Journal of Public Management & Social Policy

Volume 29 | Number 1 Article 9

September 2022

“Why Do I Have to Send My Child There?” How Low-Income and Working-Class Black Mothers Perceive School Choice in Washington, D.C.

Brian Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/jpmsp

Part of the Political Science Commons, Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

Recommended Citation

Brian Robinson (2022) "“Why Do I Have to Send My Child There?” How Low-Income and Working-Class Black Mothers Perceive School Choice in Washington, D.C.," *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy*: Vol. 29: No. 1, Article 9.
Available at: https://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/jpmsp/vol29/iss1/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Scholarship @ Texas Southern University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Public Management & Social Policy by an authorized editor of Digital Scholarship @ Texas Southern University. For more information, please contact haiying.li@tsu.edu.

"Why Do I Have to Send My Child There?" How Low-Income and Working-Class Black Mothers Perceive School Choice in Washington, D.C.

Brian Robinson
New York University

Despite being cemented into the American education system, school choice policies remain controversial among scholars, practitioners, policy makers, and education reform advocates. This study seeks to understand how low-income and working-class parents, for whom school choice advocates claim these policies are intended to benefit, perceive school choice and what motivates these perceptions. In particular, this study focuses on low-income and working-class Black mothers who are often disadvantaged in the education marketplace. Taking advantage of a relatively robust school choice system in Washington, D.C., the author interviewed 10 low-income and working-class Black mothers. The mothers in this sample see school choice policies as an opportunity to exert agency over their children's education opportunities; however, in reality their choices are limited by their positionality which constrains their real choices. These parents want options beyond their in-boundary traditional public school but policy makers must pursue equitable policies to make the school choice process easier and fairer.

Keywords: school choice, Black parents, Black mothers, low-income parents, working-class parents

Across America, 41% of parents have access to some form of public school choice (NCES, 2019), the ability to express a preference for the school their child attends. Despite the fact that school choice is now an established part of the education system in many cities across the country, it's still a hotly debated topic among practitioners, scholars, policymakers, and education reform advocates. School choice advocates have argued that the practice can level the playing field by providing economically disadvantaged students and students of color access to the educational opportunities typically enjoyed by economically advantaged students and White students (Flake, 2004; Stern, 1998; Viteritti, J.P., 1999). However, school choice critics have long argued that the practice reinforces or exacerbates racial and socio-

economic segregation (Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019; Frankenberg et al., 2011; Orfield, 2013; Scott, 2011) and do not result in students attending better performing schools (Ravitch, 2010; Scott, 2011), although data are mixed on this latter critique. Some critics argue that money invested in charter schools or voucher programs would be better spent improving traditional public school programs (Burris, 2017; Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019; Lafer, 2018; Ladd & Singleton, 2018). Scholars have also raised questions about structural or systemic barriers that can prevent families from fully exercising choice (Aragona, 2019; Condliffe, 2015; Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019; Lubienski, 2005).

A voice frequently missing from this debate is that of parents, especially low-income, working-class, and parents of color for whom advocates say school choice policies are intended to benefit. This study seeks to fill this void by focusing on low-income and working-class parents of color and, in particular, low-income and working-class Black mothers in Washington, D.C. Numerous scholars have demonstrated that important decisions about the care and education of the child, including choosing schools, are most often made by the mother (Andre-Bechley, 2004; Ciciolla & Luther, 2019; Cooper, 2005; Cooper; 2007; David et al., 1997; Dudley-Marling, 2001; Foster et al., 2016; NCES, 1997; Stambach & David, 2005). This holds true for two parent and single parent households (Milkie et al., 2002; NCES, 1997; Weiss et al., 2003). However, the intersection of race, gender, and class is important to understanding how low-income and working-class mothers uniquely consider the issue of school choice. Although childcare and education have traditionally been gendered work carried out by mothers, White mothers still enjoy race privileges that Black mothers do not. Similarly, mothers who belong to the middle-or upper-economic class will enjoy privileges low-income and working-class mothers would not. There is also the issue of having the social and cultural capital necessary to navigate school choice systems that low-income and working-class mothers are less likely to possess.

Taking advantage of a relatively robust intradistrict school choice environment in Washington, D.C., this study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) How do low-income and working-class Black mothers perceive school choice? and 2) What motivates low-income and work-class Black mothers' perceptions of school choice? Washington, D.C.'s school choice environment is robust in the proportion of students enrolled in schools of choice, competition from a nearly equal number of traditional public schools and public charter schools, and a free public transportation program for all students regardless of what school they attend and how far they live from that school. Washington, D.C., often locally referred to as the District, is also one of a small number of cities that utilize a unified application that allows parents to express preference for any alternative traditional or public charter school.

Washington D.C. Background and Context

Public school choice in Washington, D.C. has been in existence since 1996 after the United States Congress passed the District of Columbia School Reform Act. The act allowed for the creation of public charter schools in the District and established the D.C. Public Charter School Board who would be responsible for oversight of those schools (H.R. 3019, 1996). Years later, in 2003, Congress created the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program which offers a limited number of private school vouchers to economically disadvantaged Washington, D.C. students based on a lottery with priority given to students from schools in need of improvement. The voucher can be used to pay for tuition and fees at any private school, including religious institutions (Serving our Children, 2020).

While every student in Washington, D.C. has a right-to-attend school, also known as an in-boundary school, assigned based on their residential address, families in the District also have the option of applying to out-of-boundary traditional public schools. In the 2013-2014 school year, the District instituted a unified application system where families could apply to up to 12 traditional and public charter schools at once (Glazerman & Dotter, 2017; Peretti & Parrott, 2017). Students rank-order their preferred schools and a computer algorithm matches each student to their highest ranked school, waitlisting those who are not matched immediately to one of their top choices.

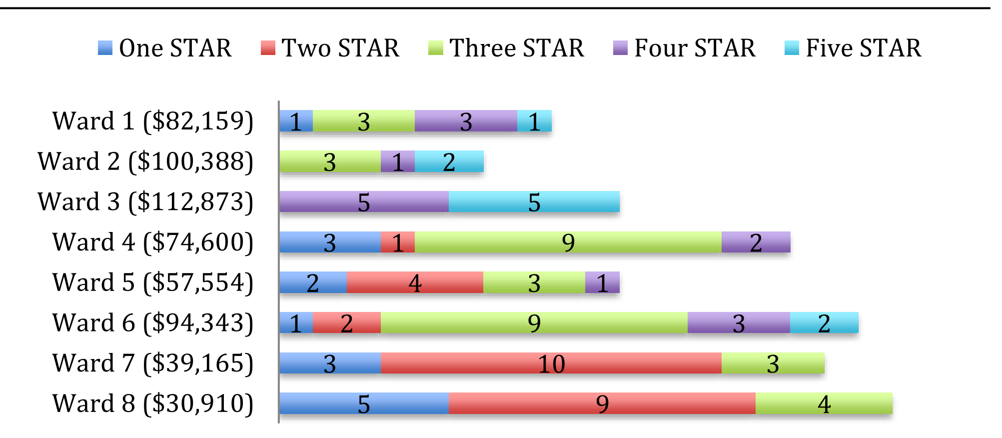
Educational opportunity and income are inextricably linked in Washington, D.C. The city is organized into eight wards, with the Anacostia River separating wards 1-6 to the west and wards 7 and 8 to the east. According to 2016 data, the overwhelming majority of families living in wards 7 and 8, often referred to as "East of the River", and to a lesser extent ward 5, lived below the poverty line and participated in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (D.C. Department of Human Services, 2016). The child poverty rate for children living East of the River alone was a staggering 90% (D.C. Department of Employment Services, 2016). The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has identified 66% of ward 8 students, 56% of ward 7 students, and 44% of ward 5 students as "at-risk," a category for identifying students vulnerable to academic failure including those who are homeless, in foster care, qualify for TANF or the Supplemental and Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), and/or are over-age for high school (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2017).

