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Paradoxical Choices:
The Realities and Limitations of Privatized Education for Latino Students

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One of the claims asserted by advocates of the privatized school choice model is that Traditional Public Schools (TPSs) have failed in their efforts to ameliorate social inequalities for underserved populations. School choice models that support privatization and competition are typically associated with the idealization of market efficiencies, as well as a cult-like focus on the efficient management of public goods (Trujillo, 2014). Apple (2004) calls this framing of the market ethos an eloquent fiction, suggesting that its advocates embrace social Darwinism and divestiture from public institutions. Latinos are expected to represent approximately 25% of all public school students by the year 2021 (Gándara, 2010). While achievement gaps between Whites and Latinos have narrowed slightly in recent decades, the gap between Latino English Learners (ELs) and non-Latino ELs has remained steady or grown marginally (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In 2014, over 12 million Latino students were enrolled in public schools across the country. Roughly six percent of those students attended charter schools. Latinos are proportionally overrepresented in charter schools, accounting for over 30% of all enrollees (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b). This paper critically examines various issues of equity and equality for Latino students through the lens of scholarly works that have empirically or theoretically explored various nuances of the privatized school choice model. It offers a synthesis of findings gleaned from the aforesaid body of literature, while also addressing key implications for federal, state, and local educational policy.

Keywords: *privatized school choice, charter schools, education equity, traditional public schools, Latino achievement, school segregation, neoliberalism*

The ideological underpinnings of privatized education in the United States have a strong footing in the country's historical and philosophical connection to the rights and freedoms of the individual. In recent decades, the idea of privatized school choice often is connected, rhetorically, to the goal of ameliorating educational inequities. Frequently, this narrative is accompanied by periphrastic linkages to the inadequacies of public schooling. These deficiencies, whether real or hyperbolized (or some of both), have taken the public stage on various occasions across the long arc of its relatively brief, but tumultuous history. Notwithstanding the potential (or tendency) to politicize the topic, the cracks in our educational system have a basis in reality. At a minimum, it is fair to say that our public school system has served and continues to serve certain groups better than others (See: Flores, 2007). The Coleman Report (1966), for example, which addressed the underachievement of marginalized groups in the United States, made these fissures quite evident and, in simultaneity, set the stage for a public discourse framed around the failures of public schools.

The narrative of public school failure has proven to be especially useful to certain politicians who, at one time or another, jockey for votes or who seek to weaken their political opponents using the aforementioned theme as a politically convenient means to divide and conquer the voting populous. A Nation at Risk, published in 1984, which positioned American schools as being far behind their global competitors, also heightened the public's perception that national educational reform was needed (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). It is not until a decade or so later, however, that privatized school choice became a key component of federal and state educational policy.

Privatized school choice alternatives have grown at a steady pace over the last three and a half decades, with notable surges here and there along the way. One of the primary mechanisms for operationalizing privatized school choice has included the charter school model. Another notable increase in charter schools is linked to President Obama's first term. As the name implies, schools of this category come with a charter (i.e., a contract that determines the accountability agreement between the issuing authority and the school). Generally speaking, charter schools are funded with public monies but are subject to fewer regulations than traditional public schools (TPSs). A significant growth in charter schools is detected at or around the beginning of George W. Bush's first term as president. Moreover, politicians' support for privatized school choice proved to be uniquely bipartisan in post-90s America. Despite their accelerated growth in the last decade and a half, charter schools represent just over 6% of all schools in the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). Nevertheless, when combined with a comparatively high percentage of private schools, which represent roughly 25% of all schools (Council for American Private Education, 2016), the encroachment of charter schools upon public schooling in the U.S. is quite significant.

The well-known economist Milton Friedman, who often is credited (or disparaged) for having first introduced the idea of school vouchers, also is a key point of reference in terms of understanding the ideological underpinnings of privatized school choice. Friedman (1982) advocated for an expanded application of free-market principles to include areas of life that were once considered the primary responsibility of the public sector, which included education. In his most often cited book, Capitalism and Freedom (1962), Friedman asserted that complex social problems were best addressed by promoting competition and by unleashing the invisible hand of the markets. Over the decades, his beliefs have been endorsed, regurgitated, and reinvented by politicians and privateers seeking to position themselves as proponents of American capitalism and free enterprise (e.g., Ronald Reagan).

