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Antecedents and Consequences of Residential Choice and School Transfer

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Abstract

This article examines the antecedents and consequences of residential choice and school transfers within one of the eight largest urban school districts in Texas. This study is based on survey data from a representative sample of parents of K-12 students enrolled in this district. In addition to demographic characteristics of the family, the parent decision-making model of Schneider, Teske, & Marschall (2000) was examined to determine if aspects of this model were useful in understanding the school choices made at the beginning of the school year and the parents' motivation to move to another

school at the end. The results provide some support for the view that residential choice is related to enhanced achievement and satisfaction; while, within-district transfers were used more by better-educated White parents who did not qualify as low income. Parents' motivation to move their children to another school was greater when they perceived the school as less receptive to their involvement and their children as less successful in school.

Proponents of school choice emphasize the benefits of shifting power away from the educational bureaucracies running public schools toward the parents of primary and secondary school students by allowing parents more choice in the schools their children attend (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1955; Glass, 1994; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000). Parents are regarded as the group most likely to pressure schools to meet the needs of their children, and consequently, improve the overall quality of education provided by American schools (Howell, Peterson, Wolf, & Campbell, 2002; Schneider et al., 2000). However, critics of school choice argue that many parents would make school choices based on the "wrong" criteria, such as the predominant social class of the students in a particular school or district, or make no choices at all (Ascher, Fruchter, & Berne, 1996; The Carnegie Foundation, 1992). Consequently, critics argue that the full-scale use of choice by parents might lead to greater stratification within U.S. primary and secondary schools, particularly in terms of socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity (Gill, Timpane, Ross, & Brewer, 2001; Howell et al., 2002; The Carnegie Foundation, 1992). This article examines the extent to which a variety of demographic factors were related to the school choices of parents of students enrolled in an urban school district with a diverse student population. This study is based on survey data from a representative sample of parents of K-12th grade students collected at the end of their school year. In the present study, the schools within the district varied widely in terms of their proportion of low-income students, ranging from under four percent to more than ninety percent. Likewise, the schools varied widely in terms of the proportion of non-Hispanic White students, ranging from around three percent to over eighty percent.

Stratification

Parents with the financial resources have been selecting their children's schools by residential choice for many years (Howell et al., 2002; Schneider et al., 2000). Historically, middle or upper class parents have moved to neighborhoods served by better schools or sent their children to private schools (Henig & Sugarman, 1999). In 1993, for example, 40% of parents nationwide reported using residential location to gain access to good schools (NCES, 1997). School choice by residential choice has been widespread for many years, leading to substantial stratification of our public schools, by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Orfield & Lee, 2004). Because residential choice was common in the district we studied, we asked parents to gauge the extent to which they had selected their neighborhood based on the quality of the schools serving that neighborhood.

In the U.S., much of the stratification of public schools has resulted from middle and upper income parents leaving inner city public schools for suburban ones (Howell et al., 2002). In order to stem this flight of higher income families, many urban school districts allowed parents to transfer their children to within district schools other than the ones they

were assigned to. In the present study, the school district allowed parents to make such transfers if there was room at the receiving school. Because of these within district transfer opportunities, we asked parents in our sample if their children had transferred to the school they attended or whether this school was the one their children were assigned to.

The present study evaluated not only the extent to which the parents had exercised two types of school choice, but also, the extent to which the parents were motivated to move their children to a public school in another school district, or move their child to a private school. A greater understanding of this motivation might help to explain why some parents have not exercised their right to move their children to another school, even when they were given this option (Campbell, West & Peterson, 2001; Schneider et al., 2000). No doubt various demographic factors affect this motivation, such as income status, ethnicity, or parents' educational levels. For example, Bosisis (2001) reported the results of opinion polls suggesting that African American parents may be particularly interested in vouchers. Likewise, some research has reported that mothers of children who use vouchers tend to have more education than other mothers within the same eligible group (Howell, & Peterson, 2000; Peterson, Myers, & Howell, 1999). Of course, some voucher programs have been designed specifically for low-income families (e.g., in Milwaukee and Cleveland, see Gill et al., 2001). If some demographic groups are more motivated to move than others, this could lead to further stratification of schools in the U.S. The present study examines if parents' motivation to move their children to another school is related to their educational levels, race, ethnicity, or low-income status.

