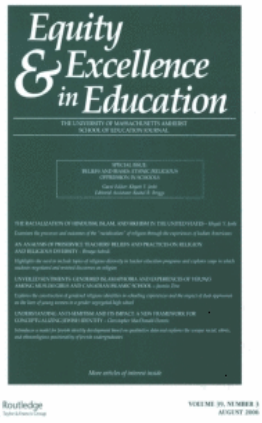


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Kimberly A. Goyette [a]
[a] Temple University,

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# Race, Social Background, and School Choice Options[1]

Kimberly A. Goyette
*Temple University*

This research contributes to discussions about social inequality in school choices in two ways. First, educational choices include the multitude of options families may consider, including choosing a home in a particular area and home-schooling. Decision-making is considered not at a single point in time, but over children's educational careers. Second, this research explores school choices across school district boundaries to include school choices in suburban and rural, as well as urban districts. I use data from a random sample of families with school-aged children living in the Philadelphia Metropolitan area (including some counties in New Jersey) and other counties throughout Pennsylvania to explore the options that families consider for their children's schooling. The data paint a picture of two constellations of families: those who are white, suburban, and middle-income (who primarily select schools based on their neighborhoods and residences), and those composed of lower-income and urban families of color (who rely more on non-neighborhood school options). The differences between these predispositions toward choice suggest that the expanded school choice policies of urban school districts will have little influence on overall school inequality because of the tendency of white, suburban middle-class families to choose public schools in their relatively privileged, suburban neighborhoods.

Advocates of expanded school choice policies, ranging from controlled choice desegregation programs to magnet and charter schools to voucher programs contend that one benefit of expanded choice is that choice reduces social inequality across schools. Proponents of such programs suggest that increasing options for school choices should lessen school inequality for two reasons. First, students who are dissatisfied with their schools, often those in the worst schools, have the opportunity to move into schools with better resources and/or instruction. Second, because public schools have to compete to enlist and retain students, all schools are motivated to provide their students with a competitive education (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coons & Sugarman, 1978; Nathan 1989; Young & Clinchy, 1992).

In contrast, other researchers find that that school transfers, charter schools, and private schools may be used to avoid contact between relatively privileged students and students of less privileged races and socioeconomic classes, thereby increasing class and racial segregation within school districts (DeSena, 2006; Fairlie, 2002; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Saporito, 2003; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006). Further, students who take advantage of non-neighborhood public school choice options tend to be more educated (Witte & Thorn, 1996), have higher incomes, and are more

Address correspondence to Kimberly A. Goyette, 1115 West Berks Street, Gladfelter Hall, 7th Floor, Department of Sociology, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122. E-mail: kgoyette@temple.edu

likely to have employed parents compared to students within the same school or school district who do not avail themselves of these options (Henig, 1995; Martinez, Godwin, & Kemerer, 1996; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). These families also tend to be more dissatisfied with their children's public schools and more active in school affairs, (Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1996; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999), and they have higher educational expectations for their children (Witte & Thorn, 1996). When these students and their families exercise choice, the schools they leave not only lose talented and engaged students but also the tax dollars and Title I (1965) funds associated with those students. Under these conditions, expanded school choices further disadvantage students who remain in low-performing neighborhood schools and thereby lead to greater social inequality between schools.

The research that informs this debate over the effect of expanded choice on school inequality generally treats educational choices as discrete phenomena with two options—to enroll or not enroll in a particular choice program (e.g., Henig, 1995; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). However, educational decision-making may involve a multitude of options from utilizing public school transfer programs to investigating charter and private schools to changing residences to take advantage of favored public schools. Even families that are not directly exposed to a variety of newer choice options like charter, magnet schools, or the controlled choice programs of urban districts recognize that they can choose schools by selecting a public or a private school, buying a home in a particular area, or even home schooling their children (Holme, 2002). Further, Goldring and Hausman (1999) highlight that those who do not partake of explicit choice options like private, magnet, or charter schools, or school transfer options are not necessarily "non-choosers." Families may make the choice to remain in assigned, neighborhood public schools after careful consideration of several options. This may be true especially if families choose neighborhoods specifically for their assigned schools. Whether or not families consider choice programs like charter, magnet, or intra-district transfer programs for their children's education may depend on previous decisions families have made, such as where they live and whether or not they choose to educate their children at home.

This research contributes to discussions about social inequality in school choices in two ways. Building on past research, I identify variation by race, parent's education, and family income in school choices. In this research, school choices include the multitude of options families have considered for the education of their children over time, including choosing a home in a particular area and home-schooling. Second, this research explores choices across school district boundaries to include suburban and rural, as well as urban districts. I use data from a representative sample of families with school-aged children living in the Metropolitan Philadelphia area (including surrounding counties in New Jersey) and in other metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties throughout Pennsylvania to explore the options that families consider for their children's schooling.

