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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from a study that examined the relationship between school responsiveness under different choice arrangements and the processes by which families make choices about schools. The study is part of a larger, ongoing project being conducted in 16 metropolitan high schools of choice in Chicago, Illinois; Washington, D.C.; and Chattanooga, Tennessee. This paper focuses on seven schools within three types of schools of choice--Catholic (three schools); single-focus magnet (two schools); and multifocus magnet (two schools). A survey of all 12th-grade students' parents, a total of 565, elicited an overall response rate of 49 percent. Findings indicate that different types of families prefer different types of choice arrangements for different reasons. Overall, parents choose schools overwhelmingly for academic reasons. Second, parent involvement differs according to different choice arrangements. Catholic schools facilitate greater levels of parent involvement, and multi-focus magnet schools are least effective in this area. Third, schools under different choice arrangements respond differently to parents. Catholic and single-focus magnet schools tend toward more structural responsiveness. Of the three types, Catholic schools have the most effective parent communication. In conclusion, schools that function from a communitarian perspective, such as Catholic and single-focus magnet schools, rather than from a bureaucratic one, have higher levels of commitment and parent involvement. Five tables are included. (Contains 78 references.) (LMI)

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL RESPONSIVENESS: FACILITATING THE HOME-SCHOOL CONNECTION IN SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

by

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The issue concerning the relationship between parent involvement and school choice has attracted the attention of policymakers, researchers, and educational practitioners who are trying both to understand the nature of this relationship and to make decisions about educational choice arrangements. One reason for such widespread concern is the number of school districts and states who are currently experimenting with different types of school choice plans for parents and their children. While these different choice plans may carry different consequences for schools, families, and communities, choice has become a catch-all phrase to describe various types of educational reforms intended to stimulate change. Despite their differences, nearly all choice advocates argue that it will result in greater parental involvement, satisfaction, empowerment, commitment, and sense of community (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Bryk & Lee, 1992; National Governors' Association, 1986; Raywid, 1985; Witte, 1991.)

The purpose of this study is to better understand how school choice influences parent involvement and what role the school plays under different choice arrangements in responding to parents. While the debate over the merits of school choice is often limited to choice among public schools, the private sector has historically responded to parental dissatisfaction with public schools by establishing their own schools. By including both public and private schools in this study, we examine a range of school choice alternatives. Likewise, the research literature investigating parental choice and parent involvement needs to be examined

simultaneously for both sectors if we are to understand the relationship between family choice and parent involvement.

Two strands of educational research on school choice have emerged over the past twenty years. The first has focused largely on parents' reasons for school choice and has been limited to private schools (e.g., Bauch, 1987; Bauch & Small, 1986; Erickson, 1982; 1984; 1986; Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Greeley, McCready, & McCourt, 1976; Kraushaar, 1972). This literature has established that such factors as social class differences, differences among private school types, and differences between families who initially enroll their children compared to those who transfer from public to private schools are related to parents' preferences in schooling and perceptions about the school (Erickson, forthcoming; Maddaus, 1990). Bauch and Small (1986) developed a typology listing four dimensions of parents' reasons for school choice. These are academic and curriculum reasons, discipline, religion and values, and various noneducational considerations (e.g., location of the school, transportation availability, child's choice). This literature has focused largely on parents as educational consumers concluding that patrons of denominational schools seek them primarily for religious reasons, although in more recent years such patrons are increasingly concerned about academic excellence (Bauch, 1989b).

A parallel literature on parental choice examines parents' choice of public school districts compared with parental choice processes for private schools (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Kirby, 1988;

Frechtling & Frankel, 1982; Williams, Hancher, & Hutner, 1983) and on parental choice alternatives within a public school district (e.g., Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Frechtling, et al., 1980; Fox, 1967; Nault & Uchitelle, 1982; Witte, 1991). Compared to private school parents, public school parents use superior searching methods; and parents' level of educational attainment influences their capacity to make informed choices due to lack of information (e. g., Bridge, 1978; Nault & Uchitelle, 1982). However, Bridge's (1978) data suggest that parents' information changes over time and that lower-income families eventually receive information similar to that of higher-income families indicating that socioeconomic status may not play a decisive role in determining how and why parents make school choices (Bauch, 1989a). In assessing together the separate literatures on private and public school choice, it is clear that questions about family choice in both private and public sectors have not been studied in a coherent, systematic fashion.

