

Spring 2014

# The Study of Choice: Looking at Parent Surveys and Putting Them into Perspective

Brigit M. Rioual

*Trinity College*, [brigit.rioual@trincoll.edu](mailto:brigit.rioual@trincoll.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>

---

## Recommended Citation

Rioual, Brigit M., "The Study of Choice: Looking at Parent Surveys and Putting Them into Perspective". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2014.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/355>

# The Study of Choice: Looking at Parent Surveys and Putting Them into Perspective

Brigit Rioual  
Educational Studies Program Senior Project  
Trinity College  
December 2013

## **Abstract**

In the 1960s, interdistrict choice or 'voluntary desegregation' became popular in a few cities across the country. While it is not widespread, it is seen as more effective than other school choice options. My research focuses on parents' perceptions of an interdistrict school choice program, Northeast Choice, which is located in a Northeastern city. Through analyzing surveys collected by Northeast Choice completed by the parents in the program, I examine how parents experience the actual program and the schools the children attend through the program. I find that the majority of the parents who responded have positive feedback and because of this, it can be interpreted that these parents are having good experiences with both the program and the schools. While interdistrict choice is not widespread, my findings are important because it shows that parents and students are benefiting from this program and that interdistrict choice should be an option in more cities across our country.

## Introduction

Parents always want the best for their children, particularly when it comes to the education they feel their children deserve. Over the course of many decades, schooling options have become more and more diverse, primarily because of how highly valuable education has become in our society. These choices vary from private to public, from being close to home to traveling a bit farther. While there are a lot of public school options, there are fewer private school options. Private schools range from either being secular to non-secular and are all tuition based (Bell 2009). Within the sphere of public school options, parents can send their children to their assigned neighborhood public school or apply to send their child to a magnet school, a type of school that has a specific theme and offers educational programs and enrichment opportunities based on the theme. Parents also can apply to send their children to a charter school, a publicly funded but independently run school (Bifulco, Ladd & Ross 2009). Due to public funding, there is no tuition for these options.

After the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, parents have also been given the opportunity to send their children to different public schools within their district. This option is called intradistrict choice, and is offered to children who currently attend schools that do not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years and deemed “in need of improvement” (Richards, Stroub & Holme 2008). Whether a school meets adequate yearly progress depends on a state’s academic proficiency standards, based on a state’s standardized tests (Howell 2006). The children that attend a school that does not meet AYP for two consecutive years have the right to attend a school in their district that is achieving AYP (Howell 2006; Kahlenberg 2011). Schools that do not meet AYP are considered underperforming. Likewise, schools that meet AYP are considered higher performing.

National research has demonstrated that under NCLB, intradistrict choice has not been effective. Between 2003 and 2005, it was found that fewer than 2 percent of the students that were eligible to transfer out of their underperforming schools actually did so (Richards, Stroub & Holme 2008). Additionally, the participation rates of African American and Hispanic students participating in intradistrict choice were even less than white students (Kahlenberg 2011). While it has been argued that parents are opting out of transferring their children to higher performing schools because they in fact like the school their child is enrolled in, Richards, Stroub, and Holme (2008) suggest it is more likely that there just are not any better alternatives available within those districts.

Magnet schools, charter schools, and intradistrict choice are not the only public school choice options though. Interdistrict choice is an alternative option, though not widely used. Interdistrict choice is the opposite of intradistrict: it allows children to travel over district lines and attend schools in surrounding districts. It has also been called voluntary desegregation (Schofield 2001).

For my research, I focus on an interdistrict choice program located in the Northeastern part of our country. Due to confidentiality, I will be referring to this program as Northeast Choice. I will examine the perceptions that parents have of the program and the schools that their children attend within the program. Northeast Choice administered a survey that parents responded to and I will examine their answers to the questions posed about the program and the schools. With these surveys, I will be

answering my research question: *how do parents experience Northeast Choice and the school their children attends through the program?*

### *Background on Interdistrict Choice*

Before going into the literature on school choice and my findings, it is important to understand the history behind interdistrict choice. In this section, I will be providing more information about the creation of interdistrict choice and a few of the programs across the country. I will conclude this section by focusing on basic information about Northeast Choice.

### History of Interdistrict Choice & the Programs

In the 1960s across our country, white families fled to suburban towns from urban cities to escape the increase of minorities in urban schools. This flee led to segregation in the schools, both in the suburbs and cities because the suburbs had mostly white students and the urban schools had mostly minority students (Jacobs 2003; Kimelberg & Billingham 2013). Additionally, since the white families that went to the suburbs had more monetary resources and more education, the urban schools began to deteriorate because the minority students were mostly low income and had parents with very little education. The urban students were performing well below the national average on standardized testing and because the schools consisted of students that were low income, there were fewer resources to help them. This caused parents in a few urban cities to be frustrated, and as a result, some cities implemented a voluntary desegregation program, which allows students in urban cities to cross district lines and go to schools in the surrounding suburbs. This broke down the segregation specifically in the suburbs and offered urban students better educational opportunities since the suburbs had more resources and performed better on standardized testing (Beckett 2005).