The distribution of quality schools is correlated with the distribution of income in the District. While there is no universally agreed upon definition of "quality" schools, families have consistently ranked academic performance as the most important indicator of quality (Bast & Walberg, 2004; Burgess et al., 2015; Elacqua et al., 2006; Jochim et al., 2014; Rohde et al., 2019). In one survey of Washington, D.C. parents, 80% prioritized academics over other indicators such as safety and location (Jochim et al., 2014). This study uses the D.C. School Report Card Ratings, based on the School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) framework as a proxy for quality. Similar tools have been used as a proxy for school quality in other studies (Harris & Larsen, 2015; Lincove et al., 2018; Zimmerman & Vaughn, 2013). Figure 1 shows the distribution of right-to-attend schools by ward, median household income, and quality as determined by the D.C. 2018 STAR ratings which assigns schools "stars" ranging from 1-5 based on a 100-point scale, with five being the highest rating available. The 2018 year was chosen because this is the year that parents who participated in the study were interviewed. During this time, there were very few 4- or 5- STAR right-to-attend schools in Washington, D.C. and all the higher quality schools were in wealthier wards with none being located East of the River.

With limited number of high-quality right-to-attend schools, most families in Washington, D.C. have opted to attend an out-of-boundary school. This is especially true for families living East of the River. According to data published by My School D.C., the government entity that operates the unified lottery application, since its inception through 2020 a total of 156,721 applications were submitted with a plurality (over 40%) coming from wards 7 and 8 each year (MySchoolDC, n.d.). Table 1 shows the distribution of students who attended their right-to-attend in-boundary school compared to an out-of-boundary school, given the number of high-quality schools as determined by their 2018 STAR rating. The table shows that the majority of students in most wards attended an out-of-boundary school in 2018.

Outside of the traditional and public school sectors, nearly 1/5th of Washington, D.C. students attended a private school from 2011-2015 – the most recent years for publicly available data (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2017). The private school population is driven mostly by wards 2 and 3 where roughly 50% of students in each of those wards opted out of the traditional and public charter school sectors (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2017). By contrast, only about 16% of students in ward 5 and less than 10% of students in wards 7 and 8 attended a private school (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2017). Many of the students in wards 5, 7, and 8 are able to attend private schools because of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program. In 2019 more than half of scholarship recipients lived in those higher poverty wards (Serving Our Children, 2020).

Figure 1: Distribution of Right-to-Attend Schools by Ward, STAR Rating, and Median



Household Income

Table 1: In-Boundary vs. Out-of-Boundary Attendance by Right-to-Attend Quality (2018)

Ward	In-Boundary	Out-Of-Boundary	Number of 1, 2, and 3 STAR Schools	Number of 4 and 5 STAR Schools
1	27%	73%	4	3
2	44%	56%	3	3
3	80%	20%	0	10
4	29%	71%	12	5
5	15%	85%	7	4
6	33%	67%	12	5
7	21%	79%	16	0
8	21%	79%	16	0

Today, almost three-fourths of public school students in Washington, D.C. attend a school of choice - whether it is a traditional public school or public charter school (Office of

the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2017) - an astounding figure that suggests significant parent demand for education options beyond their child's right-to-attend school. Additionally, since its inception the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program reports nearly 40,000 applications yet only awarding about 10,000 scholarships, suggesting demand is far greater than available funding (Serving Our Children, 2020). In the most recent year, the Opportunity Scholarship Program reports that of the 1,732 students receiving a scholarship, 42% are low-income students receiving SNAP and/or TANF benefits, 82% are Black and 12% are Latinx, and a little more than half reside in Wards 6, 7, and 8 - the wards with the greatest concentration of poverty (Serving Our Children, 2020).

School Choice As Freedom and Empowerment

Present-day school choice is often traced to economist Milton Friedman (Lubienski, 2005; Koven & Kahn, 2014; Orfield, 2013; Ravitch, 2010; Scott, 2011) who invoked rhetoric of individual and family freedom to advocate for a plan that would provide every family a voucher to spend on government approved education programs (Friedman, 1955). Friedman believed his plan would increase educational choices for parents and families and encourage private schools to open. As with any other marketplace, parents would essentially become consumers who "could express their views about schools directly, by withdrawing their children from one school and sending them to another" (Friedman, 1955, p. 4). However, this theory of action fails to acknowledge that marginalized parent groups struggle to gain access to the education marketplace and are less successful in navigating the education marketplace compared to more privileged parents (Cooper, 2005).

The first major national test of Friedman's theory was spurred by the historic Brown v Board of Education decision. Brown, the landmark decision striking down racially segregated schools as fundamentally unequal and forcing local and state governments to integrate White and Black children into the same classrooms, was met with great resistance by White parents and local and state politicians in the south. Southern states responded to Brown by passing tuition grant statutes that would fund families to attend any other school – private or public, depending on the state – outside of their local school (Wearne, 2013; Robinson, 2004). As a result of the tuition grants, "white-only" private academies began to spring up in places like Prince Edward County, Virginia, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Macon County, Alabama (Robinson, 2004). None of these tuition grant statues held up in federal courts and by the early 1970s all had been ruled unconstitutional and blatant attempts to thwart the Brown decision.

Conservative scholar Gerard Robinson (2004), conceptualized school choice after Brown as two distinct movements: fear-based and freedom-based. According to Robinson, fear-based choice was cloaked in the rhetoric of "freedom" and "choice" and used by local and state politicians and parents who sought to circumvent Brown. As opposed to fear-based choice decisions used by parents and politicians to avoid school desegregation, Robinson (2004) claims freedom-based choice was a vehicle to "remedy the disparities between rich and poor students" (p. 14).

Lisa Stulberg (2006) identified four discourse narratives aligned with school choice that invoke the legacy of the civil rights movement and Brown. The first narrative argues school choice is a natural descendant of Brown, the next logical step "to a more enduring equal educational opportunity for all" Stulberg, 2006, p. 26). Sol Stern (1998), a conservative activist, called school choice the last civil rights battle, empowering and liberating poor children from failing public schools. Joseph Viteritti (1999a) averred that school choice, when

designed to intentionally benefit "underserved populations," could be considered the new "civil rights crusade" to "achieve social and political equality for racial minorities and poor people." Former Democratic Congressman, Rev. Floyd Flake (2004) argued vouchers and charter schools are the way to fulfilling Brown's legacy guaranteeing "every child would have access to a quality education that is of equal value regardless of where that child happens to be educated" (p. 6).