## HOW DO FAMILIES IDENTIFY SCHOOLING OPTIONS?

Whether and how families choose their children's schooling is a difficult concept to measure, particularly with quantitative data. Researchers have typically asked whether or not parents perceive they have choices and, if so, what options they consider (Neild, 2005). Other innovative research provides parents with a website of options available within a district and tracks their

search patterns (Buckley & Schneider, 2003). While studies such as these are informative, they are limited in that they consider decision-making only within school districts and at a single point in time.

The first way that decision-making about schools has been approached in qualitative literature is by asking parents whether or not they feel or believe they have choices. For example, Neild (2005) studied predominantly low-income African American parents in Philadelphia schools and found that most of the parents she interviewed were aware that they had some choice in the schooling of their children. She argues that nearly all parents, even those who were heavily involved in managing their children's high school choices, were unaware of the structural constraints (lack of available slots, for example) on these choices, though.

Another way of operationalizing perceptions of choice is by tracking the options that parents may consider for their children's schooling among public schools in a single district. When weighing their options, Buckley and Schneider (2003) contend that some parents act as "marginal consumers" (p. 137) These "marginal consumers" invest in gathering information about school choices in order to make informed decisions. This research, though, tells us little about the full range of options that families may consider and whether demographic, class, or other characteristics are related to the options families perceive.

## SOURCES OF VARIATION IN OPTIONS BY RACE AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

There are several sources of variation that appear to affect whether families perceive more or fewer schooling options or consider particular types of options. One is that information about options may not be equally available or accessible to parents, based on variations of race or class status (Henig, 1995). For example, Schneider, Teske, Roch, and Marschall (1997) contend that high income parents are less likely to use relatives as sources of information about schools and are more likely to report talking to friends or coworkers about school choices. Low income parents are more likely to rely on relatives for information about schools, which leads to more limited information about schooling options. In addition, Schneider (2001) finds that middle-class parents consult fewer sources of information about schools because they rely more heavily on middle class social networks that they trust. Schneider et al. (1997) also find that not only are people of color of all classes less likely to use Whites as informants about schools, they also have networks with fewer members than do Whites. These studies suggest some hypotheses. People of color may perceive fewer options because they have more limited networks for gathering information. Low-income parents also may perceive fewer options because they rely on information from relatives, which may be redundant. Both the number of members in a network and the type and quality of information held by the members of that network may vary by race and class, and this may lead to perceptions of fewer schooling options among low income families and families of color. These hypotheses have not yet been empirically examined in the research literature, though.

A second reason that families may consider fewer or more school options is that families approach education differently according to their social class background. Families may feel little need to explore alternatives to what they perceive is a public good that is provided by the state to all (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996; Reay & Ball, 1998; Wells & Crain, 1997). Families

who consider many options for their children may see education as a calculated decision that matches the values and attributes of the family (perhaps race, status, or religion) and those of the child (artistically talented, scientifically inclined, etc.) to the best-fitting school (Ball 2003; Bowe, Ball, & Gewirtz, 1994; Holme, 2002), and middle-class parents feel qualified to make these complex educational choices for their children (Lareau, 1989; Reay & Ball, 1998). For example, Wells and Crain (1997) found that many of the urban families of color in their study in St. Louis did not opt to transfer out of under-resourced city schools to attend suburban schools with superior resources because they believe children have an adequate learning environment in the city. Only the exceptionally gifted students are thought to warrant the better resources of the suburbs to be properly educated. Parents and especially the children in Wells and Crain's study (1997) who chose not to transfer to suburban schools also were concerned with maintaining feelings of comfort and familiarity in their schools. In these ways, then, families' decision-making about schools may reflect concerns that are specific to their social situation (Ball, 2003; Fuller et al., 1996; Reay & Ball, 1998). These studies suggest that working-class families of all races may consult fewer sources and rely on neighborhood schools that are familiar. Middle-class families may perceive more options in an attempt to match children to schools that are suited to their abilities and to their strategies for social mobility.