The eight main programs—located in Hartford, Minneapolis, East Palo Alto, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Boston and Rochester—were implemented by either federal state ruling, state court ruling, or state law in the years between 1965-2001 and still exist today. These eight programs (except Minneapolis) were created

“...to assure the poor students of color who live in low-income and racially isolated communities are able to transfer to schools in more affluent and predominately White communities. The most successful of these programs have also succeeded in getting urban school districts to participate in meaningful numbers” (Wells et al. 2009, 20)

Hartford, Minneapolis and East Palo Alto were created based on “state court rulings grounded in state constitutional guarantees of educational opportunities,” while Indianapolis, Milwaukee and St. Louis were created by federal court orders, and Boston and Rochester through “state legislation and local policies that specifically sought to create more racially-diverse public schools” (Wells et al. 2009, 2-3).

All eight of these programs still exist today. For many of these programs, admission varies. It depends on the program whether the students are screened or not, but like other school choice options, students and their parents have to seek out the programs. Additionally, these interdistrict programs vary in size, serving between 500 and 10,000

students, depending on the program. While the amount of students they can serve varies, these programs are regardless popular and have long waitlists (Wells et al. 2009).

There have been mostly positive findings within these programs. I explore the literature on interdistrict choice further in the following section of this paper, but it is important to provide some context for the broader findings of these programs to show why they have continued. First, research has shown that these interdistrict programs help close achievement gaps between blacks and whites, Latinos and whites, “improve racial attitudes especially among Whites”, and “lead to longer-term mobility and further education for the students of color who participate” (Wells et al. 2009, 3).

When looking at specific programs, it has been found that in Hartford, the students’ in Project Choice (now Open Choice) have test scores and proficiency rates that “are higher than their Hartford Public School peers and black and Latino students statewide” (Wells et al. 2009, 5). Research on the Milwaukee program, like the Hartford program, has found that the students that went to the suburbs did better than their counterparts in the city, and in the more recent Minneapolis program, where income is a qualification to be a part of the program, outperformed their counterparts who decided to stay in the city despite qualifying for the program (Wells et al. 2009, 7). Likewise, the program in St. Louis has found that students that attend the suburban schools and remain there do better than their peers in the magnet schools or neighborhood schools in St. Louis by the time they get to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Wells et al. 2009).

Finally, it has been found that there are better long-term outcomes for mobility and opportunity by being in these programs. In St. Louis, the students who participated in the program

“...revealed that they had learned they could make it in a “White world” where students’ futures are highlighted by real job opportunities and college preparation. They no longer feared leaving the predominately Black north side of St. Louis and competing with Whites in educational institutions or the job market. They had learned that they could succeed in such settings; they were prepared to integrate into a predominately White society” (Wells et al. 2009, 6).

For the Open Choice program, it has been found that these students are more likely to graduate from high school and also go to college for longer than those who stayed in Hartford Public Schools. Generally, it has been found that blacks that go to the suburbs (that are mainly white) are more likely to be hired by businesses that are owned by whites in comparison to those who went to schools in the city (that are mainly black) (Wells et al. 2009). Additionally, while it was difficult at first for these suburbs to be willing to open up seats to city children, it has shown that “suburban residents, educators, school officials and students grow to appreciate these programs more the longer they continue” (Wells et al. 2009, 7).

### Northeast Choice

As noted before, I am focusing on an interdistrict choice program that is located in a city in the Northeastern part of our country, which I have renamed Northeast Choice. Like the programs written about previously, Northeast Choice was created to

“...address both the need for the most disadvantaged students in poor urban school districts to have school choices beyond their district boundaries and the

need for a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities across these same boundaries in order for states to maintain their constitutional guarantees to all students” (Wells et al. 2009, 15).

It is important to note that this program is slightly different than the programs I just discussed in that it allows students that live in the surrounding suburbs to transfer to schools within the city too. Based on 2011 data, the city this program is in has schools that are mostly underperforming, so they have little access to higher performing schools within their district. Additionally, the surrounding suburban towns that students have access to in the program are mostly high performing and achieving the AYP (Northeastern City Department of Education 2011). Via the Northeast Choice website, there are 2000 spots for students in the suburbs. The demographic information about the parents that took the survey administered by Northeast Choice will be provided later on.

## **Literature Review**

While my study focuses on interdistrict choice from the parent perspective, scholars have studied interdistrict choice and the other school choice options that I previously discussed. I have broken up my literature review into two parts: first I examine how parent characteristics play a part in their school choice decisions after No Child Left Behind, and then I look at the different ways interdistrict choice has been studied.

### *Parents’ School Choice Decisions after NCLB*

After NCLB, scholars have studied parents and their various school choice options in different ways. From looking at the school choice options parents are interested in, parent’s knowledge of the school choice options under NCLB, who transfers out of schools and what schools they are leaving, and the reasons behind parents’ decisions, we can understand how parents are involved with the process of school choice.

Because parents are the ones who make school choice decisions, Bell (2009) looked at the sets of schools the parents decided from, how parents constructed those choice sets, and how their income and geographic location shaped the creation of these choices. Through the study, Bell found that poor and working-class parents selected schools that were typically failing, nonselective, and free. In contrast, middle-class parents’ chose schools that were nonfailing and selective. Working-class and poor parents also had a larger number of schools in their sets than middle class parents. Additionally, Bell found that most of the city parents were people of color and chose schools that consisted of students that were predominately students of color. On the other hand, suburban parents were white and chose schools that had mostly white students. Out of all 48 parents interviewed, 45 used their social networks to learn more about schools, but middle-class parents’ networks allowed them to have more contact with nonfailing, selective, and tuition-based schools (Bell 2009).