Reformers who subscribed to the rhetoric of civil rights and school choice have, as Christopher Lubienski (2005) explained, given up on government intervention in favor of competition as a means to diversify schools and give poor Black families alternatives to the public school system. Former mayor of Cincinnati Kenneth Blackwell (2007) referred to the school choice debate as a new front on the civil rights battle and to school choice programs that "free poor urban and rural children from failing public schools" as the "century's defining civil rights issue". In the late 1980s, conservatives included school choice on their civil rights agenda, which emphasized empowering minorities to pursue economic advancement (Snider, 1989). In his first address to a Joint Session of Congress in 2017, former President Donald Trump proclaimed "education is the civil rights issue of our time" and called for an education bill "that funds school choice for disadvantaged youth, including millions of African-American and Latino children" because "these families should be free to choose the public, private, charter, magnet, religious, or home school that is right for them" (White House, 2017). This notion of empowerment, liberation, and equity channels the core foundations of the civil rights movement.

The second discourse narrative of school choice that invokes the legacy of Brown, according to Stulberg (2006), holds that school choice is more legitimate than Brown in the Civil Rights revolution. Stulberg admits that this narrative is less common, but nonetheless is utilized by advocates of school choice who reject the premise of the Brown decision mandating integrated schools. Derrick Bell (2004) argued that the Brown decision has become irrelevant as Black students attend schools that are as "segregated and educationally ineffective" as ever before. He viewed efforts to integrate schools for the purposes of providing Black children with a quality education as misguided. In his words, "the principle of gaining equal educational opportunity for Black children was and is right. But our difficulties came when we viewed racial balance and busing as the only means of achieving that goal" (Bell, 2005, p. 274).

Bell went on to encourage Blacks to "forge fortuity," or defy the involuntary sacrifices and interest-convergence determinants of racial policies and practices that, in his view, only accommodate the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equity so long as they converge with White interests. He describes a history of Blacks exercising school choice in the forms of creating single-race schools and through the use of vouchers and charter schools as an example of "forging fortuity."

> *"Educators and parents have ignored the siren song that only integrated schools are worth fighting for. Going against the resistance of public school officials and teachers' unions, they have worked in a number of settings to provide children with effective educations based on the needs those children present, turning negative outside influences into positives for learning and development." (Bell, 2005, p. 276).*

Michael Holt, an African-American journalist who chronicled the movement leading to publicly funded vouchers in Milwaukee, likewise considered those who advocated for

integration as a means for educational opportunity "misguided" and criticized the civil rights establishment for not conceding that, in his view, integration was a failure. Vouchers, Holt argued, are a "jumpstart for a stagnated Civil Rights movement" (Holt, 2000).

The third of Stulberg's (2006) narratives rebuts those who invoke the legacy of Civil Rights to support school choice. It holds that school choice is a misguided replacement of Brown and that vouchers and charters amount to state-sponsored and state-sanctioned segregation. Those invoking this narrative would say the debate over school choice "downplay the impact on racial and economic segregation in schooling" (Stulberg, 2006, p. 33). Janelle Scott (2011) went further, asserting advocates invoking the rhetoric of Brown and civil rights were co-opting the Civil Rights movement and "created an environment that not only tolerates but also embraces segregation in the U.S. public schooling" (p. 44).

Historian Steve Suitts (2019) believed that rhetoric invoking freedom to choose schools as a benefit to Black, Latinx, and economically disadvantaged children was akin to the rhetoric of racist White politicians and parents who demanded freedom to choose schools as a way to avoid desegregation and "turns the icons and language of civil rights inside-out while thwarting the national goal of an effective, equitable system for all children." Criticizing President Trump and others who invoke the language of civil rights to advocate for school choice to liberate economically disadvantaged children from an "oppressive" system, scholar Dave Powell (2017) argued that "the promise of unfettered school choice threatens to push us all further apart, creating the kinds of divisions that truly make oppression real."

"Freedom" has typically been invoked as an expression of an individual's desire, and perceived right, to make decisions for themselves independent of government. During the Civil Rights Era, the concept of freedom was invoked as an expression of Black America's desire to be rid of oppressive government laws that treated them as second-class citizens. In the evolving conversation on school choice, freedom has been invoked both as a racist justification to circumvent school integration post-Brown v Board of Education and to empower communities dissatisfied with the quality of education their children were receiving at traditional public schools (Bell, 2005).

Present-day school choice policies have largely been influenced by a combination of conservative values that promote a reduced role of the state in the social welfare ("Conservativism," 2002), neoliberal values that favor free-market principles and the privatization of institutions that provide public goods and services ("Neoliberalism," 2002), and libertarian values that advocate the role of the state be minimized to create the maximum possible scope for freedom ("Liberalism," 2002). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rhetoric of school choice advocates began to regularly include terms such as "freedom" and "liberation" to associate school choice with these values (Scott, 2013). Examples of this rhetoric include Blackwell (2007), Snider (1989), and Stern (1998) as quoted earlier in this paper. According to Scott (2013), those who embraced school choice as "freedom" and "liberation" turned to the language of "empowerment" for minorities and economically disadvantaged students through the marketplace. The notion was that empowerment through increased parental choice resulted in greater educational equity (Scott, 2013).

Scott (2013) pushes back on this, claiming that school choice actually has the effect of limiting the kinds of empowerment parents can choose from because parent ability to participate in school governance or to equitably choose schools varies by access to social and political capital. Patillo (2015) and Cooper (2005) likewise argued that economically disadvantaged Black parents in particular are not empowered by choice but instead find

themselves with limited agency and no real control over the schools their children can attend.

Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to understand how low-income and working-class Black mothers perceive school choice and what motivates their perceptions of school choice. While free-market principles undergird conservative and libertarian support for school choice, this is not what draws Black mothers and Black advocates of school choice policies (Cooper, 2005; Patillo, 2015). Patillo (2015) notes that for Black school choice advocates, the impetus of their support is organized around themes of parent and community empowerment, control, and agency rather than free market principles. While empowerment may equate to the liberty or freedom to express one's interest and have those interests met, Patillo argues that this is a weak form of empowerment and instead suggests that true empowerment - strong empowerment - is not just expressing an interest and having it met, but in the context of school choice that "parents have access to political actors and institutions, that those actors and institutions are responsive to parents, and that parents have a determinative say in decisions being made by officials or agencies" (Patillo, 2015, p. 45, emphasis in original). Patillo goes on to argue that parent control is reflected in whether parents, not school districts, control what schools their child ultimately attend. Lastly, Patillo identifies two types of agency - individual agency and agentic power - which holds that parents are able to voluntarily implement their will and direct their actions with purpose, independent of structural or systemic constraints.

Scholars have used theories of bounded rationality to explain the constraints that can limit the independent agency of some parents (Ben-Porath, 2009; Bonal et al., 2017; Valant, 2014). Bounded rationality suggests there are limitations to rational decision making and that "the ability of individuals to choose under the existing conditions of school choice policies is significantly restricted" (Ben-Porath, 2009). While many advocates theorize simplicity in exercising choice, bounded rationality posits that, in reality, there are social and cognitive factors that make exercising choice quite complex. Cooper (2005) argued that Black low-income and working-class mothers are often forced to make "positioned choices" based on how their race, class, and gender positions, and constrains, them within the education marketplace.