The second strand of educational literature on choice has concentrated on types of public school family choice arrangements including intra-district and inter-district plans, open enrollment schools, magnet schools, specialty schools, and public voucher plans (e.g., Metz, 1986; Raywid, 1985). Given the innovative nature of these diverse choice arrangements, the literature is largely explanatory, focusing on the goals and structure of these innovations. Considerable controversy surrounds some aspects of family choice arrangements such as "dumping" and "creaming" in which it is assumed that under choice plans, higher socioeconomic

families will end up in the best schools and poor families will be left in low quality public schools. Some studies of magnet schools conclude that these types of schools are successful in improving school quality (e.g., Blank, et al., 1983; Levine, et al., 1980); however, it is unclear whether such schools can capitalize on the advantages of choice found in private schools--clear purpose, shared goals, flexible management, small size, a community orientation, and a host of other quality school factors (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Erickson, forthcoming; Hill, et al,, 1990).

Simultaneously, research on parent involvement has clearly established a strong connection between student achievement and parent involvement (Epstein, 1992; Gordon, 1977; Henderson, 1987; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Tangri & Moles, 1986; Swap, 1984). This research has focused on a wide range of related family factors that influence students' performance in school. These factors can be grouped into several major categories: demographics, school related, family related, and idiographic. Within each category, previous studies have found a large number of specific factors that influence parent involvement. Among demographics, for example, parents in high socioeconomic families are more likely than are parents in low socioeconomic families to be involved with their children's education, as evidenced by parental participation with teachers and schools, and such involvement improves their children's academic performance (e.g., Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Lareau, 1987; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Also, urban and

African-American families are often at risk for parent involvement due to a cultural dissonance between these families and the schools (Irvine, 1990; Lightfoot, 1975).

Among school-related factors, for example, Schickedanz (1977) has classified various parent activities in schools as they effect the decision-making role of school staff members. At Level One parents respond to the school by attending parent meetings and parent-teacher conferences; at Level Two parents take more active roles performing school service such as in the classroom and on field trips. And, finally, at Level Three parent involvement activities include advisory committee membership and other decision-making activities. Numerous researchers have found that the more active roles parents take at school, the greater the benefit of parental involvement for promoting academic and social change in schools (Comer, 1980, 1984, 1988; Gordon et al., 1979; Leler, 1983; Warnat, 1980).

Among family related factors, parents improve their children's academic achievement by spending more time with their children in pursuit of activities that aid in cognitive development such as reading with their children, participation in homework (Cooper, 1989; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) and providing enriching cultural experiences (e.g., Bloom, 1985, 1986; Leibowitz, 1977; Resnick, 1987; Scott-Jones, 1984). And finally, parents idiographically influence their children's academic performance by imparting appropriate values such as expectations for their child's achievement (Seginer, 1983; Stevenson, et al., 1986; Wright &

Wright, 1976) and through "parenting styles" that foster good communication between parents and their children and responsible behavior which contributes to successful school performance (Dornbusch et al., 1987).

The separate literatures on parental choice and involvement need to be linked in a way that focuses attention on the role played by the school in the educational process. However, linking these two bodies of literature has received considerably less attention than each has received independently. While some theoretical work does exist that allows us to examine parental choice and involvement in the context of the school, it is not empirically informed and is based generally in noneducational settings. For example, much of this theoretical literature relies on Hirschman's (1970) interest in the use of voice and exit as methods for achieving satisfaction by public employees within an organization, rational choice theory, and market theory.

Research Questions

This paper attempts to empirically explore the link between the two bodies of literature on parental choice and involvement by examining school responsiveness under different choice arrangements. The way in which schools may choose to respond to parents' needs and the resulting policy system of the school, may interact in important ways with the processes by which families make choices about schools. Schools which are open to parents' inquires and which provide opportunities for participation may build stronger parental school ties and enjoy greater levels of

parental involvement. The issue for family choice arrangements is how to structure schools in such a way that they are responsive to parents' needs while providing the best educational programs possible. For example, can public magnet schools capitalize on some of the advantages documented for private schools?

This paper asks three specific questions: (1) What are the characteristics of families who prefer different types of choice arrangements and what are their reasons for choosing their preferred schools? (2) How are parents involved in their children's education under different types of choice arrangements? (3) How do schools respond to parents under different types of choice arrangements? Our study is based on a sample of parents from three different types of school choice arrangements: Catholic, single-focus specialty public schools, and multi-focus magnet public high schools.

Data and Methods

The study reported here is part of a larger, ongoing project of schools and families being conducted in sixteen metropolitan high schools of choice located in Chicago, Washington, DC, and Chattanooga, Tennessee. To be included in the project, schools had to meet the following criteria: (1) serve a large proportion of minority or low-income students, (2) admit all or a portion of their students through choice and a formal application process, and (3) draw a large portion of students from inner-city areas. The parent survey data reported here are augmented with information provided by the schools.