While Bell (2009) looked at the choice sets of parents after NCLB, Howell (2006) looked at parents’ knowledge of the intradistrict school choice provision of NCLB. Through a survey of public school parents in Massachusetts, Howell found that the majority of parents say that they are familiar with the intradistrict option of NCLB.

However, most of the parents that had a child in an underperforming school were unaware of this and thus did not know that they qualified for the act's choice provisions. When looking at the parents with children in underperforming schools, Howell finds that they are less satisfied with the schools their children are in and that they would prefer to send their children to a different public or private school. They want their children to go to schools with more advantaged and higher performing students, just as the parents whose children attend higher performing schools. Additionally, parents of children in underperforming schools identify wanting schools that have lower proportions of African Americans, higher proportions of Whites, and lower proportion of low income students. The final finding of this study is that most of these parents want their children to go to private schools (Howell 2006).

Like Howell, Bifulco, Ladd and Ross (2009) also looked at parents and school choice after NCLB, but through looking at school data on Durham, North Carolina public schools and focusing on who transfers out and what schools they are leaving. They found that students who are advantaged, meaning that their parents had a college education, have used choice to transfer out of their assigned schools that had a higher concentration of disadvantaged students so they could go to schools with higher achieving students. Advantaged students were also more likely to not go to their assigned school than children whose parents had a high school education. Additionally, high achieving students that live in areas with low-achievement were also more likely to not go to their assigned school than low achieving students. Therefore, areas with disadvantaged students and lower achievement have students transferring out the most, and the students transferring out are more likely to be high achieving and advantaged. Bifulco, Ladd and Ross also note that black students are more likely to opt out of their assigned school than white students. Finally, when looking at parents of children in elementary and middle schools, they found that both low and high achieving students in elementary school were equally likely to transfer out of their assigned school (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross 2009).

While the previous studies looked at all choice options of NCLB and parents, one study looks at parents in relation to a specific type of choice programs. Kimelberg and Billingham (2013) conducted interviews with middle-class parents living in Boston, MA to learn why they were choosing intradistrict choice. They found that most of these parents appreciated the diversity of the city and the classrooms their children would be in. They wanted their children to have "an education experience that differs significantly from the homogeneous experience of their own childhood" (Kimelberg & Billingham 2013, 211-2). Additionally, they stated that they wanted their children to have a classroom that reflected the "real world" (Kimelberg & Billingham 2013, 211-2). Finally, they wanted their children to be close to home but they were only comfortable sending their children to those schools if there were parents like them from similar backgrounds (Kimelberg & Billingham 2013).

Although all these studies pertain to how parents' characteristics play a part in their school choice decisions, none of these studies involve parents' opinions of school choice options. While these studies do give us insight on parents' knowledge of school choice, how they make their choices, and who makes what choices, we don't know how they experience the choices that they make. This is one thing my study contributes, which could help parents make better decisions about school choices, and also could help those that create the policies to see interdistrict choice as an option. These studies are just one

way to look at parents and school choice and gives background information on who makes what choices.

### *Interdistrict Choice Programs*

Instead of just focusing on how parents' characteristics play a part in their school choice decisions, scholars have also looked at interdistrict school choice programs specifically. While I found one scholar who did look at parents and interdistrict choice, it was about their decision process. Additionally, scholars have looked at the characteristics of students and whether there is a connection between the type of student and the district they end up in, the achievement of students in interdistrict programs, the students' experiences, and why interdistrict choice is a better option.

While Orfield et al. (1997), like Kimelberg and Billingham, looked at parents and their choices, Orfield et al. instead studied parents who chose interdistrict choice in Boston's METCO program. They found that parents made the choice to send their children to the suburbs because they cared about their children's academics, just like suburban parents. They did not care very much about the interracial experience, but did wish that there were more diversity among the teachers and even the curriculum (Orfield et al. 1997).

Holme and Richards (2009) also studied interdistrict choice, but in Denver, Colorado. Rather than examine the characteristics of the parents, they examined the characteristics and trends of the students and whether there is a connection between what type of student participates and the districts they participate in. Overall, Holme and Richards found that higher income students were more likely to transfer to a different district that was also a higher income school district. Similarly, white students were more likely to transfer to districts with more white students. Finally they found that lower income students and students of color also used interdistrict choice to transfer to districts that had a higher proportion of students that are also lower income and of color. While interdistrict choice is seen as a way to desegregate schools, according to this study, students tend to choose schools that have students like them, further implicating the desegregation efforts of interdistrict choice (Holme & Richards 2009).

While Holme and Richards looked at the characteristics of students who participate in interdistrict programs, Jacobs (2003) studied the achievement of students in an interdistrict choice program, Open Choice, in Connecticut. She compared the students in Hartford that stayed in the Hartford Public Schools to the students who attended the Open Choice program that lived in Hartford. She found that students that attended the program performed better in reading, and to a lesser extent, in math. She also found that writing scores were lower for the students in the choice program than the students who were going to school in Hartford. When dividing the groups into whether they were lower or higher income, she found that lower income students in the program performed worse than the lower income students attending school in Hartford. In contrast, the higher income students in the program performed better than the higher income students attending school in Hartford (Jacobs 2003).

