. The targeted schools also tend to be underenrolled, with as low as 32% utilization. Care was taken to select comparison schools with student populations that are approximately equal to those of the targeted schools (499 to 809 among the elementary schools). Care was also taken to select comparison schools that are not dramatically overcrowded.

Implementation was already underway at the outset of the *I Choose!* project at two of the targeted schools. At Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School, six teachers were trained in the Montessori method prior to the 2002-03 school year, and four classes of pre-Kindergarteners and Kindergarteners initiated the program that year. It is anticipated that classes for grade 1 and 2 students will be initiated in 2003-04. At Liberty City Elementary School, the Calvert Model was initiated in Kindergarten and grade 1 during the 2001-02 school year. The program was extended to grade 2 in 2002-03. The *I Choose!* project will support the extension of the program to one more grade each year

through grade 5 in 2005-06. Ultimately, students will be able to continue in this program through grade 8 at Brownsville Middle School.

To summarize, two major activities occurred during year 1 that addressed the expansion of school choice options in Choice Zone 1. First, a review was conducted of the established programs with themes that were slated for implementation in the targeted schools. These included International Baccalaureate/International Education, International Studies, Montessori, and Professional Development Schools. The review revealed that there was generally little difference in the quality of the established programs. The second activity involved the identification of eight schools that are comparable to the eight targeted schools that were in operation during year 1. These comparison schools will be used to gauge the impact of the *I Choose!* project on the targeted schools.

Educational Equity in Marketing

Educational equity in marketing was measured by the *Parent Survey*. Baseline data on the amount of choice being exercised by targeted school parents versus the comparison school parents were collected from the survey. A 30% random sample of parents in each group were surveyed. Table 6 displays the specific number of recipients and respondents from each group. The final column in the table reveals that the overall response rate was 17.9%, which is somewhat disappointing. However, surveys of parents generally yield such low response rates. Nevertheless, with a total of 578 respondents, the survey results should provide evidence of the parents' general perceptions.

Table 6
Responses to the Parent Survey

Group	Recipients	Respondents	
	n	n	%
Targeted schools	1,710	310	18.1
Comparison schools	1,516	268	17.7
Total	3,226	578	17.9

According to the survey results, over half of the parents in both the targeted school group and the comparison school group were aware that they had certain options regarding which public school their child attends. The affirmative responses were 62% and 55% respectively. Table 7 presents the reported sources of information among parents who were aware of their options. The most common sources

for parents in both groups were the school, and friends/family. The radio/television and the ACCESS Centers were secondary sources of information.

Table 7
Parent Survey: Sources of information on choice options

Group	Source of information %(n)							Total
	Radio/TV	Newspaper	School	Billboards	Friends/family	ACCESS	Other	
Targeted schools	11(20)	4(7)	37(70)	1(2)	29(55)	12(23)	5(10)	187
Comparison schools	10(14)	4(6)	33(45)	1(1)	34(47)	10(14)	7(10)	137
Total	10(34)	4(13)	35(115)	1(3)	31(102)	11(37)	6(20)	324

Note: See Appendix C for the full text of the questions.

Table 8 presents a summary of the reasons that parents, who were aware of their choice options, gave for deciding to enroll their child at the neighborhood school. A review of the table reveals that, once again, the responses of the targeted and comparison school parents are fairly similar. About one third of the respondents in both groups chose the neighborhood school due to proximity. About 20% indicated that they based their decision on the quality of the neighborhood school’s program. Again, about 20% based their decision on the inherent safety of the neighborhood school. The remaining reasons were each selected by less than 10% of the parents.

Table 8
Parent Survey: Reasons for choosing neighborhood school

Group	Reasons %(n)						Chose another school	Total
	Proximity to home	Program quality	Convenient to work or child care	Safety	Choice process unclear	Other		
Targeted schools	32(60)	21(39)	9(16)	23(43)	5(10)	4(8)	5(10)	186
Comparison schools	36(50)	20(28)	5(7)	19(26)	6(8)	5(7)	9(13)	139
Total	34(110)	21(67)	7(23)	21(69)	6(18)	5(15)	7(23)	325

Note: See Appendix C for the full text of the questions.

Incidentally, it should be noted that a higher percentage of comparison school students than targeted school students had enrolled in schools outside their neighborhood, 9% (n=13) versus 5% (n=10). This is a surprising result, because as has been noted, there are some options already available in the targeted schools, but not in comparison schools. These comparison school students apparently obtained “hardship,” or administrative, transfers from the ACCESS Centers.