Families' perceptions of options for schooling their children also are likely influenced by the traits they consider desirable in schools and the obstacles they face to their children's attendance at particular schools. Both the characteristics that families desire in schools and the constraints they face may be shaped by their race and social class background. Smrekar and Goldring (1999) found that lower income parents and parents of color in Cincinnati and St. Louis were more concerned about transportation when choosing schools for their children than were middle-class, white parents. More advantaged families may have cars that allow them to more conveniently transport children to schools further distances from home or work. Less advantaged families may have to rely on public transportation. They depend on the timetables of public transportation and the convenience of public transportation routes to their homes, schools, and workplaces. Lower income families may be less likely to afford to stay home to care for children and/or have less flexible work schedules to provide transportation for children's education and after school activities. Further, high quality schools are more often located in advantaged neighborhoods, requiring low income families to travel further to attend these schools. For these reasons, transportation may be an important constraint on low income families' perceptions of their schooling options.

Other factors families may consider in their school choices may be related to the race and/or class composition of students in the schools. Families may choose schools in which their children feel comfortable and welcome, and these may be those schools with students who are similar in race or class background. They also may be the schools that are closest to their homes or schools that relatives and friends have attended or currently attend (Fuller et al., 1996; Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000). Students from less advantaged families may face difficulties adjusting to schools where middle- and upper-class children predominate. Similarly, racial minority children may not want to be one of only a few minorities in their schools. Families may seek out schools where their children will feel welcome, and race and class barriers may hinder this.

Families with economic resources may choose schools based solely on academic reputation because they are able to overcome these other obstacles to placing children in their ideal schools. Smrekar and Goldring (1999) found that in St. Louis 74% of parents with incomes over $50,000 reported academic reputation as their main reason for choosing a magnet school compared to

26% of the lower income parents. Goldring and Hausman (1999) and Smrekar and Goldring (1999) suggest that working-class families may be more constrained by considerations, such as transportation, and thus may perceive fewer options for their children's schools.

## EXPANDING THE OPTIONS FOR SCHOOL CHOICES

Research on school choice thus far has mostly examined whether or not families decide to send children to alternatives to the schools to which they are assigned based on their residences. However, the choice of where to live and the choice of where children should go to school may not necessarily be easily separated. For example, Holme (2002) did in-depth qualitative research on how high-status families searched for information about schools in order to choose homes in the neighborhoods associated with these schools. She found that parents relied on high-status neighbors and social networks. The information gathered by parents was based on ideologies of race and class, which equated race and class with the culture and values of the schools. Parents in Holme's study chose schools for their children based on their desire to maximize their children's academic and social standing. Though the school they "chose" was a neighborhood, public school, it was clear that they sought information about the school and compared it to other neighborhood schools before locating to neighborhood associated with a desirable school.

Another choice that families make concerning their children's schooling is whether or not to home-school them. Although the choice of educating children at home is a rare one with about 2.2% of school-aged children doing so in 2003 (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006), it is an option that parents may consider, especially those parents who dislike educational institutions for religious or other reasons or who feel they have few other institutional options (Stevens, 2001).

Because school choices, such as magnet schools, charter schools, and transfer programs, are more numerous in urban areas, the majority of the research on school choice is done in urban settings, notably in Milwaukee, Detroit, Montgomery County, Maryland, New York, San Antonio, St. Louis, and Cincinnati (e.g., Henig, 1995; Lee et al., 1996; Martinez et al., 1996; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999; Wells & Crain, 1997; Witte & Thorn, 1996). However, there are school choices that have existed beyond urban boundaries and these choices seem to be expanding. Suburban and rural residents often have access to private schools in the form of country day schools, preparatory schools, and military academies. Charter schools appear to be expanding in suburban and even rural areas (Kane & Lauricella, 2001). For example, of the 67 urban, suburban, and rural counties in Pennsylvania, almost 40% (26 counties) had at least one operational charter school in 2005–2006, when our survey on school choices was conducted. Only two counties in the state did not include religious or other private alternatives to public schools.

Another reason to expand the discussion of school choice beyond urban boundaries is to consider the historical role of the suburbs in residential and school white flight. Suburban schools have been and still are often viewed as havens from problem-plagued urban districts (Clark, 1987; Clotfelter, 1976; Coleman, Kelly, & Moore, 1975; Farley, Richards, & Wurdock, 1980; Giles, 1978; Giles, Cataldo, & Gatlin, 1975; Smock & Wilson, 1991). Families who locate to the suburbs and even rural areas may exercise school choice through their choice of residence. Many researchers have acknowledged that it is this division between urban school districts and suburban and rural districts that is most stark and most consequential for educational inequality. Because the *Milliken vs. Bradley* Supreme Court decision in 1974 limited the ability of courts to

mandate integration across city and suburban districts, there have since been few efforts to remedy disparities in educational resources that occur across school districts (Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle, 1997). Funding inequalities by place of residence remain one of the most persistent causes for school social inequality in the U.S. (Kozol, 1991).