As indicated, this study focuses on three types of schools of choice: Catholic, single-focus magnet, and multi-focus magnet public schools.[1] The three urban Catholic schools serve lower- to middle-class students and range in size from 400-to-700 students with an average of 12% of families with incomes below the poverty level. Two of the schools are private and one is a diocesan Catholic school. The diocesan school serves exclusively African-American students, while the two private schools serve 86% and 30%, respectively. The three private schools enroll 100% of their student body in college preparatory or academic programs.

The two single-focus magnet schools are organized academically around a single theme and enroll the smallest number of students among the schools in the study. One focuses on arts and sciences, serving 400 students of whom forty-two percent are African-American. The second school focuses its programs around the agricultural sciences. It serves 240 students from middle and upper-middle income families, of whom 67% are African-American and 22% are Hispanic. Approximately 10% of students come from families below the poverty level.

The two multi-focus magnet schools are large, comprehensive high schools each serving approximately 2,000 students. One serves 100% African-American students of whom 25% come from families with incomes below the poverty level. The other is a more working or

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[1] We acknowledge the limitation that we are not examining parents' choice options in a given community; rather, our study is limited to examining discrete types of schools of different choice arrangements in individual settings.

middle-class school with only 5% who have incomes below the poverty level; however, it has a sizeable minority population enrolling 81% African-American students. Both schools have multiple programs ranging from college preparatory to vocational and remedial programs. The majority of students are enrolled in programs designated for students who attend the school by neighborhood assignment. However, for the magnet programs approximately 20%, or 400 students are enrolled making these choice or magnet programs comparable or smaller in size than the Catholic schools and somewhat larger than the single-focus schools. The magnet program for both schools is a college preparatory program and one of the schools also has a visual and performing arts choice or magnet program, as well. One of these schools serves 100% African-American students in its college preparatory program, while the other serves 40% in the college preparatory and 60% in the visual and performing arts program.

Sample

For the purposes of this study, only parents who chose these schools or their specific magnet programs are included. In each school all twelfth grade students were given questionnaires to hand deliver to their parents and return in a sealed envelope to a central collection point at the school upon completion. The sealed envelopes were returned to the researchers. The total response rate, across all seven school was 49%. Specifically, Catholic schools returned 62% of the delivered surveys, single-focus magnet schools and multi-focus magnet schools returned 50% and 42%,

respectively. Although the response rate may raise some concerns, the data suggest that the respondents generally are similar to parents who choose these schools as indicated in the above description. (See demographics in Table 3).

Instrumentation

The initial survey for this research was based on questions used in previous surveys which examined relationships between parents and schools (Becher, 1984; Erickson & Kamin, 1980; Goodlad, 1983; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Horn & West, 1992; National Catholic Educational Association, 1986). Revised versions of the original questionnaire were used in a series of studies which examined Catholic schools (Bauch, 1988, 1993; Bauch & Small, 1986; Bauch, et al., 1985). The questionnaire was subsequently piloted in Spring 1991 in public schools of choice as well as Catholic schools (Bauch & Cibulka, 1988). Based on these earlier analyses, final adjustments were made to the questionnaire.

Procedures and Variables

To study parent involvement and school responsiveness under three different types of school choice arrangements (i. e., Catholic, single-focus, multi-focus), chi square and discriminant analyses were conducted. Chi square analyses examined the relationship between parents' reasons for choice among the three types of choice arrangements while discriminant analysis was used to determine differences among the three school groups in terms of parent involvement and school responsiveness. Discriminant analysis is a multivariate procedure which distinguishes between

groups of respondents based on a series of discriminating variables. The goal of the analysis is to find a linear combination of variables that maximizes the differences among groups in the sample to best determine which parent-school interactions best distinguish among the three types of school choice arrangements.

As indicated previously, the conceptual framework for this study focuses on four sets of variables: Parent demographics, parents' reasons for choice, parent involvement or activities and responsibilities that facilitate the home-school relationship, and school responsiveness or activities and responsibilities that facilitate partnership with the home. The variables, definitions, measures, means, standard deviations and reliability coefficients of all the variables in the analyses are presented in Table 1.

(Table 1)

Parents' reasons for choosing a particular school are measured by five separate variables: Academic reasons (academic programs and college preparation), career reasons (preparation for careers/jobs), disciplinary reasons (discipline policies and safety), moral reasons (moral/character development, religious education, shared values and beliefs) and, convenience (availability of transportation and closeness of school to home).

Parents' activities that facilitate the home-school relationship are measured by nine separate variables--six indicating parent activities at school and three indicating parent activities at home. The first set of variables pertaining to

parent activities at school include the extent to which parents say they sought information prior to enrollment, they have current information about the school, receive information directly from their child or from school meetings, contact the school, attend school meetings and events, and serve on committees and are otherwise actively involved.