The most oft found constraint to exercising choice for low-income and working-class families is access to information (André-Bechley, 2004; Aragona, 2019; Campbell et al., 2017; Condliffe et al., 2015; Cooper, 2005; Jessen et al., 2011; Jochim et al., 2014). Corcoran, Jennings, Cohodes, and Sattin-Bajaj (2018) highlighted three information frictions, the costs of acquiring and processing information, to study how some families' rational choices are bounded. The first is the cost of acquiring information. For some families, obtaining and processing information can be costly in terms of time or other resources. The second friction is information and/or choice overload, where the sheer number or complexity of choices is too overwhelming. The third friction is any administrative or other barrier that can hinder families from exercising choice.

The present study will analyze data through the lens of parent empowerment, control, and agency as described here along with the constraints which can place limits on these themes.

Methodology

Participants in this study are low-income and working-class Black mothers of students who live in and attend a traditional public school or public charter school in Washington, D.C. Mothers of children in Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 programs were considered parents of elementary school children for the purposes of this study.

Data collection for this study took place in 2019. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling is when a researcher deliberately chooses participants due to the qualities they possess (Etikan et al., 2016) and allows for a sampling frame of those who may be most affected by a specific issue (Valerio et al., 2016). In purposive sampling, "the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide information by virtue of knowledge or experience" (Etikan et al., 2016). When using a purposive sampling method, "researchers map all sites, or as many sites as possible, where the people in the desired group gather; choose a sample of sites; and identify respondents from that site sample…" (Schensul, 2012, p. 85). Areas where participants were sampled for this study include public libraries, community and school events, and recreation and family centers. Additionally, the author reached out to community and advocacy organizations that work with parents and families. The author also posted on online parent forums. One mother was snowball sampled; meaning another mother who participated in the study referred them.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is typically measured using income, education, and occupation (APA, 2006). This study used education and whether a participant received government assistance to classify SES. The screening survey prospective study participants completed inquired about both in order to measure participant SES. As noted, Washington, D.C. uses "at-risk" as a proxy for low-income. Students in families receiving TANF and SNAP benefits are considered at-risk. In order to receive these benefits, families must demonstrate they are low-income. For the purpose of this study, the author similarly classified mothers who self-identified as receiving TANF and/or SNAP benefits as low-income. Mothers who did not self-identify as receiving these benefits but also did not self-identify as obtaining any professional degrees were classified as working-class.

For parents who the author made initial person-to-person contact (i.e. met them for the first time at a school event, etc.), the author invited them to complete a paper version of the screening survey. The author followed-up with eligible mothers via a phone call or an email and arranged an interview. Interviews took place in-person at coffee shops, libraries, or in the participant homes. For mothers who the author made initial contact with online (i.e. mother emailed me after seeing a posting in a forum), the author sent them an online version of the screening survey to complete. Once deemed eligible, the author similarly followed-up and arranged interviews. All mothers were offered $20USD as a small token of appreciation for their participation in this study. Table 2 describes the 10 mothers in this study with their pseudonym and the sector of the school their children attended going into the 2019-2020 school year.

A total of 10 Black low-income and working-class mothers was interviewed for this study. The method used to explore their understanding of school choice in Washington, D.C. was semi-structured open-ended interviewing. An open-ended interview provides respondents "space to express meaning in his or her own words and to give direction to the interview process" (Brenner, 2006, p. 357). The semi-structured format of the interview asks "all informants the same core questions with the freedom to ask follow-up questions that build on the responses received" (Brenner, 2006, p. 362). Most interviews lasted anywhere between

30-60 minutes. Prior to the start of each interview, subjects were asked for permission to audiotape the conversation. They were informed that their participation was voluntary, the content of the conversation would be confidential, and at any time they could withdraw from the interview. Participants signed a consent form if they agreed to participate. There were broad interview questions designed to better understand the research questions that guided the study. However, these questions largely served as guiding questions as additional follow-up questions were asked to better understand participant perspective and experiences. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed.

Table 2: Study Participant Descriptive Data

Parent	School Sector
Vonna	Early Learning Center
Felicia	PCS
Ashley	DCPS- In-Boundary
Tammy	DCPS- In-Boundary
Antoinette	PCS
Tanesha	DCPS- In-Boundary
Regina	DCPS- Out-of-Boundary
LaShonda	DCPS- In-Boundary
Brianna	DCPS- In-Boundary
Melat	1- DCPS- Out-of-Boundary 1- Private (Through D.C. Opportunity Scholarship)

Limitations

The study design relies on purposive sampling, which can be viewed as a limitation. A strength of purposive sampling is that it "aims to maintain rigor and identify a sampling frame based on specific study driven variables and characteristics" (Valerio et al., 2016, p. 3). Purposive sampling can also be effective in engaging persons from hard-to-reach populations, such as economically disadvantaged individuals, with research (Valerio et al., 2016). However, it also lends itself to sampling bias because not all parents had an equal chance of being included in the study. In my direct recruitment of parents, some outright declined to participate. Undoubtedly, some parents saw recruitment materials for my study and decided against contacting me for further information. Those parents could have provided a unique insight to the topic that may otherwise be absent from the conversation.

Another limitation to the data analysis is that a structured process of member checking was not built into the study. Birt et al. (2016) explain that member checking is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. There are several methods qualitative researchers can employ to validate the data provided by respondents including returning transcripts and researcher interpretation of data to participants so that they can confirm its accuracy or re-interviewing the participant to confirm previous interpretations. One way I have addressed this in the data collection process was to frequently repeat participant ideas or statements back to respondents during the interviews to ensure I correctly understood the intentions behind their words. The data analysis process informed my findings which are incredibly transparent with the inclusion of participants' own words that support my analysis. Lastly, this study cannot presume to generalize beyond the sample of 10 participants who were interviewed.

School Choice and the Limitations of Agency

There was a time where going to the neighborhood school was the norm. Although there were selective magnet and citywide specialized schools and some cities experimenting with and implementing limited citywide choice, for the most part children went to a school with other children in the neighborhood based on their address. At a coffee shop in a gentrifying community in southeast Washington, D.C., Vonna, a native Washingtonian whose daughter was about to enter Pre-K4, recalled the days when children were largely restricted to their neighborhood schools, her experience escaping the "horrible" school she was bound to by using a relative's address, and how that influences her support for having choices:

> *Oh gosh. It's (school choice) severely important. I wouldn't want to feel like, you know, like back in the day when I was in school we couldn't go outside of our school boundary to school. And when you got caught it was a big issue. I remember trying to go to school and getting found out that I didn't live where the school was. I remember the principal actually followed me home. It was horrible. I wasn't a bad kid like, I didn't get that. But she said that I was taking an opportunity from another child. And I was like my scores and my grades and I'm good and I'm on the student council, like what do you care?! But, anyway, I remember that. And I felt like "Damn. I gotta go to these horrible schools in my neighborhood just because I live over there." I feel like it's slavery in a sense, you know what I mean? Like you just like being restrited to this one area. You can't move. So, having a choice is very important.*

Vonna was not alone. Over the past twenty years, there has been a drastic shift in experience with families in cities like Washington, D.C. being released (at least theoretically) from their neighborhood school and having alternate options such as other traditional public schools, public charter schools, and for some, private schools. For low-income and working-class Black mothers in Washington, D.C., the belief that having a choice gives them agency over their children's education was a strong motivating factor for supporting school choice.