## PENNSYLVANIA AND METROPOLITAN PHILADELPHIA SURVEY

The main source of data for this study is the Pennsylvania and Metropolitan Philadelphia Survey (PMP), which asks a random sample of respondents their opinions regarding different aspects of community life in Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia region. The PMP is a telephone survey of heads of households in Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia metropolitan region, including the surrounding New Jersey counties. The survey was administered in the fall of 2005. The sample was selected through random digit dial technology and is representative of all households in Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia metropolitan region with a residential telephone number. The survey was approximately 40 minutes in length and respondents were paid $10 for their participation. The survey has a 22% response rate. While this response rate is lower than historical response rates to telephone surveys and less than ideal, it is similar to researchers' response rates from many phone surveys that have recently been conducted (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2005). However, new research shows that while low response rates are not desirable, they need not necessarily lead to bias in the results (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2000; Keeter, Miller, Kohut, Groves, & Presser, 2000).

I compared the demographic profile of the respondents to the survey to census data for the region and found that they do not differ significantly in race, median income, and educational attainment from the population of the region. The responses were weighted to account for slight differences between the sample and the general population. The overall unweighted sample size of households with children between ages 5 and 18 with complete information on race, social background, and area of residence is 386.

Several questions on the survey explore the options families considered for their children's schooling. The dependent variables here are a series of questions that ask whether or not families have ever seriously considered (1) a neighborhood public school, (2) a private school, (3) a selective public school, like a magnet school, that requires an application or entrance exam, (4) a charter school, and/or (5) transfer into a public school that is not a neighborhood public school, charter, or magnet school for the education of the child/ren in their household. Answers to these questions are combined into an index that measures how many of these choices families had considered. Further questions ask whether families have ever home-schooled any of the children in their household and whether or not families specifically moved to their neighborhoods so that their children could attend the public school where they live.

The main demographic variables of interest in all models are race, social class background, and area of residence. Race is measured with two categories (1) white and (2) people of color. In the Philadelphia area, people of color are primarily comprised of African Americans. African Americans make up approximately 19.2% of the Philadelphia Metropolitan region's residents. Asian Americans constitute 2.9% of the metropolitan region's residents, and Latinos/as are about 4.4% (Metropolitan Philadelphia Indicators Project, 2005). According to statistics from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 2005 Pennsylvania as a whole has a much smaller proportion of

African Americans at 10.6%, Asian Americans at 2.2%, and Latinos/as at 4.1%. Because the proportions of Asian Americans and Latinos/as were so small I aggregated African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos/as into one category. Though there are likely important differences in school choice processes among these groups that I am unable to detect because of their small sample sizes, they are similar in that these groups are more likely than Whites to reside in urban areas that give them access to public school choice programs like magnet, charter, and school transfer programs.

Social background is gauged by two variables. The first is the highest education of the respondent from the family and is categorized so that those who have a bachelor's degree or more are compared with respondents who have less than a bachelor's degree. Income is the second measure of social class background. Families whose households make between $40,000 and $80,000 a year and over $80,000 a year are compared to the reference category—those who make less than $40,000 a year. Finally, area of residence is measured with three categories (1) urban, the reference category; (2) suburban, and (3) rural. These areas are self-reported by respondents.

Multivariate models also include a number of important control variables. Because race, social background, and area of residence are not only related to each other but they may be related to other variables that can influence how families choose schools for their children, multivariate models are necessary to tease out the independent influence of race, social background, and area of residence on identifying schooling options. The first control variable I include is the age of the respondent, measured continuously in years. The second is the number of school-aged children in the home, measured continuously. The number of school-aged children is likely to influence the number of options people may consider for their children—the more children, potentially the more options considered. Number of children in the household might also be constraining, though, if the number of children limits the amount of resources that can be spent on any one child. Next, I include the gender of the respondent from the family with (1) male as the reference and (2) female. The marital status of the respondent is included such that (1) is married and (2) is not married. Unfortunately, the survey did not allow me to distinguish between other kinds of family forms. Questions did not address cohabiting relationships nor relationships between same-sex couples. Finally, I include a variable that indicates whether respondents (1) own or (2) rent their homes.