Parents' activities at home are measured by questions which asked the extent to which parents enforce rules about school issues, such as maintaining good grades and doing homework; and enforce rules about non-school issues such as talking on the phone and holding a job. In addition, we asked parents how often they check over or help with school assignments.

School responsiveness, or activities and responsibilities on the part of the school that facilitate the home-school relationship are identified by five variables measuring the extent to which the school: Provides information to the parents about courses and academic help, contacts the parents about how the child is doing, communicates effectively with parents, seeks advise from the parents, and whether the school requires parents to perform volunteer activities at or for the school. Parent demographic variables include survey respondent, ethnicity, religion, education, income, family structure, and parents' expectations for their children's highest level of educational attainment.

In addition, the analyses control for two variables that could account for differences among schools: Income level of the parents

and ethnicity[2]. The means and standard deviations of all the variables aggregated to the school level in the analyses are presented in Table 2.

(Table 2)

Results

This section reports the differences in characteristics of families and their reasons for school choice among three different types of choice arrangements; also, the differences in how parents are involved in their children's education under these different arrangements, and how schools with differing types of choice arrangements respond to parents.

Parent Demographics

It is quite clear that different family types prefer different choice arrangements. Statistically significant differences were found for some demographic variables across all three types of schools among parent choosers for ethnicity, religion, education, income, family structure, and parents' expectations for their child's level of educational attainment (Table 3). Catholic parents are most likely to choose Catholic schools (52.4%). Catholic and single-focus magnet school parents tend to be similar in minority composition (64.8% and 57.1%, respectively) and parents' expectations for their child's level of educational attainment--82.8% and 93.6%, respectively, expect their child to

[2]The correlation between income level and highest level of school attainment of the respondent or his/her spouse is r=.49, therefore income was used in the analyses.

obtain a college degree or higher.

In contrast, multi-focus parent choosers tend not to be Catholic (82.1%), are more likely to be minorities (86.2%), and do not expect their child to graduate from college (24.0%).

Reasons for Choice

Controlling for income and ethnicity, the parents in these three different choice arrangements--Catholic schools, single-focus magnet schools, and multi-focus magnet schools--differ in their reasons for school choice, parent involvement, and perceptions of school responsiveness. The first analysis examined the extent to which parents in these three types of schools differed in their reasons for school choice.

Overall, parents in the sample choose schools overwhelmingly for academic reasons. Most parents (N=456; 86.2%) said they chose a school for academic reasons, as compared with discipline (46.7%), moral development (45.2%), career, (33.5%), and convenience (26.7%) reasons.[3]

The results of the chi square analyses on these five reasons for choice indicate that income has a significant impact only on disciplinary reasons for choice. Lower income families are more likely to choose a school based on a school's discipline policies and for safety reasons than are higher income families. Ethnicity significantly impacts academic and convenience reasons. Blacks and other minorities are less likely to choose for academic reasons and

[3]The total exceeds 100 percent as parents could indicate more than one reason for school choice.

more likely to choose for convenience.

The chi square analyses testing for differences between the three types of school choice arrangements regarding parents' reasons for choice, taking into account the previously stated findings, indicate that minority parents are most likely to choose Catholic and multi-focus magnet schools for academic reasons ($X=10.5$, $p<.01$). Similarly, white parents are most likely to choose Catholic schools for academic reasons ($X=8.77$, $p<.01$). However, lower- ($X=27.36$, $p<.000$) and lower-middle ($X=24.64$, $p<.000$) class parents are most likely to choose Catholic and single-focus schools for disciplinary reasons, while middle ($X=39.22$, $p<.000$) and upper class ($X=14.11$, $p<.001$) parents are most likely to choose only Catholic schools for disciplinary reasons. Ethnicity and income are not factors in choosing Catholic and multi-focus schools for convenience reasons ($X=7.05$, $p<.05$) nor in choosing Catholic schools for moral reasons ($X=165.12$, $p<.000$). There is not a significant relationship between career reasons for choice and types of school choice arrangements.

A summary of those parents indicating "yes" to a particular reason for choice by school choice arrangement is presented in Table 4. The most widespread reason for all parents is academic reasons. Secondarily, Catholic schools are chosen for moral and disciplinary reasons; single-focus schools are also chosen secondarily for disciplinary reasons. However, parents who choose multi-focus magnets are choosing them secondarily for career reasons and convenience, while these are relatively unimportant

reasons for Catholic and single-focus school parents. Only Catholic schools are chosen for moral reasons.