Having choices is a central component of an independent model of agency where people can exert control over their environments and influence the world according to personal preference (Stephens et al., 2012). This model of agency is what Patillo (2015) describes as agentic power, exhibiting power over others, institutions, or structures. Professional-class parents, by nature of their status, tend to possess the social, cultural, and economic capital necessary to be autonomous agents for themselves and their children. Low-income and working-class parents on the other hand, often do not. For the low-income and working-class Black mothers in this study, having the opportunity to choose which school their child attended was perceived as a form of empowerment.

This finding came through clearly in a conversation with Felicia, a mother who moved from Montgomery County, MD to Washington, D.C. because of the District's universal Pre-K program. Felicia explained that for her, having a choice was important because it both gave her agency over her son's education and provided the opportunity for a better learning environment:

> *It's real important because…having to be forced to go to an in-bound school don't mean that that's your best option. Like, if that's not the*

> *school that your child need to be at and you feel it's something else out there, why can't you have that option without having to pay a fee? ...I could live in a rundown neighborhood. My neighborhood isn't the best neighborhood. I live in northeast...My school for my child is not in the greatest neighborhood. Why do I have to send my child there just because...that's the in-bound school. No. I feel like if I found a school that was good enough for my son on the northwest side or up in Georgetown (a wealthy community in Washington, D.C.), I should have that option to let him go there. And he should have the option to attempt to be accepted, you know what I'm saying?*

Regina, a mother who consistently exercised choice with all three of her daughters, shared how having options outside of her in-boundary schools empowered her to exert control over her children's learning outcomes:

> *…if they had to go to their home school…they wouldn't have had the same academic outcomes. They wouldn't have been able to stay in a bilingual program. They would have been in a school that's always fighting. Even though I said PARCC is not a great test I still do look at the PARCC and if that school looks like nobody passes the PARCC...that to me tells me it's just a lower standard of learning there so I don't know. I'd probably have to move.*

For mothers like Regina and Felicia, choice represented an opportunity to escape a perceived lower quality school with a "lower standard of learning." This idea of "escaping" undesirable schools was central to many of these low-income and working-class Black mothers' support for school choice. Of the 10 parents in this study, only half attend their in-boundary DCPS school and only two are satisfied and felt that they "got lucky". Tammy would consider herself one of the "unlucky" ones. In the interview, Tammy shared the struggles of placing her son who has been diagnosed as needing behavior and emotional support into a school that can provide the education experience he needs. Tammy expressed frustration with her son's in-boundary school and the entire system that relies on a child's address to determine which school he attends: "It's like a lack of address get you a lack of education. Because…the school that I probably really want my child to go...They won't let them go because of their address. So, then we're stuck with the boundary school."

For low-income and working-class Black mothers, seeking agency is part of what Cooper (2007) refers to as "motherwork". In this sense, the mothers seek "social agency by attempting to navigate the educational marketplace and choose good schools for their children" (p. 500). "Good schools" are not just places where their child could get a good education, but also where they would be safe. In almost every interview, the mothers mentioned both physical and emotional security as factors into their decision-making processes. Some mothers shared incidents of violence that they say occurred either in the schools themselves or in the neighborhoods where the schools are located. Safety was at the forefront of the minds of these parents.

Sitting in her home in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C., LaShonda described what she called a shootout near the DCPS senior high school where her eldest children attend. Safety was tied with academics as the most important consideration when choosing a school for her children. Brianna, also living in Anacostia, explained how the

seemingly consistent police presence in or around her son's elementary school was a comfort when she was deciding where to send her child:

also asked parents…and they were like it's a good school like, you know the police (are) there (to) make sure it's safe. I don't have any problems. But you know on the southside…all the south you know, they do a lot of dangerous stuff so don't matter where you put your kids in school there's going to be something happening.

In addition to the physical safety of their children, low-income and working-class Black mothers were also concerned with the emotional safety of their children:

> *Felicia: So, my son came to me the other day and he was like "I might want to go here next year." I said "Oh really." He said "Yeah they treat me really well here." I said "forreal?" He said "yeah." I said "OK." I mean we have conversations all the time but he's a boy and he doesn't wanna tell me half the stuff I ask him. So, when he says that, like, it means something to me, you know, you telling me how you really feel.*

> *Tanesha: I kind of just look at my children and I can feel what they're feeling. So, if he's feeling like a little uneasy or something then I'm like "I don't know..." I just look at (things) like that and how teachers gravitate towards the kids and stuff like that. How they...interact with the children and stuff like that.*

While the mothers in this study believed they had agency in their choices, they were often bounded by limitations such as the neighborhoods where they can afford to live, the amount of information they can access, or the ability to navigate the education marketplace. These mothers were further limited by not having a supporting network of family or friends to help navigate the process, a maternal strategy mothers rely on to negotiate their involvement in their child's education (Weiss et al., 2003). Many of the mothers in this study were making decisions on their own, lacking not only a supporting network, but the social and cultural capital to navigate the school choice process in the city. The mothers needed what Stanton-Salazar (2014) referred to as an institutional agent, someone who possesses a high degree of human, cultural, and social capital and is willing to impart the institutional knowledge, resources, privileges, and opportunities that come with said capital onto another. Without social and cultural capital or an institutional agent to support them, low-income and working-class Black mothers in this study were most likely to experience bounded rationality by being limited or otherwise unable to make choices they might make under more ideal circumstances.

Vonna was the only mother who shared that she had any kind of support. She had a counselor from a non-profit organization who taught her how to use the MySchoolDC website and about some of her options in the city. Without that institutional agent, she says, it would have been harder for her to navigate school choice in the city. For the rest of the mothers, being without support or resources were significant barriers to them exercising choice. Many spoke about not having enough information to make a fully informed choice. This finding reaffirms the theory of information frictions, the cost of acquiring and processing information,

posited by Corcoran et al. (2018). Ashley shares that she "got lucky" by being in-bounds for a school that she considers good but did not apply to many others because she simply did not know about them.