## VARIATIONS IN SCHOOLING OPTIONS BY RACE, SOCIAL BACKGROUND, AND AREA OF RESIDENCE

The first five columns of Table 1 indicate whether families consider specific types of schooling options across race, social background, and area of residence. Bivariate percentages and means show some interesting differences across these demographic characteristics. For example, people of color are significantly less likely than Whites to consider neighborhood public schools for their children's education. This may be because people of color have fewer financial resources to choose highly-regarded schools in suburban districts, an explanation which is explored in the analysis presented in Table 2. While 93.4% of Whites surveyed said they had considered neighborhood public schools, only 75.0% of respondents of color said they had. Respondents of color are significantly more likely than Whites to consider all other non-neighborhood public school options. They are more likely to consider private schools than Whites (71.9% compared

TABLE 1
Educational Options Families Considered by Race, Education, Income, and Type of Residence

| | *Option Neighborhood public school* | *Private school* | *Magnet school* | *Charter school* | *Transfer to non-neighborhood public schools* | *Number of options*[a] | | *Ever home-schooled* | *Moved to neighborhood for school* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Race | | | | | | | (*SD*) | | |
| White | 93.4%*** | 50.7%* | 11.3%** | 8.6%*** | 13.5%*** | 1.8*** | (1.0) | 3.0% | 42.7%* |
| People of color | 75.0 | 71.9 | 31.3 | 50.0 | 45.5 | 2.7 | (1.4) | 9.4 | 21.9 |
| Education | | | | | | | | | |
| < B.A. | 94.2** | 49.6 | 11.6 | 12.9 | 17.4 | 1.9 | (1.1) | 5.1 | 36.1** |
| B.A. + | 84.9 | 61.3 | 17.2 | 11.8 | 15.1 | 1.9 | (1.0) | 0.0 | 52.7 |
| Income | | | | | | | | | |
| < $40,000 | 93.1 | 42.0* | 11.5 | 19.5 | 25.3 | 1.9 | (1.2) | 11.4*** | 28.4* |
| $40–$80,000 | 90.2 | 53.6 | 17.0 | 9.8 | 14.3 | 1.8 | (1.1) | 1.3 | 46.4 |
| > $80,000 | 93.5 | 61.3 | 8.6 | 9.8 | 11.8 | 1.9 | (0.9) | 0.0 | 41.9 |
| Residence | | | | | | | | | |
| Urban | 84.6 | 60.0 | 17.2 | 29.2*** | 23.1** | 2.1 | (1.3) | 4.7 | 23.1** |
| Suburban | 93.6 | 55.2 | 16.8 | 7.2 | 23.0 | 2.0 | (1.1) | 0.8 | 50.0 |
| Rural | 93.1 | 47.2 | 8.3 | 9.7 | 8.3 | 1.7 | (1.0) | 5.0 | 40.3 |

* $p < 0.050$ ** $p < 0.010$ *** $p < 0.001$

[a] This is a mean, not a percentage as in the rest of the table.

$N = 386$, except for 7 missing cases for ever home-schooled ($n = 379$).

TABLE 2
Multivariate Models for Number of Options Considered, Whether Private or Other Public School Options were Considered, Whether or Not a Family Ever Home-Schooled Children, and Whether or Not a Family Moved to the Neighborhood for the School

| | | | *Non-neighborhood school options* | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Number of options* | | *Private school* | | *Other public school* | | *Both private and other public* | | *Ever home-schooled* | | *Moved to neighborhood for the school* | |
| | *coeff.* | *(s.e.)* | *RRR* | *(s.e.)* | *RRR* | *(s.e.)* | *RRR* | *(s.e.)* | *Odds ratio* | *(s.e)* | *Odds ratio* | *(s.e.)* |
| Constant | 0.156 | (0.307) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Race (White = excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| People of color | 0.357*** | (0.091) | 0.876 | (0.536) | 2.651 | (1.461) | 3.259* | (1.554) | 6.384 | (6.975) | 0.419$^{+}$ | (0.238) |
| Education (< B.A. = excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| B.A. + | −0.008 | (0.084) | 0.701 | (0.281) | 1.224 | (0.908) | 1.229 | (0.558) | 0.016* | (0.030) | 2.052 | (0.789) |
| Income (< $40,000 = excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| $40–$80,000 | 0.042 | (0.158) | 1.980 | (1.143) | 1.099 | (0.748) | 1.117 | (0.916) | 0.064* | (0.074) | 2.654* | (1.278) |
| > $80,000 | 0.064 | (0.165) | 4.664* | (3.043) | 1.153 | (0.984) | 0.815 | (0.754) | | | 1.801 | (1.047) |
| Area of Residence (Urban = excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Suburban | −0.027 | (0.087) | 1.066 | (0.639) | 1.064 | (0.789) | 0.909 | (0.461) | 0.417 | (0.484) | 3.303* | (1.799) |
| Rural | −0.130 | (0.105) | 0.985 | (0.639) | 0.743 | (0.581) | 0.617 | (0.384) | 1.696 | (1.742) | 2.086 | (1.172) |
| Sex (Male = excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Female | 0.022 | (0.078) | 0.843 | (0.315) | 0.797 | (0.564) | 1.729 | (0.716) | 1.596 | (1.709) | 0.865 | (0.277) |
| Age | 0.009 | (0.006) | 0.956 | (0.031) | 1.005 | (0.023) | 1.073** | (0.028) | 1.026 | (0.053) | 0.945* | (0.025) |
| Number of School-aged Children | 0.021 | (0.038) | 1.037 | (0.266) | 1.445 | (0.414) | 1.350 | (0.348) | 0.176 | (0.169) | 1.221 | (0.221) |
| Marital Status (Married = excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Not married | 0.107 | (0.105) | 1.121 | (0.606) | 6.611* | (4.951) | 1.704 | (0.907) | 0.112* | (0.101) | 1.969 | 0.861 |
| Home Ownership (Own = excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rent | −0.026 | (0.132) | 1.158 | (0.743) | 1.257 | (0.795) | 0.689 | (0.450) | 0.783 | (0.821) | 0.935 | (0.895) |
| $\chi 2$ | 93.72 | | 101.49 | | | | | | 45.02 | | 19.63 | |
| df | 12 | | 33 | | | | | | 10 | | 11 | |