The Black Box

Originally, the push for school choice was justified in terms of theories of economics (Friedman, 1955) or political science (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The idea was that by changing institutions so that parents could select their children's schools, market forces and the power of parents would influence schools to improve. There was little in the way of theoretical models explaining the mechanisms within schools and families that would bring about school improvement. One theoretician to attempt to explain the "black box" of school choice was Mark Schneider and his colleagues (Schneider et al., 2000; Teske & Schneider, 2001). A key element in their parent decision-making model was the linkage between choice and involvement. Schneider et al. reasoned that when parents chose their children's schools, they became more involved in the school as well as more engaged in their children's education. This enhancement of parent involvement was hypothesized to promote not only higher quality schools, but also, greater educational success for their own children. Furthermore, Teske & Schneider (2001) argued that this enhanced school success led parents to have greater satisfaction in their children's schools.

The parent decision-making model of Schneider et al. (2000) has received only mixed support from research. For example, Howell et al. (2002) evaluated the outcomes of voucher programs in Dayton, Ohio, Washington, D.C., and New York City, using random field tests, and found that parents who used their vouchers to send their children to schools of their choice were no more involved than parents who did not get vouchers. In addition, Bielick & Chapman (2003) examined the results of three national surveys, conducted in the 90s, and found that while parents of children attending private schools were more involved in their children's schools, there was no difference in involvement between parents of students attending chosen versus assigned public schools. However, in support of the

parent decision-making model, Howell et al. (2002) found the expected improvement in student achievement among some groups of students attending chosen schools, notably African American students. However, extensive research conducted on participants in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program found no significant differences in achievement between students attending chosen schools and students attending their assigned schools (Witte, 2000). Thus, the key linkage in Schneider et al.'s parent decision-making model, namely greater school choice leading to more parent involvement and subsequent student achievement, has received only mixed empirical support from research. Nonetheless, several studies of school choice programs have found that parents are more satisfied when their children attend chosen public or private schools than when they attend assigned public schools (Bielick & Chapman, 2003; Moe, 2001).

Schneider et al.'s parent decision-making model was developed to explain what happens after parents exercise school choice. The present study not only examines whether this model sheds light on the processes that are triggered after school choice, but also this study examines whether this model is useful in understanding parents' motivation to move their children to another school district or to private school. In other words, the present study examines the extent to which the mechanisms of choice, involvement, achievement and satisfaction were affected by school choice and also whether these mechanisms affected the parents' motivation to move their children to another school. Consistent with the model, we hypothesized that school choice would be associated with greater involvement, achievement, and satisfaction. We also expected that parents who had less choice in the schools their children attended, who were less involved in their children's education, who perceived less achievement in their children, and who were less satisfied with their children's schools, would be more motivated to move their children to another school district or a private school.

Method

School District

All the parents in our sample had enrolled at least one child in the Austin Independent School District, during the 2000-2001 school year. According to the Texas Education Agency (2001a), the total number of students enrolled in the district during this school year was 77, 816 and they attended 109 schools, including 74 elementary, 17 middle/junior highs, and 12 high schools. There were magnet schools within four comprehensive high schools and one magnet school at the middle school level. The school district is one of the eight largest urban school districts of Texas, and covers most, but not all of the public schools within the city limits. The district is completely surrounded by suburban school districts. In terms of the racial and ethnic composition of the students during the 2000-2001 school year, 16% of the students were African American, 48% were Hispanic, 34% were non-Hispanic White, and 3% were categorized as Other. Forty-eight percent of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged. Of those district students who had taken the state's competency test in the spring of 2001, 74.3% passed all sections, compared to 82.1% for the state average (Texas Education Agency, 2001b).