> *Ashley: I'm always interested in finding somewhere better but I didn't have any information really. I really...when I put him in Walter Elementary I got lucky because that year I realized it was a good school they was on the news and everything and the people in the community was like "yea I went there when I was younger" and stuff like that and once I got there and I seen what they were about it was good.*
>
> *Brian: On the application you can rank up to 12 schools. Do you recall if you ranked up to12 schools?*
>
> *Ashley: I did like three...the three that were closer to me and easy for me to get to…and also, I didn't know about any other school. Honestly, I didn't know about any other schools and they curriculums and stuff that they offer. I just wanted him to get into school when it first started.*

Tanesha also shared how she felt bounded by a lack of information about her choices:

> *I do feel a little limited because maybe I don't know...I may not know too much about the school or what they may have to offer...something like that. And it's crazy because I feel like now I should be more like, you know, I should...maybe should ask more questions and stuff like that. Get more involved and stuff like that.*

LaShonda was incredibly frustrated because she missed the deadline to apply for the unified lottery, which she blames on a lack of information about the application processes. Since she missed the deadline, her children were waitlisted for her desired public charter school, and are now attending their respective neighborhood schools:

> *Brian: How do you find out information about when the deadlines are?*
>
> *LaShonda: They don't just put it out there. Like, once you go to register them, that's when you'll find out. It's not like it's presented so everyone can know.*
>
> *Brian: So, you don't think the District does a good job of informing parents of when deadlines are?*
>
> *LaShonda: No but they should let you know because them charter schools be better, like they be way better. So, I think they should let you know but they don't.*

Tanesha did not know much about her school options except for Harmony Public Charter School – a 4-STAR school in northeast D.C., but wished she had information about other schools:

> *Brian: Do you feel that you had enough information about the elementary schools to make choices about where to send your kids?*
> *Tanesha: No. The only thing I know of is like, you know, Harmony. They are pretty good...I don't know. Like sometimes they say that charter schools are a little different than public schools and stuff too so, I don't know too much information about it. But I guess I would want to learn information…*

The opposite of the independent model of agency is the interdependent model of agency which is characterized as having "less economic capital, more environmental constraints, greater risks and uncertainty, and less choice, control, and influence" (Stephens et al., 2012, p. 90) than those with independent agency or agentic power. The low-income and working-class Black mothers in this study wanted to be empowered and were trying to make the best decisions they could for their children in a system that advantages those conditioned under the independent model of agency, when indeed they are conditioned under the interdependent model of agency. As evidenced, the low-income and working-class Black mothers in this study were limited by a lack of information in the choice making process. Whether they did not understand all the available school options in the city or were not even aware of application deadlines, the information frictions these parents faced made exercising choice more difficult despite their strong desire to do so.

Discussion

This study sought to understand how low-income and working-class Black mothers perceive school choice and what motivated their perceptions of school choice. The mothers in this study perceived Washington, D.C. school choice policies as opportunities to exert control over their children's education that they otherwise would not have had. They were motivated by a desire for agency to seek out and declare schools of perceived better quality. However, through the lens of empowerment, control, and agency which guided this study, parental agency is severely limited. School choice advocates argue that the policies empower parents which, to the extent that this is true, is certainly a weak form of empowerment as parents are limited by the schools available to them in the lottery, the administrative barriers to application, and are left to be reactive to decisions made by officials and agencies rather than having a determinative say in those decisions, signaling a lack of true control that parents have in the process.

At its essence, school choice policies do not provide choice. The most elementary definition of choice is to decide between two or more options. When offered the opportunity to choose, it is implied that whichever option is chosen will be honored. Because parent school choices are limited for the many reasons discussed throughout this study, the use of the term "choice" to describe the process by which parents express a preference for the school they would like for their child to attend draws pushback from scholars (Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019; Orfield, 2013; Scott, 2011) and even some of the parents in this study.

However, parents have come to embrace school choice. Beyond the small sample in this study, the demand for applications on MySchoolDC and through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is evidence of this embrace. Many highly desirable public charter

schools and traditional public schools have lengthy waitlists every year. Private school voucher programs like the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program turn away hundreds, if not thousands, of parents every year. Given that school choice is cemented into the Washington, D.C. education landscape – and indeed the American education system, the author proposes recommendations to improve the school choice discourse, support low-income and working-class parents navigating the education marketplace, and to make systematic changes which address issues of education inequities.

First, the author recommends school choice advocates acknowledge the valid critique that choice policies as they are currently designed are indeed very limiting. Advocates must embrace transparent language that makes clear that the process of exercising school "choice" does not mean parents are choosing schools in the most literal sense but are merely expressing a preference for the schools they would like their children to attend. More transparency in language and process could also have the effect of disarming, or at least weakening, a critique of school choice opponents and push the conversation beyond semantics and towards the lived experiences of those attempting to navigate the education marketplace and the policies that undergird those experiences.

Beyond this, policy makers in Washington, D.C. must examine the lottery selection processes to better position low-income and working-class parents, who are disproportionately Black and most likely to be in-boundary for low-performing schools, to have the greatest opportunity to access higher-quality, more desirable schools. One idea is to add an at-risk preference to the lottery so that parents of low-income students can have greater priority than their wealthier peers. However, adding an at-risk preference alone makes only a marginal difference (Peretti & Parrot, 2018). The District must also remove information barriers and do better at informing low-income and working-class parents of the processes, their options, and how to navigate the education marketplace. One strategy could be to replicate the work of the local nonprofit D.C. School Reform Now (DCSRN). Every year, DCSRN launches its High-Quality Schools Campaign that assigns parent advocates to families who help them understand and explore their options and assists them in completing their application to maximize their utilities. These parent advocates are essentially institutional agents that support parents who lack the cultural capital to navigate Washington, D.C.'s education marketplace. The District could support DCSRN and other non-profits with the structure in place to engage in similar work by awarding grants that would expand the reach of this advocacy.

It is also important that District leaders examine inequities which create the conditions that result in low-income and working-class families seeking out alternative options. Of course, the greatest and most obvious inequity is the lack of high-quality right-to-attend schools located in predominantly low-income and working-class communities. The District has historically underinvested in its traditional public schools and it continues to do so today. Reports from the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute (North, 2019) and the District's independent auditor (Roth & Perkins, 2019) find that underfunding schools has resulted in additional money designed to supplement the budgets of schools serving at-risk students actually being used to pay for core staff that should be funded by the city's comprehensive staffing model. The District must pay what Ladson-Billings (2006) calls an education debt by over-investing resources necessary to improve the quality of low-performing schools serving at-risk students that have been persistently neglected.

Furthermore, the District must examine its housing policies that prevent low-income and working-class parents from accessing neighborhoods that are in-boundary for more desirable schools. An example of a structural change would be to intentionally create more

affordable housing units and amending the thresholds for those who qualify. This is especially important as the city continues to gentrify. Between 2010 and 2013, a study by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition found that 20,000 Black residents were displaced from Washington, D.C. as a result of gentrification (Richardson et al., 2019). Assuming that figure held at pace in the subsequent years, at least 60,000 Black residents would have been displaced during the past decade alone. The District must protect housing for low-income, working-class, and native residents who are mostly Black, and ensure they are not locked out of high-quality right-to-attend schools simply because of their address.

Conclusion

The low-income and working-class Black mothers in this study wanted what all parents desire: quality education opportunities for their child and the agency to make the best decisions possible. While these mothers see school choice as a vehicle for empowerment, their agency is limited by their positionality which constrains the choices they are able to make. This study's findings are not unique to Washington, D.C. Policy makers in the District and beyond must examine the barriers that marginalized parent groups face in navigating the education marketplace and purse equity-minded solutions to make the school choice process easier and fairer. Furthermore, policymakers must interrupt and re-examine housing and economic policies which disproportionately lock these families out of high-quality school zones in the first place and invest in ensuring every school – traditional or public charter – is a school where families want their children to attend.

Author's Biography

Brian Robinson, Ph.D. is originally from Baltimore, MD. He taught for seven years in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Virginia before pursuing and earning his doctorate degree in education policy and leadership at New York University. Dr. Robinson currently works at an education nonprofit, supporting education leaders working to improve policy and practice for learners from historically marginalized communities. He currently lives in Laurel, MD.