In addition to the *Parent Survey*, applicant data were available for the one targeted program scheduled to begin during year 2. It has been anticipated that the demographic characteristics of the choice zone combined with the appeal of the programs will result in increased diversity in the targeted schools. Ada Merritt Elementary School, although it is admittedly not the typical *I Choose!* school, seems to have produced this outcome. Recruitment for this school reached out to parents who work near its location in downtown Miami and who desired a bilingual, “prep school” type curriculum. The demographic mix of the students whose parents submitted applications for its opening year reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the district: 26% black, 14% white, 47% Hispanic, 10% multiracial, and 1% Asian.

In summary, the results of the Parent Survey and the initial applicants to one of the targeted schools yielded insights into the marketing of the *I Choose!* project. They revealed that the majority of the responding parents are aware of their options regarding which school their child attends. The parents primarily received information about those options from the school and from friends or relatives. Nevertheless, less than 10% of targeted school students attend schools outside their neighborhood. On the other hand, the applicants to the new targeted school, which recruited during year 1, reflected the racial/ethnic diversity of the district.

Educational Equity in Selection

The method for determining the eligibility for enrollment in the targeted schools is currently in the planning stages. The intent is to design a method that will increase enrollment, diversify the student body, and involve more families in the choice process. Procedures for ensuring equitable access to educational options have been developed in the MDCPS over many years in a variety of programs. For example, the MDCPS Board Rule 6Gx13- 6A-1.46, which pertains to magnet programs/schools, sets forth procedures to be followed in recruiting and selecting students. The goal of these procedures is to establish “a broadly diverse student population reflective of the diversity in the student population districtwide.” To achieve this goal, “all elementary attendance boundaries in the district [are divided] into one of four designated groups based on indicators of school performance and socio-economic circumstances.” Students are then admitted to non-talent-based magnet programs/schools on a random selection basis.

The recruitment and selection processes of magnet programs/schools are well defined routines. Early in the fall, staff of each program/school review their student population, and set goals for recruiting students who would increase the diversity with regard to language needs or abilities, socio-economic circumstances, race, ethnicity, gender, and exceptional education needs. Application forms and informational materials are then disseminated districtwide. Recruitment begins on October 1, and all applications are due at the appropriate magnet program/school by January 31.

In reviewing the applications, the school staff may utilize established criteria for selection relevant to the “educational needs of the magnet program/school.” These criteria, which may be related to “such factors as skill, talent, academic performance, conduct, written essay, and interest,” are scrutinized by district staff in order to ensure that they do not pose “unnecessary barriers to equitable access.” Once eligibility has been determined, admission is based on the random selection of the applicants, who have been stratified according to the magnet program/school’s attendance boundary, if appropriate. Priority is always given to the siblings of students already enrolled in the magnet program/school. In the case of magnet schools without an attendance boundary, priority is given to students residing in the established priority service zone. Parents notified of their child’s selection must accept by March 31 or forfeit their child’s spot.

The process of selecting students for the *I Choose!* schools will not mirror the one devised for the magnet programs/schools, but certain aspects will be incorporated. Like the magnet process, some preference will be granted based on the applicant’s interests and the enrollment of a sibling in the school. Additionally, the selection for programs that are oversubscribed will take place on a random selection basis. However, unlike the magnet process, selection will also consider the proximity of the desired program. Furthermore, although students outside the choice zone may apply to a program, only those residing within it will be provided with transportation. The process that is finally adopted will necessarily include the establishment of a convenient location for accepting and processing requests for enrollment in the schools. While these activities have traditionally been carried out at ACCESS Centers or individual schools, the encouragement of transfers across ACCESS Center boundaries will necessitate that disinterested parties assume this role.

Equitable Transportation Options

A specific objective of the *I Choose!* project is the improvement of the efficiency and the availability of students' transportation within the choice zones. Planning for these improvements is proceeding. The *I Choose!* project staff have been involved in a number of meetings with the Transportation Administrative Director and his staff, including a presentation to the Schools of Choice Advisory Committee (SCAC) Transportation Subcommittee and a School Board Workshop. Adjustments to the boundaries of Choice Zone 1 have been made in consultation with the Transportation Administrative Director. A Magnet/Choice Transportation Committee will be established to oversee the tailoring of the new system to meet the needs of the families wishing to take advantage of the emerging choice options. Current discussions are focusing on such things as the specific number of choices that will be offered. For example, the feasibility of allowing senior high school students to choose among all of the senior highs in the zone is being explored. Additionally, a narrower range of choices, which is still significantly greater than those currently offered, is being considered for elementary and middle school students.