Sampling Procedure

In order to obtain information from a representative sample of district parents, we conducted telephone interviews with a stratified random sample of parents of students enrolled during the 2000-2001 school year. The unit of analysis was the individual student, not household or school, and each question during the interview was framed with regard to the specified child. This meant that parents were in the pool as many times as they had children enrolled in the school district.

The school district provided the phone numbers of all their students and these numbers served as a pool from which parents could be randomly selected to interview. However, about 12% of the parents had indicated at the beginning of the school year that they did not want their phone numbers released outside the school and 16% of the remaining parents had no working phone numbers according to school records. Nothing could be done to include the parents of the former group into our sampling universe. Consequently, the conclusions we draw are thus applicable to the 88% of the district's students who had a non-zero chance of selection into our sample. Fortunately, we were able to recover 48% of the missing phone numbers for parents who had no working telephone by providing their names and addresses to a vendor who matched this information with information available from several phone companies. Because we thought that parents whose phone numbers were recovered might be different from parents who had working numbers on record with the district, we stratified our sample in terms of whether the number was recovered or available on record. In this way, we controlled the effect that this telephone variable had on our sample.

We also stratified the sample by ethnic/racial group, low-income status, and school level, based on information provided by the school district. Specifically, the self-reported ethnic/racial group of the students was divided into three major categories: Hispanic, non-Hispanic White (hereafter referred to as White), and African American. Students who did not fit into any of these three categories (less than 3% of the district's students) were combined with the White group. We defined low-income students as those who qualified for free or reduced price lunch, or who had a sibling who had received a Pell grant, or whose family had qualified for state welfare. All others were categorized as not low income. Finally, parents were stratified by their children's school level so that the parents of students in elementary, middle, and high schools would be represented in the sample.

The number of parents interviewed was based on the number of completed interviews we needed within each of the stratification categories of Ethnic/Racial, Low Income Status, School Level, and Phone Number groups in order to ensure a margin of error no greater than 6%.

The interviewer asked to speak to "the parent or guardian of (child's name) or the adult in your household who is most involved in decisions about the education of this child." The interviewers made as many as five attempts to interview the parent or guardian of the selected student. Then, if the parent could still not be reached, the interviewer randomly selected another student from the same category and began the process of trying to reach that parent. Interviewers continued selecting students until they had completed the number of interviews needed for each category. Interviewing was conducted in English or Spanish at the choice of the respondent.

Interview Instrument

The interview instrument asked the parents to consider the experiences of only the child named by the interviewer, during the 2000-2001 school year. There were 34 questions asked of all parents and another four questions asked of parents of high school students. Most of the questions were designed to evaluate aspects of the child's experiences at the school. The questions included items measuring the motivation of the parent to move the child to another school, the degree of school choice made by the parent, the extent of the parents' school involvement, the parents' perception of the child's success in school, and the parents' satisfaction with the quality of the education the child received from the school. In addition, the parents were asked to describe their own educational attainment.

Data Analysis

In analyzing our data, we used statistical software that allowed us to calculate estimates and their standard errors appropriately for data from a stratified sample design (Lohr, 1999). Weights were calculated as the inverse of the selection probability, or N_h/n_h , where N_h is the number of students in stratum h , and n_h is the sample size within that stratum. All the analyses conducted for this study were weighted analyses using SAS's PROC SURVEYREG or SURVEYMEANS.

Results

Sample

The interviews were conducted by telephone from May 2001 through mid-July 2001 by professional interview staff at the Office of Survey Research at the University of Texas. In order to complete the 909 interviews we needed to assure a margin of error of no greater than 6%, we had to attempt to call 3,481 parents. The 3,481 parents included 381 parents who never answered the phone, 88 parents whose telephones were always busy, 754 parents whose answering machines answered all five calls, 415 parents who requested us to call back, but were never reached, and 852 parents who had provided the school district with invalid phone numbers. Only 82 parents refused to be interviewed. One hundred and twenty-five parents chose to be interviewed in Spanish.