In summary, then, Catholic and single-focus magnet schools are similar in that they are chosen overall for academic and discipline/safety reasons and not for career and convenience reasons compared to multi-focus schools. While Blacks overall are less likely to choose schools for academic reasons and more for convenience reasons, they are more like whites in choosing Catholic and multi-focus schools for academic reasons. Like middle and upper income parents in Catholic schools, lower-income parents are more likely than others to choose Catholic and single-focus schools for discipline and safety reasons. Only Catholic schools are chosen overall for moral reasons. Thus, different choice arrangements prompt parents to choose different schools for different reasons, but some similarities are evident between Catholic and single-focus magnet school parents in that these schools are chosen for similar reasons, more so than are multi-focus schools.

(Table 4)

Parent-School Interactions

The next analysis investigated the extent to which parent-school interactions differ by school choice arrangements. This analysis resulted in an optimal subset of ten variables from the original 14 which best discriminate the sample into the desired groups. The results are presented in Table 5.

The discriminant analysis resulted in two significant

functions. The first function and its corresponding Wilks Lambda of .621 discriminates among Catholic and single-focus magnet schools, and multi-focus schools. Thus, this function discriminates on the basis of a school's focus or more narrowly-defined mission; that is, compared to multi-focus schools, Catholic and single-focus schools tend to focus on a unified mission that embraces the entire student body. The group centroids, that is the distance between the groups from the mean or "0" point of the discriminant function, indicate the basis for the comparison. The centroids (group means) of the Catholic (.29) and single-focus magnet (1.1) schools are closer when compared to multi-focus magnet schools (.-.66) in terms of parent involvement and school responsiveness. Thirty-eight percent of the variance of parent-school interactions is accounted for by parents whose children attend a Catholic or single-focus school compared to a multi-focus school.

In contrast, the second function discriminates between the Catholic (.40) and the public magnet schools, that is, single focus (-.65) and multi-focus (-.19). Thus, the second function discriminates along a private-public school dimension. The Wilks Lambda of .874 indicates that thirteen percent of the variance in parent-school relations is accounted for by parents whose children attend a Catholic school compared to either type of public magnet school.

(Table 5)

Turning to the first function, discriminating between schools

with a more narrowly-defined mission and schools with multiple missions, the emerging profile of parent-school interactions in Catholic and single-focus magnet schools is somewhat different from the multi-focus magnet schools. The standardized discriminant coefficients indicate the magnitude of each predictor variable in classifying the groups by the parent involvement and school responsiveness activities. The high coefficients on ethnicity (.-59), and the extent to which parents have current information about school policies and their children's progress (.40), help at school and serve on committees (active involvement) (.33), and check over or help with homework (.-39); and the extent to which the school provides information about course selection and how to help students(-.29), is effective in communicating with parents and helps them feel at ease in approaching the school (.28), seeks advise from parents in making school decisions (.26), and requires parent volunteering (.61) suggest that these activities dominate the differentiation of Catholic and single-focus schools from multi-focus schools.

From the means in Table 3 and the direction of the coefficients and group centroids, it appears that parents in Catholic and single-focus magnet schools are less likely to be minority. In controlling for ethnicity, however, they are more likely to say they have current information about school policies and their child's progress, help at school and serve on committees (active involvement), and are less likely to check over or help with homework assignments. The schools on their part are less

likely to provide information to parents about courses and helping their children at home, but more likely to communicate effectively with the home and make parents feel at ease in approaching the school; more likely to seek advise from parents and to require parent volunteering than are multi-focus schools.

The second discriminant function distinguishes between Catholic schools, and the two public magnet schools. According to this discriminant function, differences between Catholic and public magnet schools are based on income (.35), the extent to which parents sought information prior to enrollment (-.49), have current information about the school (.23), the frequency of parents contacting the school directly about course selection and their child's progress (.52) and enforcing rules at home about non-school issues such as watching TV, using the phone and going out with friends (.31). Parents perceive that Catholic schools, for their part, are more likely to provide information to parents (.24), are more likely to be effective in communicating with parents (.45), but less likely to require parent volunteering (-.45).

Although parents in Catholic schools tend to have higher incomes, controlling for income, Catholic school parents are more likely to contact the school and enforce rules at home. Similarly, parents in Catholic schools are more likely to perceive their schools as providing effective communication with parents and making parents feel at ease in approaching the school, and as less likely to require parent volunteering. Public school parents are more likely to seek out information prior to enrolling their

students.[4]

In summary, then, parents who choose Catholic and single-focus schools (i. e., schools with a narrowly-defined mission) appear to have a greater parent involvement advantage and perceive their schools as more responsive to parents' needs than parents who choose multi-focus schools. Parents are involved in that they are more informed. That is, they are more likely to agree that they have current information about school policies and their children's school progress. They are also more involved in an active way at school in that they are more likely to say that they frequently help out at school and serve on school committees. However, they are less likely than parents at multi-focus schools to say that they frequently check over or help with homework. This may be due to the fact that students in these schools either have less homework or that they need less monitoring or help from parents with their homework. In addition, parents at Catholic schools exhibit another parent involvement advantage in that they are more actively involved at home with their children in enforcing rules that contribute toward getting homework accomplished such as limiting TV. They also take a greater initiative in contacting the school directly regarding course selection or their children's school progress than parents in the public magnet schools.