A different way to study interdistrict choice students is by looking at their experiences. Eaton (2001) looked at students in Boston's METCO program years after they left the program. She interviewed 65 past METCO participants and had three major

findings. First, the students felt that their race affected how the students and teachers treated them (Schofield 2001). Second, these participants changed their mind about METCO over the years. While right after they left the program their opinions were negative, years later they were more positive. They stated that they did not change their mind until they were in college and “realized just how valuable what they had learned in METCO was to them” and that the program “produced [a] unique educational benefit” (Schofield 2001, 386; Schaefer 2001, 55). Additionally, many of the participants stated that they developed cross-racial friendships, and it helped them in white and black communities in college and in the workplace (Schaefer 2001).

While Eaton studied a specific interdistrict choice program, other scholars have studied interdistrict choice programs at large. Richards, Stroub and Holme (2008) studied intradistrict programs and found that interdistrict choice should be an option nationally. Because NCLB offers only intradistrict choice to students who are in underperforming schools, Richards, Stroub, Holme looked at the school options students have in underperforming schools. They found that students in underperforming schools do not have very much access to higher-performing schools within their district, which would be offered through interdistrict choice. The authors argue that students would be given greater access to higher-performing schools via interdistrict choice because they find that “students would experience a five-fold increase in access to higher-performing schools” if they were given an interdistrict option (Richards, Stroub & Holme 2008).

Like Richards, Stroub and Holme arguing that interdistrict should be an option in school choice everywhere, Wells (2001) argues similarly in her study. Wells finds that research done on interdistrict choice is not accurately portraying the actual state of affairs. First, Wells states that the short-term academic achievement data isn’t telling the whole story. While short-term studies has shown that students in interdistrict programs may not be performing any better or have that many gains, interdistrict choice is not just about achievement and must do more than just raise students’ scores. She finds that there is no evidence that black students attending interdistrict choice programs need to be sitting next to white students to learn. She finds that interdistrict choice is important because it gives these students more contacts, greater self-confidence, and helps them work their way into a more realistic setting that they will have to one day go into, whether in college or in the workforce. Through this study, Wells is showing why previous studies on interdistrict choice obscures and downright does not address other aspects of educational experience (Wells 2001).

While the previous section looked at parents, NCLB and all different types of school choice options, this section looked at the ways interdistrict school choice has been studied. Interdistrict choice is not widespread and it is also not an option of NCLB, despite the potential benefits Richards, Stroub and Holme (2008) found if it were. Although interdistrict choice has been studied in many different ways, it has not been studied based on parents’ perspectives, and this is important because if parents are enjoying a program, other parents and scholars should know this so it can be an option in more cities. While achievement of these students may not be what scholars want to see, interdistrict choice does have benefits just as Wells (2001) states, and my study further extends this argument if parents are positively experiencing the program. Like Eaton (2001), I’m interested in the experiences, but instead of focusing on the children in the

program like she does, I'm focusing on the experiences of the parents in interdistrict programs because they are the ones who make school choices for their children.

## Methodology

To conduct my study on parent perceptions of Northeast Choice and the schools their children attend through the program, I used parent responses from a survey that was administered by Northeast Choice in June 2013. Surveys were completed either through the mail or Internet, and had both a Spanish and English version. In this survey, parents were asked questions about how Northeast Choice is performing as a program, how they could improve, and how the school their child attends through the program is doing (See Appendix A for full questionnaire). Because I did not administer this survey, I do not know the response rate.

Once I received the data, I looked at the responses to each of the questions on SPSS, a computer program used for statistical analysis. I focused on how parents view the program and the schools the children attend through a few different questions. The questions I looked at were:

- Does your child's school know you and your family?
- Do you receive the information you need from your child's school, such as: your child's academic progress, school events, special activities or programs, what your child is learning in school, school rules and policies?
- Does your child's school return your phone calls, emails, or other communication within a few days, display the diversity of your child on bulletin boards, paintings, murals, etc., and provide volunteer opportunities for all families?
- Which activities have you participated in at your child's school: parent/teacher conferences, after-school programs, end of the year events, school performances and volunteer as needed?

They responded yes or no to these questions or checked which applied. For these questions, I ran a frequency distribution to find the percentage that said yes or no.

Additionally, I looked at the question "would you recommend Northeast Choice to other families?" While it was a yes or no question, it did have a place to explain their reasoning. For this question, I focused on their reasoning. The question "does your child's school know you and your family?" also had a place for them to explain why they said yes or no, so I looked at both the frequency distribution and their reasons. I coded these responses based on words that stuck out to me (See Appendix B: Tables 2 and 4 for the codes). In the findings section, I discuss the codes as being positive or negative because in some cases, if the parents responded yes, they still had an issue or a negative experience (and vice versa).

While Northeast Choice received 247 mail surveys back, only 194 respondents answered every question that I focused on. This has given me a sample size of 194. Although not every respondent out of the 194 provided explanations to the two open-ended questions I focused on, I still analyzed those that did respond.