Table 1 presents the distribution of our sample by the four strata. In terms of the ethnic/racial strata, 300 parents had White (or other) children, 273 parents had African American children, and 336 parents had Hispanic children. In terms of the Phone Number strata, 154 parents had recovered phone numbers and 755 parents had phone numbers available at the school. In terms of Income Status, 432 parents were low income and 477 parents were not. In terms of school level, 326 parents had children in elementary school, 282 had children in middle school, and 301 had children in high school.

Table 1
Distribution of Parents by Four Strata:
Ethnic/Race, Phone Number, School Level, and Income Status

Students' Ethnic/Race	Phone Number	School Level					
		Elementary		Middle		High	
		Low Income	Not Low	Low Income	Not Low	Low Income	Not Low
White +	Recovered	2	6	5	9	2	12
	Available	13	69	9	75	7	91
African American	Recovered	15	4	9	5	8	7
	Available	77	24	34	20	35	35
Hispanic	Recovered	17	3	23	7	11	9
	Available	73	23	55	31	37	47

Note: N=909. White+ consists of 292 non-Hispanic Whites, 2 Native Americans, and 6 Asian Americans.

The educational attainment varied widely among the parents in our sample, with 11.4% indicating that they had an elementary school education or less, 11.3% indicating that they had completed some high school, 19.4% indicating they were high school graduates, 23.3% indicating they had completed some college, 22.4% indicating they had graduated from college, and 11.5% indicating they had completed a graduate degree. Most parents (94%) indicated that they expected their children to go to and graduate from college. Slightly more than half (51%) of the parents in our sample were parents of sons. Most of the parents interviewed (81%) were mothers.

Measurement

School Choice. Choice here is measured in two ways. One item asked parents if the specified child attended his or her assigned school, or whether the student had transferred to another school. Of the 909 parents in our sample, 79% reported that their son or daughter attended their assigned school, while 14% reported that their child had transferred to another school within the district. Seven percent of the parents indicated that they did not know the answer to this question. Of those who transferred their children, 31% had children who attended elementary, 26% had children in middle, and 43% had children in high school. Of the parents who reported their children had transferred, 11% said they did so to allow their children to attend a magnet school or special program within a school, such as an International Baccalaureate program.

The second school choice item asked parents to express on a 5-point scale the extent to which they had selected their neighborhood because of the schools. Parents were almost evenly divided in terms of the degree of residential choice they had exercised, with 44% disagreeing (ratings 1 or 2) and 47% agreeing (ratings 4 or 5) with the residential choice item. This item along with the other items with 5- or 10-point response formats are presented in Table 2. Table 2 presents the weighted means and standard errors for all of these items.

Table 2
Weighted Means and Standard Errors of Residential Choice, Parent Involvement, Student Achievement, Satisfaction, and Motivation to Move Items

Topic	Weighted Mean	Standard Error
Residential Choice		
I selected my neighborhood because of the schools. (5 points)	3.08	.06
Involvement		
My child's school takes my ideas and suggestions seriously. (5 points)	3.70	.04
My child's school does not encourage my involvement in school activities. (5 points)	2.20	.05
How often did you contact teachers or administrators at your child's school to advocate for your child or check on his/her progress? (10 points)	6.67	.10
Achievement		
My child's academic skills are at or above his/her grade level. (5 points)	4.09	.04
How successful do you think your child has been overall this year in school? (10 points)	7.75	.08
Satisfaction		
How satisfied are you with the quality of education that your child receives at school? (10 points)	7.62	.08
How satisfied are you with your child's teachers at school? (10 points)	7.92	.08
I am satisfied with the building and grounds of my child's school. (5 points)	4.02	.04
Motivation to Move		
If I could, I would move my child to a school in a different school district. (5 points)	2.46	.05
If I could, I would enroll my child in a private school. (5 points)	2.88	.06

Note: These means are weighted. N=909.