Since Ada Merritt Elementary School was developed as a commuter school for the children of parents who work near downtown, no transportation adjustments were needed. For the remaining eight targeted schools in Choice Zone 1, the baseline data on transportation were gathered through the *Parent Survey* and from district records. The results of the survey indicated that the vast majority of students currently travel to school by private means. Only about 10% of the elementary students take a school bus or Metro bus, as compared to one fourth to one third of middle school students. There was no apparent difference between the targeted schools and the comparison schools in this respect. Moreover, the vast majority of parents in both groups reported that their children take 30 minutes or less to travel to school. Less than six percent reported that their children rode a bus for over 30 minutes.

According to district records, the proportion of students that the district transported to and from the targeted elementary schools during the 2001-02 school year ranged from zero to 48%. At the targeted middle school, 13% were transported (MDCPS, 2002a). The corresponding data for the comparison elementary schools were zero to 22%. And, at the comparison middle school, it was 20%.

Cost-Effective Transportation

Improved cost-effectiveness for transportation was to be accomplished by the implementation of a computerized routing system that would replace the obsolete map and routing system. Additionally, the availability of attractive educational options within Choice Zone 1 would encourage parents to enroll their children in programs close to their homes. At the close of year 1, the software necessary for the computerized routing system had not been purchased, and the new educational options were still in the planning stages. Nevertheless, it was possible to approximate the baseline level of transportation associated with educational options in Choice Zone 1.

With regard to transportation, the magnet programs/schools represent the most expensive educational option. In order to establish baseline data, a comparison was made of the number of magnet students residing in Choice Zone 1 who received transportation in year 1 with those who live in other zones. Table 9 presents the number of magnet students in these two categories, as well as the total number in the district. As can be seen by a perusal of the table, the number of magnet students eligible for transportation in the district was 12,940. Of those students, the number residing in Choice Zone 1 was 1,416 and the number in other zones was 11,524.

Table 9
Magnet students eligible for transportation, year 1

School level	Eligible students: Ratio(N)		
	Choice Zone 1	Other zones	District (All zones)
Elementary	.006(158)	.017(2,428)	.015(2,586)
Middle	.043(486)	.055(3,782)	.053(4,268)
Senior high	.044(772)	.063(5,314)	.059(6,086)
All	.026(1,416)	.038(11,524)	.037(12,940)
<i>Note:</i> The ratio is calculated by dividing the number of magnet students eligible for transportation by the total number of students enrolled in the respective zones.			

In order to make a meaningful comparison, the ratio was calculated for each cell in the table. The number of magnet students eligible for transportation was divided by the total number of students enrolled in the respective school level and zone/s. Incidentally, since the students eligible for transportation may attend magnet schools/programs anywhere in the district, they may not be counted as a subset of the student population in Choice Zone 1 or the other zones. Therefore, the ratios cannot be interpreted as a percentage of student enrollment. Nevertheless, the ratios do provide an index for comparing the relative demand for transportation by zone. Accordingly, the ratios indicate

that in year 1 there were proportionately fewer magnet students eligible for transportation in Choice Zone 1 (.026) than in the other zones (.038). The difference in the ratios at each school level was between .01 and .02. Thus, it may be concluded that in year 1 the choice-related transportation cost of Choice Zone 1 to the district was lower than that of the rest of the district.

Students' Academic Achievement

The reputation of a school often reflects both the parents' perception of their children's academic achievement and the actual performance of the children on standardized tests. The former may be based on the latter, or it may be based upon other factors, like personal experience. It may even be based upon the opportunity to choose a school rather than be assigned to it. This section will address both the parents' satisfaction with their children's school, and the children's performance on achievement tests.

Parent satisfaction

Selected results of the parent form of the *School Climate Survey* from the targeted and comparison elementary and middle schools are summarized in Tables 10 and 11 respectively. The first row of each table contains the mean percentages of all district parents from the corresponding school level who tended to agree with the designated survey items (i.e., responded either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"). To gauge differences from these means, the range of average scores was operationally defined as plus or minus one standard deviation from the mean. This criterion should encompass approximately two-thirds of the district schools with ratings close to the mean. They are thus regarded as typical schools falling in the operationally-defined average range. The second row in both tables displays the range of each criterion. For example, row 1 in Table 10 reveals that the mean response to item 1, which deals with the school's safety, is 85%. And, row two reveals that the average range for this mean is defined as 79% to 92%. Consequently, any percentage above 92% would be regarded as a very favorable response, and any below 79% would be regarded as a very unfavorable response. The subsequent rows in the tables display the percentages for each school. The percentages that are above or below the average range are highlighted.