By focusing on these questions with my sample size of 194, I was able to answer my research question: *how do parents experience Northeast Choice and the school their children attends through the program?*

## Findings

### *Context*

Before going into the questions I focused on to answer my research question, it is important to know the demographics and participation of the parents in the program. Out of the 194 respondents, 192 responded to where they live. The majority of the parents live in the Northeastern city (94%), while the remaining does not. Regarding the amount of children they have in the program, the entire sample responded and a little over half have one child in the program (54%). The rest of the sample consisted of having two children (34%), three children (11%) and four or more children (1%). Finally, 193 out of 194 responded to how many years their family has been in the program. Parents responded less than a year (8%), between one and three years (41%), between four and six years (30%), between seven and nine years (10%) and 10 or more years (10%) (See Appendix B: Table 1).

### *The Survey*

When looking at the explanations as to why parents would recommend Northeast Choice to other families, 117 out of the 194 responded. I found that the top four positive explanations were because of the education their child receives, the program itself, the schools their child attends, and that it helps children (See Appendix B: Table 2). Parents' responses ranged from:

“Because it insures that their child gets the best education.”

“Program employees follow up with families for update on information for the following year.”

“My child is receiving a quality educational experience in a suburban school and he is excelling in all areas. I believe every child should have this choice.”

“My child so far has been welcomed into his school district and he has achieved his learning benchmarks”

“It helps kids get a chance at a better education.”

While the feedback was overwhelmingly positive for the 117, there were a few negative responses. In the explanations, one parent responded that they liked it in the beginning but not anymore, while another parent responded that the program is unorganized. Another reason was because of transportation. One parent replied, “No kid should need to show up to a school late almost every day.” Because the comments were mostly positive, the negative comments were coded as negative responses (See Appendix B: Table 2).

When looking at whether the child's school knows the family, the majority of the 194 respondents said yes (97%) (See Appendix B: Table 4). For the explanation portion of the question, 111 out of the 194 respondents provided an explanation. The top positive reasons were because the parents are involved, they (the parents and/or the school)

communicate, the parents visit and because of the programs they or their child goes to (See Appendix B: Table 4). Parents' responses ranged from:

“Educators and myself communicate through emails, phone calls and notes”

“I go to the schools on a regular basis”

“I visit her school to attend activities for parents”

“I have some children with educational needs and the school and I have a close relationship so my child can receive the best support”

“I like to stay involved.”

Negative explanations were either about how the school doesn't reach out, they don't feel comfortable, it was a new school, or they have no transportation (See Appendix B: Table 4).

For the questions regarding the information the parents receive from their child's school, the majority of the 194 parents (99%) received their child's academic progress. The majority also received information about school events (99%), special activities or programs (98%), what their child is learning in school (96%), and the school rules and policies (99%) (See Appendix B: Table 3).

When looking at the questions regarding what the school does, the majority of the parents replied that the school does return their phone calls, emails, or other communication within a few days (99%), displays the diversity of their child on bulletin boards, paintings, murals, etc. (92%), and provides volunteer opportunities for all families (96%) (See Appendix B: Table 3).

Lastly, for the activities the 194 parents participated in, parent/teacher conferences (178) and school performances (115) had the most participation, while after/school performances had the least (60). End of the year events (85) and volunteer as needed (74) were also not as frequent (See Appendix B: Table 5).

## **Discussion**

### *Interpretation & Analysis*

Overall, the feedback from the parents who responded to the survey about the Northeast Choice program and the schools their children attend are positive. When looking at both questions where parents were asked to provide an explanation, the majority of the responses were positive. Additionally, the majority of the parents also responded that the school knows the family. The majority of the parents also replied that they receive various amounts of information from their child's school, that their child's school communicates back, displays their child's diversity and provides volunteer opportunities. Finally, most of the parents who responded are participating in some way at the schools.

The fact that the responses are positive can be interpreted that these parents are having good experiences with the program and the schools. I define good experiences by the parents responding yes to the questions and having positive explanations. Throughout

these parents' responses, positive things are being said regarding the program and the schools; they are being communicated with, receiving information, and being welcomed in by the schools. Additionally, despite being towns away and stating that transportation is a problem, parents are still participating in high numbers. Being towns away is an obstacle, yet most of the parents are still going to parent/teacher conferences and a lot are going to school performances. The fact that 74 parents also said they volunteer as needed is also surprising, since most of these parents probably work.

### *Limitations*

Although my findings are positive, there are two main limitations to my study. First, while I perceive the parents responding yes to these questions and having positive explanations means that they are having good experiences, one could argue that parents who are having negative experiences may not be responding to the survey. However, one could also argue that such participants would have been the most motivated to take the survey in order to complain and make their needs known. Additionally, some people just might be more likely to do surveys than other people, so that could also change who is responding. Because I do not know who is responding, I can only interpret that these responses mean that these parents who responded are having good experiences; I cannot state that these parents who responded are having good experiences or that parents in the program are having good experiences because I am looking at a small sample size.