We expected that parents who reported that their children transferred to another school would be less likely to agree with the statement about residential choice, and indeed this is what we found. Parents who reported that their children attended their assigned school agreed more with the statement about selecting their neighborhood because of the schools than did the parents who reported their children had transferred, $F(1, 778) = 11.48$, $p = .0007$. Even though we found that residential choice and transferring schools within the same district were related, we considered both scores separately in our study because these two items measure different aspects of school choice.

Parent Involvement. Parent involvement is measured here with three items, one assessing the extent to which the parents reported that the school took their ideas and suggestions seriously and the second, measuring the extent that the school did not encourage their involvement in school activities. The parents' responses to these first two involvement items were significantly and negatively correlated, $r(751) = -.17$, $p = .0002$. In addition, parent involvement was gauged in terms of the frequency with which the parents reported contacting teachers or administrators at their children's school to advocate for their children or check on their progress. The parents responses to this third item was slightly correlated with their responses to the first involvement item, $r(756) = .08$, $p = .0489$, but unrelated to their responses to the second involvement item, $r(827) = .02$, $p = .6986$. Because of the weak associations between these three variables, we considered these items as assessing distinct aspects of parent involvement.

Student Achievement. Two items measure the parents' perceptions of their children's achievement. One item assessed the extent to which the parent thought their child's academic skills were at or above grade level and the other, the extent to which the child was perceived to be successful overall in school. Not surprisingly, the scores from these two statements correlated significantly with each other, $r(886) = .43$, $p < .0001$. Despite this degree of overlap, we used these two items separately in our analyses.

School Satisfaction. Three items measure the parents' satisfaction with their children's schools. The central and basic satisfaction item asked each parent to rate, on a 10-point scale, the overall satisfaction with the quality of the education the child received. We found that almost 74% of the parents evaluated their children's school quality somewhere between a seven and ten, with a score of 10 being the highest possible. Parents' responses to this central question were strongly correlated, $r(883) = .77$, $p < .0001$, with their responses to the second satisfaction item about teachers. The third satisfaction item concerned the building and grounds and this was significantly correlated with the central satisfaction item, $r(894) = .33$, $p < .0001$, and the teacher satisfaction item, $r(851) = .27$, $p < .0001$. Despite this strong degree of overlap, we used the scores from three items separately in our analyses.

Motivation to Move. Two items assess the parents' desire to move their children to another school. The parents' responses to the item about moving to another public school were significantly correlated with the parents' responses to the item about moving to a private school, $r(883) = .43$, $p < .0001$. Despite this overlap, we used the parents' responses to these two items separately in our analyses.

School Choice and Stratification

In order to ascertain whether demographic variables were associated with the exercise of school choice at the beginning of the school year or the motivation to move to another school at the end of the school year, we calculated correlation coefficients between

several demographic variables and the four choice variables, residential choice, transfer within district, move to another district, and move to a private school. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients between Demographic Variables and School Choice and Motivation to Move Variables

Demographic Variables	School Choice		Motivation to Move	
	Residential Choice	Transfer/Not	Another Public	A Private School
Parent's Education	.09*	.12*	-.01	.01
Low Income Status	.01	-.10*	.01	.01
School Level	.05	.07	.13*	.06
Sex of Student	.05	.04	.03	.03
Ethnic-Racial Group	.05	.09*	.13*	.06
Hispanic-White	.05	.09*	.04	.04
African American-White	.14*	.00	.12*	.09*
African American-Hispanic	.17*	.08	.14*	.07

Note: * $p < .05$

These results indicate that the degree of residential choice was weakly, and negatively, correlated with parents' education, and that the parents of White and Hispanic students expressed greater degrees of residential choice than the parents of African American students. None of the other demographic variables was related to degree of residential choice exercised by the parent.

In terms of transferring students to other schools within the district, the results indicated that better educated parents, parents who were not low income, and White parents were more likely to exercise this type of school choice than less educated, low income or Hispanic parents. None of the other demographic variables was related to whether the student transferred to a school different from the one assigned by residence.