$^{+}p < 0.100$; $^{*}p < 0.050$; $^{**}p < 0.010$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Note: Unweighted $n = 386$ for number of options and 381 for non-neighborhood school options and moved to neighborhood for the schools (5 cases had missing information for those dependent variables). $N = 377$ for ever home-schooled due to 2 cases that are completely determined and therefore dropped from the analysis.

RRR = Relative Risk Ratio. Relative risk ratio is used to compare the coefficients from multinomial regression models to the excluded category. Unlike logistic regression models, odds ratios are not appropriate for these models.

to 50.7%), more likely to explore magnet and charter schools (31.3% and 50.0% compared to 11.3% and 8.6%, respectively), and more likely to consider transfers to non-neighborhood public schools (45.5% compared to 13.5%).

Across other dimensions of stratification, there are less clear patterns. Respondents with less than a B.A. report considering neighborhood public schools statistically significantly more than those with a B.A. or more, though Table 2 shows that this is due to income differences between the two groups. Higher income families are more likely to consider private school options for their children. Urban residents are more likely to consider charter schools; this is not surprising because of their greater availability in cities, though it is important to note that almost 10% of rural residents also consider charter schools. Urban and suburban residents also are statistically significantly more likely to consider transferring students to non-neighborhood public schools.

The next column presents the sum of the number of options that families considered for their children. It appears that generally families consider about two educational options for their children on average. However, families of color consider almost three options on average, a statistically significant difference from Whites. Urban and suburban residents are statistically significantly more likely to consider more options than rural residents.

The final columns of Table 1 ask about other types of choices that families may make about their children's schooling. Families may consider not participating in educational institutions or participating in limited ways by home-schooling their children, for instance. The survey did not contain a question that asked whether families had ever considered this, but it did ask whether families ever have home-schooled their children for any or all of their academic subjects. Few families avail themselves of this option overall. The only significant difference in the likelihood of home-schooling is by income. Lower income residents are statistically significantly more likely to home-school their children, with 11.4% of those making less than $40,000 reporting home-schooling their children as compared to 1.3% of those families making between $40,000 and $80,000 a year and no families who made more than $80,000.

The last column shows how demographic characteristics are associated with the decision to move to a particular neighborhood so children may attend that neighborhood's school. Unlike the other types of school choices that families may consider, Whites are statistically significantly more likely to have moved to their neighborhood for that particular school (42.7%) than are people of color (21.9%). Respondents with a B.A. or more also are significantly more likely to have done this than those without a B.A. Middle and higher income respondents choose neighborhoods for their schools more often than do lower income respondents, and suburban and rural residents are statistically significantly more likely to locate to their neighborhoods because of schools than are urban residents.

Because race, social background, and area of residence are related, Table 2 includes these demographic factors together in multivariate models to tease out their independent influences on the school choice options that families considered. The first model uses negative binomial regression to explore the influence of race, social background, and area of residence on the number of educational options families consider for their children. In this model, only race remains a statistically significant influence on the number of options considered once other demographic variables are controlled. People of color consider significantly more types of options than do Whites, even when controlling for urban, suburban, or rural residence, and other background factors. This result differs from that of Henig (1995) who found that people of color were less likely to use magnet school choice options in Montgomery County, Maryland. However, Henig

considers only a single school district. When a larger geographical region that includes suburban and rural areas is examined, people of color are actually more likely to avail themselves of options to their neighborhood public schools. These results also differ from those of Smrekar and Goldring (1999) and Witte and Thorn (1996) who found that people of color are as likely as Whites to use magnet school choice options. These results suggest that people of color are *more* likely than Whites to consider alternatives to neighborhood schools when including private, magnet, charter, and school transfers as choice options.