A perusal of both Tables 10 and 11 reveals that the parents' responses at both targeted and comparison schools generally fall into the average range, and the responses at each targeted school are

similar to those at the corresponding comparison school. Nevertheless, there are a few exceptions. The school with the most favorable responses is Melrose Elementary School. On eight of the ten items, the responses at this school were above the average range. Its comparison school, J. H. Bright Elementary School, did not receive above-average responses on any of the items. Therefore, it appears that Melrose is beginning the project with an advantage over Bright. In contrast, Poinciana Park Elementary School received unfavorable responses on six items. It is paired with B. J. Hawkins Elementary, which also received unfavorable responses, albeit on only three items. Thus, Poinciana Park appears to be at some disadvantage, although its results are based on an extremely low response rate (17%).

Table 10

School Climate Survey: Targeted and comparison elementary schools, 2001-02

Elementary School (response rate)	Item: % of "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" Responses								
	1. Safe	4. Academic standards	5. Discipline	6. Materials, equipment	10. Inspiring teachers	13. Well-informed teachers	21. Critical thinking	22. Study habits	23. N cult relat
District mean	85	76	73	89	92	90	82	87	8
District mean ± 1 standard deviation	79 - 92	65 - 88	66 - 80	84 - 95	88 - 96	85 - 95	76 - 88	82 - 92	83 -
Earlington Hghts. (49%)	87	76	67	90	92	86	86	89	9
W. Little River (54%)	81	72	76	91	92	85	85	90	8
L. C. Evans (41%)	86	62	73	86	89	88	72	92	8
Westview (57%)	89	73	76	87	91	86	81	87	8
M. L. King (24%)	93	69	69	84	93	93	84	86	8
N. B. Young (57%)	91	70	73	85	93	89	80	91	9
Liberty City (40%)	81	70	67	88	92	91	82	89	8
North County (57%)	81	68	66	85	86	83	80	88	8
Lorah Park (70%)	92	68	70	92	89	89	85	90	8
V. E. Blanton (61%)	85	70	76	90	88	87	85	89	8
Melrose (75%)	84	75	82	99	97	98	92	97	9
J. H. Bright (76%)	82	57	77	93	94	90	85	90	9
Poinciana Pk. (17%)	80	57	65	83	86	93	78	84	8
B. J. Hawkins (54%)	81	74	74	77	87	89	81	85	8

Note: The shaded cells highlight values that are higher than 1 standard deviation above the mean (dark shade) or lower than 1 standard deviation below the mean (light shade). The source is *School Climate Survey 2001-02 Results* (http://drs.dadeschools.net/ClimateSurvey/2001-02/Schools_0102.htm). See Appendix B for the full text of the survey. ^aThe standard deviation cannot be computed for the responses to item 35.

Table 11

School Climate Survey: Targeted and comparison middle schools, 2001-02

Middle School (response rate)	Item: % of "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" Responses								
	1. Safe	4. Academic standards	5. Discipline	6. Materials, equipment	10. Inspiring teachers	13. Well-informed teachers	21. Critical thinking	22. Study habits	23. N cult relat
District (mean)	72	61	69	80	72	76	73	73	7
District mean ± 1 standard deviation	58 - 87	45 - 77	56 - 81	66 - 94	59 - 84	64 - 89	61 - 85	60 - 85	62 -
Brownsville (28%)	66	60	72	70	74	80	69	70	7
Westview (25%)	66	43	62	82	65	72	78	80	7

Note: The shaded cell highlights a value that is below 1 standard deviation below the mean (i.e., below the average range). The source is *School Climate Survey 2001-02 Results* (http://drs.dadeschools.net/ClimateSurvey/2001-02/Schools_0102.htm). See Appendix B for the full text of the survey items. ^aThe standard deviation cannot be computed for the responses to item 35.