References

American Psychological Association [APA], Task Force on Socioeconomic Status. 2007. Report of the APA Task Force on Socioeconomic Status. Washington, D.C.

André-Bechely, L. 2004. "The Goals of a Voluntary Integration Program and Problems of Access: A Closer Look at a Magnet School Application Brochure." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 37(3), 302-315.

Aragona, S. 2019. "The Social and Academic Integration of Commuter Students in a System of School Choice." Dissertation.

Bast, J. L. and Walberg, H. J. 2004. "Can Parents Choose the Best Schools for their Children?" *Economics of Education Review* 23, 431-440.

Bell, D. 2005. *Silent Covenants: Brown v Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Ben-Porath, S. R. 2009. "School Choice as a Bounded Ideal." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43(4), 527–544.

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers. D., Campbell, C., and Walter, F. 2016. "Member Checking: A Tool to Enhance Trustworthiness or Merely a Nod to Validation?" *Qualitative Health Research* 26(3), 1802-1811.

Blackwell, K. 2007, April 6. "School Choice and Civil Rights. Town Hall." Retrieved from: https://townhall.com/columnists/kenblackwell/2007/04/06/school-choice-and-civil-rights-n1083857

Bonal, X., Verger, A., and Zancajo, A. 2017. "Making Poor Choices? Demand Rationalities and School Choice in a Chilean Local Education Market." *Journal of School Choice* 11(2), 258-281.

Brenner, M. E. 2006. "Interviewing in Educational Research." In J.L. Green, G. Camilli, and P.B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (357-370). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Burgess, S., Greaves, E., Vignoles, A., and Wilson, D. 2015. "What Parents Want: School Preferences and School Choice." *The Economic Journal* 125, 1262-1289.

Burris, C. 2017, January 23. "Do Charter and Vouchers Hurt Public Schools? The Answer is "Yes." Network for Public Education. Retrieved from: https://networkforpubliceducation.org/2017/01/charters-vouchers-hurt-public-schools-answer-yes/

Campbell, C., Heyward, G., and Gross, B. 2017. "How are American Cities Delivering on the Promise of Public School Choice?" Center for Reinventing Public Education.

Ciciolla, L. and Luthar, S. 2019. "Invisible Household Labor and Ramifications for Adjustment: Mothers as Captains of Households." *Sex Roles* 81, 467-486

Condliffe, B., Boyd, M., and Deluca, S. 2015. "Stuck in School: How Social Context Shapes School Choice for Inner-City Students." Teachers College Record, 117.

Conservatism. 2002. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved from Oxford Reference Online Database.

Cooper, Camille W. 2007. "School Choice as 'Motherwork': Valuing African-American Women's Educational Advocacy and Resistance." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20(5), 491-512.

Cooper, C.W. 2005. "School Choice and the Standpoint of African-American Mothers: Considering the Power of Positionality." *The Journal of Negro Education* 74(2), 174-189.

Corcoran, S. P., Jennings, J. L., Cohodes, S. R., and Sattin-Bajaj, C. 2018. "Leveling the Playing Field." National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge, MA. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w24471

D.C. Department of Employment Services. 2016. "District of Columbia Annual Economic Report, 2016." Office of Labor Market Research and Information. Retrieved from: https://does.dc.gov/page/labor-statistics

D.C. Department of Human Services. 2016. "Recommendations for Development of a TANF Hardship Extension Policy for Washington, D.C." Retrieved from: https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/TANF%20Hardship%20Report_0.pdf

David, M., Davies, J., Edwards, R., and Standing, D.R.K. 1997. "Choice Within Constraints: Mothers and Schooling." *Gender and Education* 9(4), 397-410.

District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority. 1996, November 12. "D.C. Financial Authority Releases Schools' Report" [Press Release]. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20001119120400/http://www. D.C.fra.gov:80/press/releases/pr-11-12-96.html

Dorsey, D. N. T. and Roulhac, G. 2019. "From Desegregation to Privatization: A Critical Race Policy Analysis of School Choice and Educational Opportunity in North Carolina." *Peabody Journal of Education* 94(4), 420-441.

Dudley-Marling, C. 2001. "School Trouble: A Mother's Burden." *Gender and Education* 13(2), 183-197.

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., and Alkassim, R. S. 2016. "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling." *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5(1), 1-4.

Elacqua, G., Schneider, M., and Buckley, J. 2006. "School Choice in Chile: Is it Class or the Classroom?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 25(3), 577-601.

Flake, F. 2004. "Fulfilling the Legacy of Brown v Board of Education." In. D. Salisbury and C. Lartigue (Eds.), *Educational Freedom in Urban America: Brown V Board After Half a Century* (5-12). Cato Institute.

Foster, T.D., Froyen, L.C., Skibbe, L.E., Bowles, R.P., and Pecker, K.B. 2016. "Fathers' and Mothers' Home Learning Environments and Children's Early Academic Outcomes." *Read Writ* 29. 1845-1863.

Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., Wang, J. 2011. "Choice Without Equity: Charter School Segregation." *Educational Policy Analysis Archives* 19(1).

Friedman, M. 1955. "The Role of Government in Education." In. R. Solo (Ed.) *Economics and the Public Interest* (123-144). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Glazerman, S. and Dotter, D. 2017. "Market Signals: Evidence on the Determinants and Consequences of School Choice from a Citywide Lottery." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (39)3, 593-619.

H.R. 2019, 104th Cong. 1996. Retrieved from:https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/house-bill/3019

Harris, D. N. and Larsen, M. 2015. "What Schools do Families Want (and why)?" Education Research Alliance for New Orleans.

Holt, M. 2000. "Not Yet "Free at Last" The Unfinished Business of the Civil Rights Movement: Our Battle for School Choice." Oakland: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press.

Jessen, S. B. 2011. "A Year in the Labyrinth: Examining the Expansion of Mandatory Public High School Choice in New York City. Dissertation.

Jochim, A., DeArmond, M., Gross, B., Lake, R. 2014. "Making School Choice Work Series: How Parents Experience Public School Choice." Center on Reinventing Public Education. Retrieved from: https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe_how-parents-experience-public-school-choice.pdf

Koven, S. G. and Khan, M. 2014. "School Choice Acceptance: An Exploratory Explication." *Journal of School Choice* 8(4), 549-566.

Ladd, H. F. and Singleton, J. D. 2018. "The Fiscal Externalities of Charter Schools: Evidence from North Carolina. Economic Research Initiatives at Duke Working Paper No. 261. Retrieved from: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3082968Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. Schools. Educational Researcher, 35(7), 3-12

Lafer, G. 2018. "Breaking Point: The Cost of Charter Schools for Public Districts." In the Public Interest. Retrieved from: https://educationvotes.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ITPI_Breaking_Point_May2018FINAL.pdf

Libertarianism. 2002. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), Oxford Reference. Retrieved from Oxford Reference Online Database.

Lincove, J. A., Valant, J. and Cowen, J. M. 2018. “You Can't Always Get What You Want: Capacity Constraints in a Choice-Based School System.” *Economics of Education Review* 67, 94-109.