The second set of models uses multinomial logistic regression to assess how race, social background, and area of residence influence the likelihood of choosing particular non-neighborhood school options. The omitted category for this analysis would show those families who considered their neighborhood public schools only. Families who considered private school are statistically significantly more likely to have higher income, though there are no other significant differences between families who consider only the neighborhood public school and those who consider private school. Families who consider non-neighborhood public school options, like magnet, charter, or school transfer programs are more likely to be headed by respondents who are not married, otherwise there are no other statistically significant differences between families who consider non-neighborhood public school options as compared to those who consider only their neighborhood public schools. Finally, families who consider both private and non-neighborhood public school options are statistically significantly more likely to be people of color and older than families who consider only neighborhood public schools. Age, along with sex, marital status, number of children, and home ownership, are included as control variables in multivariate models.

The next column presents results from a logistic regression model that compares those families who had ever home-schooled their children (in some or all of their classes) with those who had not. Odds ratios show that those with a bachelor's degree or greater are significantly less likely to home-school their children, as are those with incomes $40,000 or over compared with those making under $40,000. (Income categories between $40,000 and $80,000, and over $80,000 had to be combined because there was no variation in home-schooling among those families who made over $80,000 a year. No one in this category home-schooled their children so a coefficient could not be estimated for this category.) Also significantly less likely to home-school are those in families in which the respondent was not married.

In contrast to the results concerning private school and non-neighborhood public school options, logistic regression model results show that those families who choose schools through their choice of residence—that is, those who move to their neighborhood in order to attend a particular school—are significantly more likely to make between $40,000 and $80,000, live in suburban areas, and be younger than families who do not move to their neighborhoods to take advantage of particular schools. Residents in the middle classes, those who have located to the suburbs, and younger respondents are the most likely to choose schools through an intentional selection of their residences. Though Johnson (2006) also finds that parents of more advantaged social backgrounds perpetuate their privilege for their children through their choice of residences and, consequently, schools, she uses wealth as a key indicator of social background. Unfortunately, this survey does not ask respondents about their wealth, only their incomes.

The patterns in Tables 1 and 2 seem to suggest that white families, families with more education and higher incomes, and suburban residents are more likely to have chosen and to be able to choose schools on the basis of moving to a neighborhood with a desired school. People of color, urban,

and lower income residents may rely on other types of school choices (private schools, magnet and charter schools, transfer options, or even home-schooling) because they are less likely to have chosen or to be able to choose their schools through their choice of residences.

## CHOOSING RESIDENCES AND SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS

Exploring a broad set of options that families may consider for their children's education, I find that there are differences in these sets of options that families consider across race, social class background, and area of residence. People of color generally consider more options for their children's schooling than do Whites. People of color are more likely to consider public and private options to their assigned neighborhood schools than are Whites. Multivariate results show that among all races, high-income families are more likely than middle and low income families to consider private schools as alternatives to their assigned neighborhood schools. White and suburban families are more likely to choose schools through their choices of residences than are people of color and urban or rural residents, even after accounting for differences in education and income between the groups. Middle income families, those making $40,000–$80,000, also are more likely to choose homes in order to assure that their children attend desirable neighborhood schools. Low income families are more likely to home-school children than are middle and upper income families.

Some of these findings run counter to the research that examines whether or not families participate in particular school choice programs. Previous research suggests that lower income families and people of color may have fewer sources of information about schools (Henig, 1995), may rely on the comfort and familiarity of local public schools more (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996; Reay & Ball, 1998; Wells & Crain, 1997), and may face more constraints in their schooling choices than do higher income and white families (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). However, in this research, people of color were found to consider significantly more options to schooling for their children than do Whites. These results suggest that urban, lower income, and families of color may be compelled to search for alternatives to their assigned neighborhood schools (like private, magnet, charter, or transfer programs) because they are less able to choose residences based on their educational preferences.

Another alternative to assigned neighborhood schools is home-schooling. However, this is often not considered an option in the school choice research. This research suggests that the choice to home-school is most used by low income families. They may be dissatisfied with their assigned public schools and have fewer options for private schools. This result differs from that of Bauman (2001), who found that middle income families were most likely to home-school. Like Bauman, though, I find that two-parent families are most likely to home-school their children.