In terms of motivation to move the child to a school in another school district, the results indicated that parents of secondary students and parents of African American students were more motivated to move to another school district than were parents of elementary students or White or Hispanic students. In terms of motivation to move the

child to a private school, the results indicated that parents of African American students were more motivated than were parents of White students. None of the other demographic variables was related to the motivation to move variables.

School Choice and Parent Decision-Making Model

We correlated scores from items reflecting the mechanisms of parent involvement, student achievement, and parent satisfaction with the four school choice variables. First, we wanted to determine if the mechanisms hypothesized to result from school choice were actually correlated significantly with choosing schools.

Table 4 presents these correlation coefficients for the residential choice and transfer variables.

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients between Two School Choice and Three Mechanism Variables

Mechanism Variables	School Choice Variables	
	Residential Choice	Transfer/Not Choice
Involvement		
School takes my ideas seriously.	.13*	-.04
School does not encourage my involvement.	.04	.01
Frequency of my contact with teachers or administrators.	.01	.01
Achievement		
My child's skills are at or above grade level.	.12*	.06
My child's overall success in school this year.	.14*	.01
Satisfaction		
Satisfaction with quality of education from school.	.21*	-.03
Satisfaction with my child's teachers.	.16*	.02
Satisfaction with buildings and grounds.	.16*	.00

Note: * $p < .05$

Overall, six of the eight possible correlations between the residential choice variable and the variables representing the mechanisms of the parent decision-making model were statistically significant, although none of these relationships was strong. In contrast, none of

the eight correlations between the transfer variable and the mechanism variables was statistically significant.

Specifically, in terms of the three items assessing aspects of parent involvement, only one of the three possible correlations with residential choice reached statistical significance, indicating that the more residential choice parents reported exercising, the more they thought the school took their ideas seriously. In terms of the two items measuring the parents' perception of their children's achievement, both yielded significant correlations with residential choice, indicating that the more residential choice parents reporting exercising, the more achievement they saw in their children. Finally, in terms of three items measuring parents' satisfaction with the school, all yielded significant correlations, indicating that the more residential choice parents reported exercising, the more satisfied they were with the school.

Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients between the variables assessing the parents' desire to move their children to another school and the mechanisms from the parent decision-making model. In addition, this table reports the correlation coefficients between the residential choice variable and the two motivation-to-move variables. Note that the more residential choice parents reported, the less motivation they expressed to move their children to another public or private school. However, exercising the transfer option within the district was not associated significantly with either motivation to move variables.

The results suggested that the mechanisms of the parent decision-making model had explanatory power in terms of explaining what motivates parents to move their children to another school, either public or private. Parents expressed more motivation to move their children to another school when they believed the school did not take their ideas seriously and did not encourage their involvement in school activities. However, the correlations between frequency of parent contact with the school and the two motivation-to-move variables were not significant. Parents also expressed more motivation to move their children when they perceived their children as achieving less in school. Finally, parents expressed more motivation to move their children when they were less satisfied with the school, including overall satisfaction as well as satisfaction with teachers and the building and grounds.

Discussion

Advocates of school choice believe that empowering parents to choose their children's schools will improve the quality of American primary and secondary education. The results of this study provide some support for this view, while at the same time, these results also provide some support for the view that allowing parents to choose schools will lead to increasing levels of stratification.

Consistent with the prediction of school choice advocates, we found that parents who reported exercising more residential choice in selecting the schools for their children saw their children's achievement more positively than did parents who reported less residential choice. This enhanced achievement was reported for grade level academic skills as well as overall success in school. Similarly, parents expressing more residential choice were more satisfied with their children's teachers, school building and grounds, and the quality of education their children received from the school. Thus, in terms of student achievement and parent satisfaction, the results of the present study indicate that school choice, in the form of residential location, worked as school choice advocates predicted.