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[4]Several other variables in this study do not distinguish amongst school choice arrangements: The extent to which parents receive school information directly from their child or at meetings, attending school meetings, and enforcing rules about school school issues at home. Similarly, the extent to which the school contacts parents does not discriminate among school choice arrangements.

In perceiving their schools to be more responsive than multi-focus schools, parents in Catholic and single-focus schools feel their schools are more effective in communicating with them, more frequently seek their advise in making school decisions, and require parent volunteering. However, parents in these schools are less likely than parents in multi-focus school to say that the school provides information to parents about course selection and how to help students. This may be due to the fact that in schools with a more narrowly-defined curriculum, it is less necessary to communicate with parents about course selection than in larger schools with more broadly-defined programs and a wider array of course selections. In addition, Catholic school parents are even more likely than parents at their single-focus counterpart schools to feel that home-school communication is effective, that is, that the school responds to them quickly and makes them feel welcome and at ease when they need to contact or come to the school about a problem. However, Catholic school parents are less likely than magnet school parents to say that the school requires parent volunteering. Since Catholic schools have a tradition of parent involvement, it may be less necessary than in magnet schools to require involvement and more characteristic to invite parents to participate, especially in light of the greater emphasis in Catholic schools on helping parents feel at ease in approaching the school.

Conclusions and Implications

This examination of parent involvement and school

responsiveness under different types of school choice arrangements sheds light on the issue of the relationship between parent involvement and school choice and contributes to a better understanding of how choice influences parent involvement and what role the school plays under different choice arrangements in responding to parents' needs. The data suggest several conclusions regarding (1) the characteristics of families who prefer different types of choice arrangements including their reasons for choosing their preferred schools, (2) the relationship between parent involvement and school choice plans, and (3) and how schools under difference choice plans respond to parents.

First, different types of families prefer different types of choice arrangements for different reasons. Catholic school choice is preferred by Catholics, by white parents who have high levels of educational attainment and high expectations for their own children's level of educational attainment and for academic, moral development, and disciplinary reasons regardless of income and ethnicity. A greater array of family types choose these schools for a greater array of reasons.

Single-focus magnet school choice is preferred by the same type of families that prefer Catholic schools with the exception that they tend not to be Catholic, and for the same reasons with the exception of moral development. Multi-focus public magnet schools are least likely to be preferred by Catholics, those with higher levels of educational attainment, and those with higher levels of expectation for their own children's level of educational

attainment, and most preferred by minority families who prize them for academic reasons. However, multi-focus high schools are also preferred for career and convenience reasons by those who choose them.

Clearly, in the minds of these parents, different types of schools serve different functions and are so chosen.

Second, parent involvement differs according to different choice arrangements. The Catholic school choice arrangement clearly has an advantage. Catholic schools facilitate greater parental involvement at school and do a better job of eliciting parental involvement at home perhaps by conveying the schools' orientation toward discipline and responsibility to the parents at home in the management of their children. While this may be attributed, in part, to its religious orientation, single-focus magnet schools are clearly able to facilitate similar involvement of parents. Multi-focus magnet schools appear less effective in facilitating parent involvement at school or at home.

Third, schools under different choice arrangements respond differently to parents. Again, Catholic schools clearly have an advantage. They provide more effective communication with parents than any other type of choice arrangement, but again, are similar to single-focus schools in providing the conditions that make parent involvement and effective communication possible while multi-focus magnet schools seem less likely to do so. Clearly, Catholic and single-focus schools tend more toward structural responsiveness (Cibulka, forthcoming) in their dealings with

parents than do public magnet schools. Structural responsiveness has more to do with deliberative planning or strategizing how a school might interact more effectively with parents, rather than leaving such interactions to chance.

These conclusions raise the question of how it is that schools having a unified theme appear better able to involve parents in the school and in their children's education. In this regard, work by Bryk, Lee and Smith (1990) and Bryk and Lee (1992) is instructive.