Lubienski, C. 2005. “School Choice as a Civil Right: District Responses to Competition and Equal Educational Opportunity.” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 38, 331-341.

Milkie, M.A., Bianchi, S.M., Mattingly, M.J., and Robinson, J.P. 2002. “Gendered Division of Childrearing: Ideals, Realities, and the Relationship to Parental Well-being.” *Sex Roles* 47(1/2). 21-38.

MySchoolDC. (n.d.) [Data]. Retrieved March 2, 2021 from: https://www.myschooldc. org/resources/data

National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. 2019. Public school choice programs. Digest of Education Statistics, 2018. Retrieved from: https://nces.ed.gov/ fastfacts/display.asp?id=6

National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. 1997. Fathers’ involvement in their children’s schools. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education and Research. Retrieved from: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98091.pdf

“Neoliberalism.” 2002. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), Oxford Reference. Retrieved from Oxford Reference Online Database.

North, A. 2019, December 10. “The Funding Roadmap for Educational Justice in D.C.” D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute. Retrieved from: https://www.dcfpi.org/all/the-funding-roadmap-for-educational-justice-in-dc/

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. 2017. “Public Education Supply and Demand for the District of Columbia – Citywide Fact Sheet – SY2016-17.” Retrieved from: https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/SY16-17_Citywide%20School%20Fact%20%20Sheet_10.06.17.pdf.

Orfield, G. 2013. “Choice and Civil Rights: Forgetting History, Facing Consequences.” In G. Orfield & E. Frankenberg (Eds.), *Educational Delusions?: Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Osborne, D. 2015. “A Tale of Two Systems: Education Reform in Washington D.C. Progressive Policy Institute.” Retrieved from: https://www.progressivepolicy.org/slider/tale-of-two-systems-education-reform-in-washington-d-c/

Patillo, M. 2015. “Everyday Politics of School Choice in the Black Community.” *Du Bois Review* 12(2), 41-71.

Peretti, C. B. and Parrot, A. P. 2018. “Giving At-Risk Students Preference in a Unified Lottery for Public Schools.” MySchoolDC. Retrieved from https://www.myschooldc. org/resources/data

Powell, D. 2017, May 15. “No, Education Isn’t the Civil Rights Issue of our Time.” E*ducation Week*. Retrieved from: https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/05/17/no-education-isnt-the-civil-rights-issue.html?r=1726826262&mkey=665AD6A2-963D-4D51-8238-924373D9E27A

Ravitch, D. 2010. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*. New York: Basic Books.

Richardson, J., Mitchell, B., and Franco, J. (2019). Shifting neighborhoods: Gentrification

and cultural displacement in American cities. National Community Reinvestment Coalition. Retrieved from: https://ncrc.org/gentrification/

Robinson, G. 2004. "Freedom of Choice: Brown, Vouchers, and the Philosophy of Language." In. D. Salisbury and C. Lartigue (Eds.), Educational Freedom in Urban America: Brown V Board After Half a Century (13-52). Cato Institute.

Rohde, L. A., Campani, F., Oliveira, J. R. G, Rohde, C. W., Rocha, T., and Ramal, A. 2019. Parental Reasons for School Choice in Elementary School: A Systematic Review." *Journal of School Choice* 13(2), 287-304.

Roth, E. and Perkins, W. 2019, June 26. "D.C. Schools Shortchange At-Risk Students. A Report by the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor." Retrieved from: http://dcauditor.org/report/d-c-schools-shortchange-at-risk-students/

Schensul, J. J. 2012. "Methodology, Methods, and Tools in Qualitative Research." In S. D. Lapan, M. T. Quartaroli, and F. J. Riemer, *Qualitative Research: An Introduction to Methods and Designs* 69-103. San Francisco: Wiley.

Scott, J. 2013. "School Choice and the Empowerment Imperative." *Peabody Journal of Education* 88(1), 60-73.

Scott, J. 2011. "School Choice as a Civil Right: The Political Construction of a Claim and its Implications for School Desegregation." In E. Frankenberg & E. DeBray (Eds.), *Integrating Schools in a Changing Society: New Policies and Legal Options for a Multiracial Generation* (32-52). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press

Serving Our Children. 2020. "Program Fact Sheet: D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, 2019-20." Retrieved from: https://servingourchildrendc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/DC-OSP-Program-Fact-Sheet-SY-2019-20-1.pdf

Snider, W. 1989, Oct. 11. "Conservatives' Civil Rights Agenda Puts Spotlight on Choice." *Education Week*. Retrieved from: https://www.edweek.org/ew/article /1989/10/11/09090016.h09.html

Stambach, A. and David, M. 2005. "Feminist Theory and Educational Policy: How Gender has been "Involved" in Family School Choice Debates." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30(2), 1633-1658.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. 2011. "A Social Capital Framework for the Study of Institutional Agents and their Role in the Empowerment of Low-Status Students and Youth." *Youth and Society* 43(3), 1066-1109.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., & Markus, H. R. 2012. "It's Your Choice: How the Middle-Class Model of Independence Disadvantages Working-Class Americans." In S. T. Fiske, & H. R. Markus (Eds.), *Facing Social Class: How Societal Rank Influences Interaction* (pp. 87–106). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Stern, S. 1998. "School Choice- The Last Civil Rights Battle." *City Journal*. Retrieved from:https://www.city-journal.org/html/school-choice-last-civil-rights-battle-11879.html

Stulberg, L. M. 2006. "School Choice Discourse and the Legacy of Brown." *Journal of School Choice* 1(1), 23-45.

Suitts, S. 2019, June 4. "Segregationists, Libertarians, and the Modern "School Choice" Movement. Southern Spaces." Retrieved from: https://southernspaces.org/2019/ segregationists-libertarians-and-modern-school-choice-movement/

Valant, J. 2014. "Better Data, Better Decisions: Informing School Choosers to Improve Education Markets." American Enterprise Institutes

Valerio, M. A., Rodriguez, N., Winkler, P., Lopez, J., Dennison, M., Liang, Y., and Turner,

B.J. 2016. “Comparing Two Sampling Methods to Engage Hard-to-Reach Communities in Research Priority Setting.” *BMC Research Medical Research Methodology* 16(1).

Viteritti, J. P. 1999a. “School Choice: The Next Civil Rights Crusade.” *George Mason University Civil Rights Law Journal* 10(1), 115-120.

Viteritti, J. P. 1999. *Choosing Equality: School Choice, the Constitution, and Civil Society*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Wearne, E. 2013. “From “Fear-Based” Choice to “Freedom-Based Choice: Georgia’s Tuition Grants Act, 1960-1997.” *Journal of School Choice* 7(2), 196-224.

Weiss, H.B., Mayer, E., Kreider, H., Vaughan, M., Dearing, E., Hencke, R. and Pinto, K. 2003. “Making it Work: Low-Income Working Mothers’ Involvement in Their Children’s Education.” *American Educational Research Journal* 40(4), 879-901

The White House. 2017, February 28. “Remarks by President Trump in Joint Address to Congress.” Retrieved from: https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-address-congress/

Zimmerman, J. M. and Vaughan, D. Y. 2013. “School Choice Outcomes in Post-Katrina New Orleans.” *Journal of School Choice* 7(2), 163-181.