Achievement Test Results

The *Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test-Sunshine State Standards (FCAT-SSS)* is the state's primary instrument for gauging students' academic performance. The *FCAT-SSS* Test encompasses an extensive battery of sub-tests, including criterion-referenced assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 10. Each year, the raw scores on these tests are converted to Levels from 1 to 5. Level 3 or above is designated as "Proficient." Summaries of the 2002 *FCAT-SSS* Test results for the targeted and comparison schools are displayed by school level respectively in Tables 12 and 13. The layout of these tables is similar to that of Tables 10 and 11. Specifically, the first row in each table displays the mean percentage of district students in each grade scoring at Level 3 or above. The second row displays the average range of percentages, which is operationally defined as plus or minus one standard deviation from the mean percentage. The subsequent rows in the tables display the percentages of students scoring at Level 3 or above at each school. Percentages that are below the average range are highlighted.

Table 12
2002 FCAT-SSS Test: Targeted and comparison elementary schools

Elementary school	% of students scoring at Level 3+					
	Reading			Mathematics		
	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
District mean	57	56	50	58	49	52
District mean \pm 1 standard deviation	38 - 75	36 - 75	30 - 70	38 - 78	29 - 69	32 - 71
Earlington Heights	28	30	20	39	35	24
W. Little River	37	25	22	42	11	28
L. C. Evans	38	22	20	29	16	13
Westview	27	29	21	16	20	25
M. L. King	33	-	-	37	-	-
N. B. Young	32	47	22	42	10	22
Liberty City	40	67	30	38	39	57
North County	36	29	28	53	40	46
Lorah Park	57	35	37	73	43	42
V. E. Blanton	34	63	28	46	53	40
Melrose	42	52	36	63	46	71
J. H. Bright	58	49	36	68	50	57
Poinciana Park	28	14	14	36	30	25
B. J. Hawkins	43	24	34	34	17	26

Note: The shaded cells highlight values that are more than 1 standard deviation below the mean. Standard curriculum students only. The data source is *Miami-Dade County Public Schools 2002 FCAT Report: District and School Results*. The *I Choose!* schools are in bold type.

A perusal of Tables 12 and 13 reveals that neither the targeted nor the comparison schools posted scores above the average range in any grade or subject area category. In fact, of the targeted schools, Lillie C. Evans and Poinciana Park Elementary Schools, and Brownsville Middle School posted lower scores than most of the schools in the district in virtually every category. Only two targeted elementary schools, Liberty City and Melrose, performed consistently in the average range. Nevertheless, in most cases, the performance of the comparison school was similar to that of the corresponding targeted school. The only exception was North County Elementary School, which posted scores in reading that were lower than those at Liberty City Elementary School.

Table 13
2002 FCAT-SSS Test: Targeted and comparison middle schools

Middle school	% of students scoring at Level 3+					
	Reading			Mathematics		
	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
District mean	46	44	40	39	41	45
District mean \pm 1 standard deviation	27 - 64	26 - 62	23 - 57	21 - 58	23 - 59	26 - 65
Brownsville	22	15	16	14	17	20
Westview	18	18	15	11	22	23

Note: The shaded cells highlight values that are more than 1 standard deviation below the mean. Standard curriculum students only. The data source is *Miami-Dade County Public Schools 2002 FCAT Report: District and School Results*. The *I Choose!* schools are in bold type.

In summary, the parents' perceptions of school achievement at both targeted and comparison schools generally fell into the average range. As such, the responses at each targeted school were similar to those at the corresponding comparison school. Two exceptions that are worthy of note are Melrose Elementary School, which had more favorable responses than its comparison school, and Poinciana Park Elementary School, which had less favorable responses. From the perspective of standardized test results, the students' achievement at both the targeted and the comparison schools was generally lower than that of most schools in the district. Only two targeted schools, Liberty City and Melrose Elementary Schools, performed consistently in the average range.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation of the *I Choose!* project, which is underwritten by the Voluntary Public School Choice grant, adheres to a longitudinal strategy. To date, the evaluation has compiled baseline data for the 2002-03 school year, or year 1 of the project. The specific focus of the evaluation was presented in the Design of the Evaluation as a series of questions. These questions can now be addressed for Choice Zone 1 in year 1 of the project. Choice Zone 2 has yet to be identified. It will be addressed in subsequent reports on the evaluation.