In considering the research on public and Catholic schools from an organizational perspective, Bryk, Lee and Smith (1990) conclude that Catholic high schools function from a communitarian perspective and public schools from a bureaucratic one. The consequences of operating from a bureaucratic model include increased school size, greater curriculum complexity and student differentiation, and a dense external policy network with conflicting accountability demands which result in organizational environments marked by distrust, social conflict and a lack of personal regard for the individuals who staff the institutions. A communitarian model of school organization, in contrast, fosters a greater social cohesiveness among students and school professionals based primarily on a shared set of beliefs, values and expectations; less curricular and organizational complexity; less student differentiation, and smaller school size. In our study, both Catholic and single-focus schools resemble the communitarian model while the magnet schools resemble a bureaucratic one. Although magnet schools as schools-within-schools are to some

extent isolated from the rest of the school, their internal characteristics and external policy arrangements are still enmeshed in the bureaucratic model. And precisely because they are isolated from the rest of the school, student differentiation is increased and strains social relationships. Smaller, reorganized public schools operating under a single theme and with a focused curriculum, have managed to unshackled themselves from the kinds of bureaucratic chains that make them less responsive to parents and more inviting institutions. Indeed, the single-focus schools in this study had many of the features of Catholic schools--small size, few curricular offerings, less differentiation of students, and good social relations. It is less difficult to obtain parental trust, collaboration and participation under these conditions.

Bryk and Lee (1992) offer the notion of a school as a voluntary community characterized by a communal organization, a relatively high degree of autonomy in managing its affairs, and marked by individual membership. They argue that it is only under this type of arrangement that a school can exercise its moral authority in promoting the aims and goals of education. Membership in a school community evokes a type of commitment that is at the core of a voluntary community and results in participation. If smaller, reorganized public schools can evoke parent participation similar to that of Catholic schools by adopting some of the characteristics of these schools, then there are lessons to be found for all public schools. During this era of school reform, a renewed public debate around school organizational characteristics

that are most likely to enhance parent participation is sorely needed. Likewise, the debate over whether school choice should include private schools needs to be broadened to include the kinds of characteristics schools need to embody in order to operate effectively as voluntary communities.

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Table 1

Definition of the Variables in the Discriminant Analysis

Variables	Measures		Mean	(S.D.)
Parent Background Characteristics				
Income	4 point-scale from less than $25,000 (1) to more than $75,0000 (4)		2.39	(1.10)
Race	Black and other minorities=1; White=0		.73	(.45)
Reasons for Choice	Important Reasons: Yes=1; No=0;		Yes(%)	No(%)
Academic Reason	2 items		86.2	13.8
Career Reason			33.5	66.5
Disciplinary Reason	2 items		46.7	53.3
Moral Reason	3 items		45.2	54.8
Convenience	2 items		26.7	73.3
Parent Responsibilities/Activities				
The extent to which parents:	5-point scale			
sought information before enrollment	from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)	4 items α=.625	3.80	(.78)
have current information about school	from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)	3 items α=.759	3.74	(.87)
seek information directly	from not likely (1) to very likely (5)	4 items α=.585	3.60	(.80)
contact the school	from never (1) to very often (5)	3 items α=.723	1.90	(.92)
attend the school meetings, etc.	from never (1) to very often (5)	5 items α=.797	2.79	(1.06)
serve on committees	from never (1) to very often (5)	8 items α=.741	2.24	(.86)
enforce rules about school issues	from never (1) to very often (5)	2 items r=.781	4.32	(.95)
enforce rules about non-school issues	from never (1) to very often (5)	2 items r=.627	3.62	(1.15)
How often they check over/help with school assignments	from never (1) to very often (5)	1 item	3.33	(1.19)
School Responsibilities/Activities				
The extent to which:				
school provides info to parents	from never (1) to very often (5)	5 items α=.841	2.69	(.95)
the school contacts the parents	from never (1) to very often (5)	7 items α=.869	1.78	(.84)
parents feel the school communicates effectively	from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)	4 items α=.732	3.50	(.81)
school seeks advice from parents	from never (1) to very often (5)	10 items α=.918	1.97	(.89)
Whether school requires parents to perform volunteer activities	yes=2; no=1;	1 item	1.45	(.50)

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of the Variables According to Choice Arrangement