Unfortunately, the question on this survey asked only whether the children in the household had ever been home-schooled in one or more subjects, so we know little about whether young or old children are more likely to be home-schooled. However, Bauman (2001) found that neither young nor old children are especially more likely to be home-schooled. We also do no have information on whether children attended a school some part of their lives or for education in some subjects.

White families, middle income families, and suburban families are the most likely to select their schools through their choice of residences. These families are often omitted from discussions

about school choice because they are perceived as non-choosers (Goldring & Hausman, 1999). However, these families consider several options and report locating to their neighborhoods specifically so that their children can attend the assigned schools. Though this "choice" to relocate to the suburbs has been studied in the "white flight" literature (e.g. Clark, 1987; Clotfelter, 1976; Coleman et al., 1975; Farley et al., 1980; Giles, 1978; Giles et al., 1975), which recognizes that families have often used suburban schools to escape integrating city schools, it is often missed in school choice research, and it is consequential for overall school inequality. Middle and high income residents with bachelor's degrees who live in suburban areas may cluster around "good schools." This further drives up real estate values and, consequently, the money available to district schools. Suburban schools that have been chosen by these more advantaged residents increasingly amass more resources than do those schools that urban residents consider leaving.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EXPANDED SCHOOL CHOICE

For most of the U.S., property taxes are a major source of revenue for schools. Because of this, neighborhood residential segregation by race and social class background has serious consequences for schools. School districts that have less revenue from property taxes, either because property is taxed at a low rate or because property values themselves are not high, have fewer financial resources upon which to draw. Citizens have brought suit against districts' uneven funding policies, the most well-known of these being the case of *Rodriguez vs. the San Antonio Independent School District* in 1973 (Ryan & Heise, 2002). However, while states have worked to redress some of this imbalance by supplementing property taxes (using various formulas to create a "foundation") or by more equitably distributing tax revenues in states, such as Texas, Kansas, or Vermont, for a majority of the country, inequality in property tax revenue remains a major source of inequality across schools (Kozol, 1991; Ryan & Heise, 2002).

So, what can these results say about current inequality in school choice? A substantial proportion of families in this study exercise school choice through their choice of neighborhoods. Families who attend their neighborhood assigned schools may actively choose their schools by choosing a location in which to live. Other families may choose schools by deciding to educate children at home. The process of choosing schools does not seem to be restricted solely to those who have access to or exercise choices using the expanded school choice options of urban areas, but it appears that families are similarly deliberate about schools for their child/ren across area of residence. Expanding discussions of school choice beyond consideration of two options highlights the important role of selecting homes in families' educational decisions. Neighborhood segregation by race and social class then shapes inequalities that students experience across schools.

One important lesson drawn from an examination of these choices is that a substantial proportion of white and middle-class families make decisions about their child/ren's education through their choice of suburban residences. To the extent that funding remains unequal across school districts, expanded school choice programs that do not include access to these suburban school districts will not fully address the inequality that exists due to differential access to neighborhoods (Ryan & Heise, 2002). Advocates for the redistribution of school resources like Kozol (1991) argue that district boundaries should be drawn to include both urban and suburban areas. Resources drawn primarily from property taxes could then be distributed more evenly between

schools in the city and in the suburbs. Court cases following the unsuccessful Federal Supreme Court case of *San Antonio Independent School District vs. Rodriguez* have focused on the state level. Despite improvements in school funding schemes, in few states were revenues distributed evenly over schools. Only two states, Nevada and Hawaii, mandate provision of equal funding to all districts (Ryan & Heise, 2002). While all other states use different formulas to determine where to set the foundation level for funding for all schools in the state, differing property values create unequal resources across schools (Ryan & Heise, 2002).

This research also shows that neighborhood school options are being considered by those who are not able to choose schools through their choice of residences. Until resources can be better distributed between city and suburbs, these options should exist for urban residents who find their freedom of choice of residences (and perhaps their ideal schools) constrained by job opportunities, lack of resources, and/or residential segregation patterns.

Although more detailed work on expanded school choice programs can better show the ways in which those programs can either exacerbate or ameliorate social inequality in schools, these results suggest that unless school choice programs also address residential inequality and its link to school inequality, larger social inequalities in schools will persist in the U.S.

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**Kimberly A. Goyette** is an assistant professor of sociology at Temple University. Her recent work in the sociology of education has focused on how the influences of social background and occupational expectation on college expectation have changed over time and how social background relates to choice of college majors.