1. To what extent have educational options in Choice Zone 1 been expanded? To what extent have they in Choice Zone 2?

Year 1 of the project was devoted to planning. The boundaries for Choice Zone 1 were identified, and the strategy for increasing options in that zone was developed. The strategy prompted three major activities during year 1. First, nine schools in Choice Zone 1 were targeted for program improvement. Second, a review was conducted of the established programs with themes that are being considered for the targeted schools. These include: International Baccalaureate/International Education, International Studies, Montessori, and Professional Development Schools. Finally, eight schools serving student populations that are comparable to those of the eight targeted schools were identified. They will be used as comparison schools in the evaluation. Given these activities, it should be acknowledged that there are already numerous educational options available to students in Choice Zone 1. In fact, the percentage of schools offering such options is greater in Choice Zone 1 than it is in the district as a whole. However, the extent to which these options are distinct from one another is often unclear. Furthermore, it is not known how many of the Choice Zone 1 families have availed themselves of these educational options. The evaluation should eventually shed light on these issues.

2. Does the strategy for marketing the project equitably target all families in Choice Zone 1? Does it in Choice Zone 2?

The Choice Zone 1 parents' awareness of options in year 1 of the project provides a baseline for gauging the equitability of marketing in the future. In year 1, the majority of the parents in the targeted schools were aware that they had certain options regarding which public school their child attends.

However, nearly all had selected their neighborhood school for their child. In contrast, the examination of the question from another perspective revealed that the applicants to the one targeted school that recruited during year 1 reflected the racial/ethnic diversity of the district.

3. Are the student selection procedures of the project equitable in Choice Zone 1? Are they in Choice Zone 2?

The student selection procedures for the targeted schools were still in the planning stages during year 1. The aim of the procedures, however, will be to increase enrollment, diversify the student body, and involve more families in the choice process.

4. Are the transportation options equitable throughout Choice Zone 1? Are they in Choice Zone 2?

Planning for improvements in the efficiency and availability of students' transportation within the choice zones proceeded during year 1. The discussions focused on the specific number of school choices that will be offered to the students in Choice Zone 1. Ada Merritt Elementary School, the only school scheduled to receive students in year 2, was developed as a commuter school, so it did not require transportation services. However, the baseline data for the remaining eight targeted schools in Choice Zone 1 indicated that about 10% of the elementary students and one third of the middle school students took a school bus or a Metro bus to school. The actual percentage of students who are transported by the school district ranged from zero to 48% at the targeted elementary schools. At the targeted middle school, 13% were transported.

5. Are the transportation options in Choice Zone 1 cost-effective for the MDCPS? Are they in Choice Zone 2?

The cost-effectiveness for transportation will be improved by the implementation of a new computerized routing system, and by offering attractive educational options within Choice Zone 1. At the close of year 1 of the project, the software necessary for computerized routing system had not been purchased, and the new educational options in Choice Zone 1 were still in the planning stages. Nevertheless, it was possible to approximate the baseline level of transportation associated with magnet options in Choice Zone 1. Proportionately fewer students in Choice Zone 1 received

transportation to magnet schools/programs than in the rest of the district. Therefore, it appears that Choice Zone 1 is one of the least expensive transportation zones in the district.

6. Have students enrolled in the targeted schools of Choice Zone 1 exhibited academic improvement? Have they in Choice Zone 2?

Data on academic performance were gathered from parents' responses to the *School Climate Survey* and students' scores on the *Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT)*. With few exceptions, parents' responses regarding school achievement at both targeted and comparison schools fell into the average range for the district. Additionally, the responses at each targeted school were similar to those at the corresponding comparison school. Two exceptions which are worthy of note are Melrose Elementary School, which had more favorable responses than its comparison school, and Poinciana Park Elementary School, which had less favorable responses. The students' scores on the *FCAT* were generally lower than that of most schools in the district at both the targeted and the comparison schools. Only two targeted schools, Liberty City Elementary and Melrose Elementary, performed consistently in the average range.

In summary, the evaluation of the *I Choose!* project in year 1 yielded several results. Year 1 was devoted to planning. The boundaries of Choice Zone 1 were identified, and the strategy for increasing options in the zone was developed. Nine schools in Choice Zone 1 were targeted for program improvement, and a review of the established programs with themes that are being considered for these schools was conducted. In addition, eight schools outside of Choice Zone 1 were identified that serve similar student populations to those of the targeted schools. The targeted and comparison schools were found to have similar levels of parental awareness of available options and similar proportions of transported students. With few exceptions, the pairs of schools also exhibited similar levels of parent satisfaction with academic performance and similar levels of student performance on the *Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT)*. For the duration of the evaluation, the comparison schools will be used to gauge the performance of the targeted schools in Choice zone 1. This strategy will be extended to Choice Zone 2, when its boundaries are identified and targeted schools are selected.

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APPENDIX A

SCHOOLS IN CHOICE ZONE 1

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

PARENT FORM

APPENDIX C
PARENT SURVEY