Table 5
Correlation Coefficients between Motivation to Move and School Choice, Mechanism Variables

Residential Choice & Mechanism Variables	Motivation to Move Variables	
	Another Public School	A Private School
Residential Choice		
I selected my neighborhood because of the schools.	-.18*	-.09*
Transfer Within District		
Assigned/Transfer	-.01	.00
Involvement		
School takes my ideas seriously	-.33*	-.23*
School does not encourage my involvement.	.16*	.12*
Frequency of my contact with teachers or administrators.	-.04	.05
Achievement		
My child's skills are at or above grade level.	-.27*	-.26*
My child's overall success in school this year.	-.32*	-.28*
Satisfaction		
Satisfaction with quality of education from school.	-.49*	-.33*
Satisfaction with my child's teachers.	-.42*	-.32*
Satisfaction with buildings and grounds.	-.27*	-.19*

Note.: * $p < .05$

Unfortunately for school choice advocates, no benefits were found for parents who had transferred their children to a school within the district. Parents of transfer students saw no greater achievement in their children and expressed no greater satisfaction than did the parents of students attending their assigned schools. These results suggest that taking the

opportunity to transfer within district does not lead to an enhancement of parent support for the school their children chose to attend.

The most important challenge that our results present for the Schneider et al. parent decision-making model is that we found no association between school transfer and any aspect of parent involvement. We also found relatively little association between residential choice and parent involvement. While parents who reported more residential choice rated the schools as taking their input more seriously, there was no significant association between residential choice and the perception of the school as not encouraging their involvement in school activities. Furthermore, the item measuring the frequency of contact the parent reported with teachers and administrators had no association at all with degree of residential choice or school transfer. Note, however, that parents' responses to this item were not significantly correlated with any of the school choice or motivation to move variables.

While the results pose some challenges for the parent decision-making model, they also indicate that this model exhibited some value in deepening our understanding of the motivation of parents to move their children to another school. As expected from the model, we found that parents who believed their children's schools took their ideas seriously or encouraged their involvement in school activities were less motivated to move their children to a school in another district or to a private school. Likewise, parents who perceived more achievement in their children or were more satisfied with their children's school were also less motivated to move their children to another school.

We also found that the more parents had exercised residential choice, the less motivated they were to move to another school. This finding suggests that after choosing the family's residence based on the neighborhood schools, parents are less motivated to move their children to other schools. However, the exercise of the transfer option was found to have no association with motivation to move to either another school district or a private school.

The results of this study provide evidence that school choice was unevenly exercised across demographic groups. We found that better educated, White parents who had more income were more likely to take advantage of transfer options within the district. These results suggest that such transfer opportunities within a district could easily increase the stratification of schools within a district.

However, the finding that the degree of residential choice was greater for less educated parents is inconsistent with what critics of school choice would expect. We are uncertain whether this finding reflects characteristics of housing markets peculiar to Austin, Texas, or whether less educated parents simply report more residential choice in general. We also found that African American parents were less likely to indicate that they had exercised residential choice, which may reflect housing discrimination and not a lack of interest in school choice. Note that African American parents were more motivated to move their children to another school district than were White or Latino parents, and more motivated to move their children to a private school than were White parents. This finding is consistent with the results of public opinion polls indicating African American parents are more interested in vouchers than are other groups (Bositis, 2001).

We also found that parents were more motivated to move their children to another district when their children were in secondary, compared to primary school. This suggests disenchantment with the secondary schools within the district. Our previous study (Falbo, et al., 2001) found that parents were significantly more satisfied with the district's elementary than secondary schools. Note that none of the choice variables were related to whether the student was a son or daughter.

On balance, these results suggest that opening transfer options within a school district encourages stratification, while failing to enhance the parents' involvement in the school. As importantly, these results indicate that the act of transferring a child to another school does nothing to enhance the parents' perception of their children's achievement or the parents' satisfaction with the schools. Urban school districts aiming to stem the flight of advantaged groups from their schools may want to consider other ways than offering transfer options. For example, these results suggest that if urban school districts want to diminish the flight of students to suburban or private schools, they should encourage parent involvement in schools, promote student achievement, or enhance parents' satisfaction with the schools the children already attend.

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