Variables	Catholic (N=244) Mean	S.D.	SFM (N=79) Mean	S.D.	MFM (N=250) Mean	S.D.
Parent Background Characteristics						
Income	2.58	(1.07)	2.21	(1.02)	2.35	(1.13)
Race	.628	(.485)	.536	(.503)	.844	(.364)
Reasons for Choice	Yes(%)	No(%)	Yes(%)	No(%)	Yes(%)	No(%)
Academic Reason	89.7	10.3	(96.2)	(3.8%)	(78.8)	21.2
Career Reason	29.5	70.5	35.9	64.1	36.9	63.1
Disciplinary Reason	69.2	30.8	53.8	46.2	19.8	80.2
Moral Reason	75.6	24.4	34.6	65.4	16.1	83.9
Convenience	26.5	73.5	15.4	84.6	30.9	69.1
Parent Responsibilities/Activities						
The extent to which parents:						
sought information before enrollment	3.75	(.84)	3.85	(.74)	3.74	(.76)
have current information about school	3.89	(.80)	3.92	(.79)	3.50	(.89)
seek information directly	3.70	(.79)	3.65	(.81)	3.48	(.80)
contact the school	1.98	(.89)	1.51	(.76)	1.94	(.99)
attend the school meetings, etc.	3.00	(1.04)	2.92	(1.06)	2.59	(1.05)
serve on committees	2.41	(.86)	2.24	(.83)	2.11	(.84)
enforce rules about school issues	4.32	(.97)	3.95	(1.10)	4.40	(.91)
enforce rules about non-school issues	3.68	(1.13)	3.16	(1.17)	3.68	(1.19)
How often they check over/help with school assignments	3.28	(1.21)	2.91	(1.16)	3.47	(1.19)
School Responsibilities/Activities						
The extent to which:						
school provides info to parents	2.84	(.99)	2.61	(.85)	2.51	(.91)
the school contacts the parents	1.91	(.86)	1.51	(.74)	1.64	(.74)
parents feel school communicates effectively	3.70	(.83)	3.63	(.63)	3.24	(.81)
school seeks advice from the parents	2.04	(.93)	1.99	(.85)	1.76	(.78)
Whether school requires parents to perform volunteer activities	1.42	(.49)	1.86	(.35)	1.29	(.46)

Table 3

Family Demographic Variables by School Choice Arrangements
(Percentage Distributions)

	SCHOOL TYPE		
	Catholic (N=239)	Single-Focus (N=81)	Multi-Focus (N=245)
Respondent			
Mother/Stepmother	79.9	84.0	86.1
Father/Stepfather	20.1	16.0	13.9
Ethnicity			
American Indian	.8	-	- **
Asian	4.2	2.6	1.3
Black	58.1	50.6	83.2
Hispanic	1.7	3.9	1.7
White	35.2	42.9	13.8
Religion			
Catholic	52.4	7.0	17.9**
Non-Catholic	47.6	93.0	82.1
Education			
No HS diploma	2.9	7.3	6.1
HS graduate	17.3	14.6	17.9
Tech/Some college	33.3	32.9	40.7
College graduate	25.5	25.6	20.7
Advanced degree	21.0	19.5	14.6
Income			
<$15,000	8.1	11.0	12.9*
$15-24,999	11.8	21.9	16.9
$25-49,999	29.4	41.1	28.4
$50-74,999	27.1	9.6	19.1
$75,000 +	23.5	16.4	22.7
Family Structure			
Two parents	62.2	60.3	52.1
Adults in home			
One	17.5	28.0	22.1
Two	41.6	34.0	35.9
Three +	40.9	38.0	42.0
Siblings in home			
None	-	-	-
One	47.6	54.2	48.0
Two	31.0	27.1	32.9
Three +	21.4	18.8	19.1
Expectation for Schooling			
HS graduate	2.9	1.3	4.4*
Tech/Some college	14.3	5.1	19.6
College graduate	44.3	31.6	33.2
Advanced degree	38.5	62.0	42.8

* significant at the .05 level
** significant at the .001 level

Table 4

Percent of Parents Indicating Reason for Choice by School Choice Arrangement (In percentages)

	Choice Arrangement		
Reason	Catholic	SFM	MFM
Academic	89.7	96.2	78.8
Career	29.5	35.9	36.9
Disciplinary	69.2	53.8	19.8
Moral	75.6	34.6	16.1
Convenience	26.5	15.4	30.9

Table 5

Discriminant Analysis of Parent-School Interactions
by Choice Arrangement

Variables	Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients Function 1	Function 2
Parent Background Characteristics		
Income	-.063	.359
Race	-.590	-.094
Parent Responsibilities/Activities		
The extent to which parents:		
sought information before enrollment	-.128	-.486
have current information about school	.400	.231
seek information directly	-	-
contact the school	-.070	.521
attend the school meetings, etc.	-	-
serve on committees	.339	.053
enforce rules about school issues	-	-
enforce rules about non-school issues	-.055	.315
How often they check over/help with school assignments	-.393	-.124
School Responsibilities/Activities		
The extent to which:		
school provides info to parents	-.297	.243
the school contacts the parents	-	-
parents feel school communicates effectively	.286	.453
school seeks advice from the parents	.268	.076
Whether school requires parents to perform volunteer activities	.616	-.451
Wilks Lambda	.621	.874
$p(x^2$ test)	.000	.000
Canonical Correlation	.539	.355
Group Centroids		
Catholic	.289	.398
SFM	1.14	-.649
MFM	-.659	-.188