The other limitation was the format of the survey, which I believe is the reason why so many questions were skipped. Because so many questions were skipped, I wasn't able to look at all the questions I really wanted to look at. I found it difficult to make a really strong and cogent argument with such a limited batch of responses. There was just too much missing data for those questions to further my argument. Additionally, I could only state that I interpret that those that responded are having good experiences because of the large number of missing responses and the small sample size.

### *Implications*

This study has a number of implications. First, I didn't find literature on parents' involvement while they were in specific school choice programs, so I don't have anything to compare my findings to. In addition, those that took this survey may be already more involved with schools in the first place and may not represent the parent involvement in this program accurately.

While I didn't find literature on parent involvement in the programs, I did find literature on how parents' characteristics impact their decisions. However, I don't know about the parents' characteristics because there were no questions in the Northeast Choice survey about their education or income. Even though the majority of the parents live in the city, I cannot conclude they are low income.

If I knew their education and their income, I would be able to compare it to the literature on how certain types of parents are more involved in school choice processes. For instance, Bell (2009) found that middle class parents had more non-failing and selective schools in their school choice sets. Additionally, Howell (2006) found that many parents of children that were in underperforming schools want their children to

attend schools that have less African American students, more white students, and less low-income students. Likewise, Bifulco, Ladd and Ross (2009) found that students with parents that had a college education and high achieving students that live in areas with low-achievement were more likely to not go to their assigned school. This could be true of the parents in Northeast Choice; they might be more advantaged or just want to send their children to schools that are unlike the schools in their own district because they are underperforming. In addition, the students very well could be high achieving, but I don't have that information either.

For further study, researchers should look at the education and income of these parents and even the achievement of the students and see whether it matches with what the literature has found. Additionally, research should be done on what types of schools these parents want their children to go, to get an even better idea of who is participating in these programs. We do know that the schools in the city that most of these students are transferring out of are underperforming, but it does not mean that they are necessarily low-income parents so further study should be done on the parent characteristics (Northeastern State Department of Education 2011).

Additionally, a different implication of this study is that these parents who responded may live close enough to the schools to be involved. I didn't look at what districts the parents said their children go to school. For further study, researchers should look at how far away these parents are from the schools their children attend. Through studies done on interdistrict programs, it is found that distance from families' homes to suburban schools is an obstacle for parents to be actively involved, so it is interesting that I found that parents are fairly involved (Frankenberg 2007). Because I found that they are more involved, perhaps these parents live closer to the schools than other parents that are not responding to the survey, so this should be looked at in further study.

By looking at the districts the parents said their children go to school in, I could have also looked at whether the survey was statistically representative of the overall Northeast Choice participant pool. I don't know whether this survey accurately represents the program in any regard, but by looking at the districts in the responses and comparing it to the actual participant pool of those districts, I could have found this. For further study, researchers should look at whether the survey respondents are statistically representative of the participant pool in the districts.

Something else that should be looked at further is how many of the participants in this survey are leaving the program and whether it is statistically representative of the amount that actually leave the program. Those that are not staying in the program may not be responding to the survey, so we don't know their opinions. This was a question on the survey that I did not look at but because programs like these have high attrition rates, further research should be done (Frankenberg 2007). Additionally, if those that are not staying in the program are doing the survey, further research should be done on how they viewed the program and the schools to get a better idea of how the program and schools are doing.

Finally, I did not focus in on the question that dealt with how many years the family had been in the program. I simply stated it and continued on with my findings. Further research should be done on whether this survey represents how many actually persist in the program and whether the amount of years in the program affects their views

of both the schools and program. This would give a better idea of how the program is doing.

Overall, while my study does give insight on what is going on in an interdistrict choice program, there are many implications. I know very little about the families other than their opinions of Northeast Choice and the schools their children attend. I don't know if they are parents who are already the types to be a part of their child's school and education. Finally, I can't compare involvement in this program to any other program because of the lack of literature on this topic. However, my study does contribute to the knowledge on interdistrict programs because it is the start of understanding parents' experiences with interdistrict programs and the schools their children attend.

## **Conclusion**

Based on my study's findings and the literature, interdistrict choice is beneficial to students and parents and should be a more widespread option, especially since NCLB intradistrict choice doesn't have provide enough high performing school options. Like Richards, Stroub, and Holme (2008) found, interdistrict choice would give students in underperforming areas more high performing school options. The students in Northeast Choice are from a city where the AYP has not been achieved. They would be going to underperforming schools or have fewer options of achieving schools if they did not attend the program. Additionally, since it can be interpreted through the parents' positive feedback that they are having good experiences with both the Northeast Choice program and the schools, I argue that it is beneficial. Interdistrict is not a widespread school option, but it should be based on my findings. Additionally, Northeast Choice in its geographic area should also be a more viable option than it is. There are only about 2000 seats in the suburbs for students in the Northeast Choice program (Northeast Choice). If the suburbs gave more seats to the city students, more students could be a part of this program that is getting positive feedback from its survey respondents. In conclusion, because both the literature and my findings present interdistrict choice as beneficial, more families should be given this option.

