Why Parents Choose: Patterns of School Choice and the Role of the Hartford Community Schools

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Educational Studies
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Introduction

- Hartford Reform Strategy
  - All-choice system of school
- Hartford Community Schools
  - 6 elementary/middle schools
  - Improve academic outcomes & neighborhood stability
    - partnerships with local non-profits
    - Extended school hours & services
    - Schools as local community centers
Research Question

• Why do low-income minority parents choose schools and what does this mean for the role of the Hartford Community Schools within the larger district reform strategy?
Case for Significance

• Is school choice an appropriate and effective method to equalize education?

• “How” well studied, “why” not well studied
Literature Review

- Rational Choice Theory (Bell, 2008)
- Choice differs along socioeconomic lines (Haynes, Phillips, & Goldring, 2010)
- Increase class/racial segregation? (Schneider et al, 1998)
Methods

• Qualitative
  ▫ 6 interviews with Hartford parents

• Quantitative
  ▫ Survey data collected by the National Household Education Survey – Parent and Family Involvement in Education
I argue that a range of social and economic factors, not parental indifference, significantly impacts the patterns of school choice among low-income minority parents. The community school structure is necessary in Hartford to better serve the needs of local students and their families.
Location

- “I’m a strong believer in my children walking to school. I believe in the community school. I believe in neighborhood schools”
  - (Hartford Mother)

- “I wanted to pick my son up. I didn’t want him walking home.”
  - (Hartford Mother)
Parent Involvement

“The other choice, a suburban town, my concern for that, I wasn’t driving. I didn’t have access to a car. I’m still not driving but I have access to a car, now. And I am very involved in my kid’s life. If he were to go to one of those suburban schools I want to be sure that when they have parent teacher conferences, parent-school association, I can take an active part in that.”

Hartford Mother
Race and Ethnicity

• “I looked at academics... and the other thing, to be honest with you, when I look at the racial make up of the schools, I didn’t want my child to be, one of the 10 black children in that school”
  - (Hartford Mother & 1st generation immigrant)

• “I think one of the very good things that is lacking in our schools is, I think, the mindset of the people who serve the people”
  - (Hartford Mother)
Main Reason for School Choice by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher:Student Ratio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Main Reason for School Choice by Race/Ethnicity**

- **White**
- **Latino**
- **Black**
Home Language of Parents who Considered Other Schools

Home Language

English
Spanish

Percentage

0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
Mother's Highest Level of Education Compared with Likelihood to Consider at Least One Other School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Schooling Completed</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational School</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degree</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main Reason for School Choice by Income

Percentage

$25,000 or less
more than $25,000

Reason

Academic Performance
School Philosophy
Teacher:Student Ratio
Location
Conclusion

• Race/Ethnicity alone does not impact school choice

• School choice is affected by economic factors and social structures/hierarchy

• Hartford Community Schools as crucial support structure
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  - Director, Hartford Community Schools (Hartford Public Schools)