## References

- Beckett, Grace. 2005. "Suburban Participation in Hartford's Project Concern School Desegregation Program 1966-1998." *Senior Theses and Projects*. Retrieved (<http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/248>).
- Bell, Courtney A. 2009. "All Choices Created Equal? The Role of Choice Sets in the Selection of Schools." *Part of the special issue, Informing the future of school choice policy* 84(2):191–208.  
(<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=508034467&ste=ehost-live&scope=site>)
- Bifulco, Robert, Helen F. Ladd, and Stephen L. Ross. 2009. "The Effects of Public School Choice on Those Left Behind: Evidence from Durham, North Carolina." *Part of the special issue, Informing the future of school choice policy* 84(2):130–49.
- Eaton, Susan E. 2001. *The Other Boston Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line*. Yale University Press.
- Frankenberg, Erica. 2007. Project Choice Campaign; Improving and Expanding Hartford's Project Choice Program. Poverty & Race Research Action Council, Washington, DC  
<http://www.prrac.org/pdf/ProjectChoiceCampaignFinalReport.pdf>
- Holme, Jennifer Jellison, and Meredith P. Richards. 2009. "School Choice and Stratification in a Regional Context: Examining the Role of Inter-District Choice." *Part of the special issue, Informing the future of school choice policy* 84(2):150–71.
- Howell, William. 2006. "Switching Schools? A Closer Look at Parents' Initial Interest in and Knowledge About the Choice Provisions of No Child Left Behind." *Peabody Journal of Education* (0161956X) 81(1):140–79.  
(<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=507853954&site=ehost-live&scope=site>)
- Jacobs, Erin. 2003. "Educating Inner-City Children in Suburban Schools: A Randomized Study of Majority-to-Minority Transfer and Achievement in Connecticut." *Papers and Publications*. Retrieved ([http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp\\_papers/21](http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp_papers/21)).
- Kahlenberg, Richard D. 2011. "The Potential Of Interdistrict School Choice." *Education Week* 30(33):24–26.
- Kimelberg, Shelley McDonough, and Chase M. Billingham. 2013. "Attitudes Toward Diversity and the School Choice Process Middle-Class Parents in a Segregated Urban Public School District." *Urban Education* 48(2):198–231.  
<http://uex.sagepub.com/content/48/2/198>

- Northeastern City Department of Education. 2011. "Northeastern City State Department of Education - Academic Achievement Report." Retrieved December 12, 2013 (<http://ctayp.emetric.net/District/Index/10064>).
- Northeastern Choice. n.d. "CREC: Welcome (Northeastern Choice)." Retrieved December 12, 2013 (<http://www.crec.org/choice/index.php>).
- Orfield, Gary et al. 1997. "City-Suburban Desegregation. Parent and Student Perspectives In Metropolitan Boston." Retrieved October 1, 2013 (<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED414391>).
- Richards, Meredith P., Stroub, Kori J., Holme, Jennifer Jellison. 2008. Can NCLB Choice Work? Modeling the Effects of Interdistrict Choice on Student Access to Higher-Performing schools. A Century Foundation Report. New York, New York.
- Schaefer, Naomi. 2001. "The Other Boston Busing Story (Book Review) (Undetermined)." *American Enterprise* 12(7):55-55. (<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=507713165&site=ehost-live&scope=site>)
- Schofield, Janet Ward. 2001. "Inside Desegregated Schools: Understanding How and Why They Influence Students." *American Journal of Education* 109(3):383-90. (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1085781>)
- Wells, Amy Stuart. 2001. The 'consequences' of school desegregation: The mismatch between the research and the rationale. *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*. <http://www.hastingsconlawquarterly.org/archives/V28/I4/Wells.pdf>
- Wells, Amy Stuart et al. 2009 "Boundary Crossing for Diversity, Equity and Achievement: Interdistrict School Desegregation and Education Opportunity | TC Media Center." Retrieved December 14, 2013 (<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/news.htm?articleID=7232>).

### Appendix A: Northeast Choice Parent Survey

Thank you for taking a moment to complete the Northeast Choice Parent Satisfaction Survey. We hope to use this valuable information to provide better service to you and child participating in Northeast Choice. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact [name] at [email] or [phone number].

**A. Information About Your Family:** Please respond to the questions below about your family's participation in the Northeast Choice Program.

**A1. Do you live in [Northeastern City]? Yes      No**

**A2. How many of your children are enrolled in the Northeast Choice program?**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+

**A3. For how many years has your family been enrolled in a school through the Northeast Choice program?**

- Less than a year
- 1  3
- 4  6
- 7  9
- 10 or more years

**A4. Please select the district(s) below that your child(ren) was enrolled in for the 2012-2013 school year. Check all that apply.**

(Checklist of all Northeast Choice Districts)

**A5. Will your children in the Northeast Choice program attend school in the same district for September 2013? Please check the best answer.**

**All** of my children enrolled in Northeast Choice will attend school in the same district

**Unknown/** I have not decided yet.

**Some** of my children enrolled in Northeast Choice will attend school in the same district

**None** of my children enrolled in Northeast Choice will remain in the same district

**If “Some” or “None”, please check all reasons that apply:**

- Moving out of Hartford or current town
- Attending a magnet school
- Transferring back to neighborhood school
- Transportation
- Graduated high school
- Other -

If other, please explain:

**A6. What is the best way to reach you?**

- Email
- Phone
- Mail
- Text
- Other -

If other, please specify:

**B. Information about the Northeast Choice Program:** Please respond to the questions below about your experience with the Northeast Choice Program.

**B1. Would you recommend Northeast Choice to other families?**

Yes -

If yes, why:

No

If No, why:

**B2. What is the best way to inform families about the Northeast Choice program?**

**B3. In your opinion, what would make the Northeast Choice program more attractive to families?**

**B4. What is the best thing the Northeast Choice program does to help your child(ren) succeed in school?**

**B5. What is one thing the Northeast Choice program can do better to help your child(ren) succeed in school?**

**B6. Is the Northeast Choice Parent Newsletter helpful to you?**

Yes -

If Yes, what do you like best about the newsletter?

No –

If No, what would make it more helpful?

I don't read the newsletter.

**B7. What information would you like to see in a future Northeast Choice Parent Newsletter?**

**C. Information about Your Child's Northeast Choice School:** If you have more than one child enrolled in a Northeast Choice School, please select one school and respond to the questions below.

**C1. Please select the grade level of your child's school that you will use to respond to this section:**

Elementary    Middle    High

**C2. Does your child's school know you and your family? Yes      No**

Please explain:

**C3. Do you receive the information you need from your child's school about:**

Academic Progress: Yes or No

School Events: Yes or No

Special Activities or Programs: Yes or No

What your child is learning in school: Yes or No

School Rules & Policies: Yes or No

**C4. Does your child's school:**

Return your calls, emails or other communication within a few days:

Yes or No

Display the diversity of your child on bulletin boards, paintings, murals, etc.:

Yes or No

Provide volunteer opportunities for all families: Yes or No

**C5. Which activities have you participated in at your child's school (please check all that apply, if any):**

Parent/Teacher Conferences

After-School Programs-including sports and extracurricular activities

End of the Year events

School Performances

Volunteer As Needed

Other (please indicate)

**Do you have any other comments that you would like to share?**

## Appendix B: Tables 1-4

<b>Table 1: Information Regarding Demographics and Participation (Questions A1, A2 &amp; A3)</b>	
<b>Question</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Do you live in Northeastern City? N=192</b>	
Yes	94.3
No	5.7
<b>How many of your children are enrolled in the Northeast Choice Program? N=194</b>	
1	54.1
2	33.5
3	11.3
4+	1.0
<b>For how many years has your family been enrolled in a school through the Northeast Choice program? N=193</b>	
Less than a year	8.3
1-3	40.9
4-6	30.1
7-9	10.4
10 or more years	10.4

<b>Table 2: Would you recommend Northeast Choice to other families? (Question B1) N=117</b>	
<b>Explanations:</b>	<i>N</i>
Child enjoys it	3
Choice	3
Diversity	14
Education	45
Experience	2
Good experience	4
Helps children	18
Negative response	7
Opportunities	5
Other	4
Positive response	2
Program	27
School	26
<p>*Please Note: Not all of the 194 respondents responded to this question. Only 117 did. Additionally, many respondents said more than one answer as to why or why not they would recommend the program, so that is why these responses do not add up to 117. Because they could say more than one reason, these responses are not mutually exclusive.</p>	

<b>Table 3: Information about Northeast Choice Schools (Questions C2, C3 &amp; C4) (N=194)</b>		
<b>Questions</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Does your child's school know you and your family?</b>	96.4%	3.6%
<b>Do you receive the information you need from your child's school, such as:</b>		
<i>Your Child's Academic Progress?</i>	99%	1%
<i>School events?</i>	98.5%	1.5%
<i>Special activities or Programs?</i>	97.9%	2.1%
<i>What your child is learning in school?</i>	95.9%	4.1%
<i>School rules and policies?</i>	98.5%	1.5%
<b>Does your child's school....</b>		
<i>Return your phone calls, emails, or other communication within a few days?</i>	99.5%	0.5%
<i>Display the Diversity of your child on bulletin boards, paintings, murals, etc.?</i>	91.8%	8.2%
<i>Provide Volunteer opportunities for all families?</i>	95.9%	4.1%

<b>Table 4: Does your child's school know you and your family? (Question C2) N=111</b>	
<b>Explanations:</b>	<i>N</i>
Been there a long time	1
Communicate	33
Don't reach out	2
Helpful	1
Involved	41
Know child/family	11
Meetings	11
New school	1
No transportation	2
Other	5
Programs	15
Support for child	2
Visit	16
Welcoming	1
*Please Note: Not all of the 194 respondents responded to this question. Only 111 did. Additionally, many respondents said more than one answer as to why or why not they would the school knows their family, so that is why these responses do not add up to 111. Because they could say more than one reason, these responses are not mutually exclusive.	

**Table 5:** Information about Northeast Choice Schools (Question C5)  
(N=194)

Question	N
<b>Which activities have you participated in at your child's school? (Please check all that apply)</b>	
<i>Parent/Teacher Conferences</i>	178
<i>After-School Programs: sports and extracurricular activities</i>	60
<i>End of the Year Events</i>	85
<i>School Performances</i>	115
<i>Volunteer as Needed</i>	74
<p>*Please Note: 194 respondents checked at LEAST one activity that they participated in at their child's school. However, they could check more than one activity that they participated in, which is why the numbers do not add up to 194. They are not mutually exclusive.</p>	