Privatized school choice, or any model that supports competition and the mobilization of private capital, is typically associated with the idealization of market efficiencies, as well as a focus on the efficient management of public goods (Trujillo, 2014). Apple (2004) calls this framing of the market ethos an eloquent fiction, suggesting that its advocates embrace social Darwinism and divestiture from social responsibility above all else. In more recent times, the term neoliberalism, which derives from the classical liberal economic views of philosophers such as Adam Smith, is used to describe public policies that are undergirded by free-market principles. Political conservatives (i.e., post-Eisenhower), who typically view government intervention with disdain, have embraced free-market policies as a means to reduce the overall size of the federal government's influence. This viewpoint, scholars have argued, typically is wedded to a belief that deregulation will help to stoke the embers of entrepreneurship and economic expansion (Lemke, 2015). Scholars also remind us that progressive liberals were some of the first to embrace school choice as a possible way to address socioeconomic disparities entrenched in the public school system. Forman (2005) offered such a rejoinder, pointing out that progressive liberals in Manhattan, outraged by the city's failure to properly educate African-American children, endorsed the idea of vouchers in the late 1960s. Like all phenomena that are framed by theoretical abstractions, the manifest form(s) of privatized school choice derive from ideas and concepts that are interwoven and temporally juxtaposed.

Charter Schools

In 1992, the first charter school was opened in Minnesota. Interestingly, its founders were former public school teachers (Sanchez, 2012). In fact, it was Albert Shanker, the former head of the American Federation of Teachers, who first proposed the idea. Believing that teachers would have greater freedom to explore progressive approaches in this setting, Shanker viewed charter schools primarily as conduits for informing the policies and practices of TPSs. According to this vision, charter schools would serve as laboratories for experimentation and innovation, focusing specifically on ways to bridge sociocultural gaps between students of different backgrounds (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Perhaps what Shanker and others were not able to predict or foresee with great clarity is the extent to which their grand experiment might be misconstrued and, in subsequent decades, politicized for purposes unintended.

Since 1995, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has provided grant monies to encourage the expansion of charter schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Between 1992 and 2014, over six thousand charter schools have sprung up across the country (an increase of 224%). The largest percentage increases happened during the early-mid 2000s (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Three types of charter schools include: 1) those run primarily by for-profit operators called Education Management Organizations, or EMOs; 2) non-profit charters referred to as Charter Management Organizations, or CMOs; and 3) free standing charters. Since 2010, CMOs have taken a greater share of the industry's growth and currently represent 24% of all newly created charter schools. Nevertheless, aggregate growth is evident across all types of charter school categories and EMOs represent about 15% of all new charters (Mead, Mitchel, & Rotherham, 2015).

The Battlefield: Policies, Players, Vested Interests, and Controversies

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, signed into law by President Bush in 2002, made it possible for students to transfer out of "failing" TPSs and into either a TPS in the same district or a charter school (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to replace NCLB. Although it trims down the role of the federal government in education, it continues to incent the expansion of charter schools through grant funding. It also loosens accountability requirements by allowing states to determine their own methods for measuring school effectiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Current Secretary of the DOE, Betsy DeVos, is an ardent supporter of privatized school choice, especially vouchers. Her efforts to promote market-driven school reform in Michigan contributed to the further deregulation of charter schools in that state (Westervelt, 2016).

States must first adopt specific charter school laws in order to authorize their existence in a given jurisdiction. Presently, 43 states have adopted charter school laws. Term limits dictate how long a school's charter is valid in a given state. They currently range from 5 to 20 years, depending on the state (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Some states impose no limits on the total number of charters, while others set caps on either the total number of schools or the total enrollment legally permissible. Between 1995 and 2003, the number of states with charter school laws

grew from 19 to 40. Currently, 17 states place no caps on the number of charter schools allowable (Education Commission of the States, 2016).

Privatized school choice is highly controversial. As alluded to earlier, it is fueled in part by dueling ideologies about the role of the federal government in state affairs, as well as differing theoretical viewpoints over economics (e.g., supply-side versus demand-side policies). Private industry has much to gain from school choice. Executives in charter schools can make handsome salaries. For example, the CEO of Community Academy made roughly 1.3 million dollars in 2013 (Brown & Chandler, 2015). Among other types of constituents, the privatized school choice movement has been supported ideologically and financially by individuals who accumulated their wealth in the private industry, and thus have a vested interest in the advancement of the free-market ethos. Conservative think tanks also have funded research that supports privatized school choice. Unlike university researchers, think tank scholars can focus exclusively on their role as advocates for one policy approach or another (Boyles, 2005). To that end, such individuals are in a prime position to influence public opinion because they are freed from all teaching responsibilities and are comparatively better funded than university researchers. The U.S. marketplace represents huge potential for those who may view the industry in an opportunistic way. Given demographic trends, Latinos represent a burgeoning source of revenue streams for the industry. This is made even more evident when considering the aggregate number of school-aged students of Latino origins currently enrolled in TPSs. Opponents of privatized school choice view a myriad of dangers posed by the adoption of market-driven reforms in education. Cuban (2004), for example, warned that charter school students represent a captive market that could be easily exploited by private industry. The 2008 economic collapse reminds us that deregulation poses hazards of various kinds to the public good, including moral ones. A recent study estimated that roughly 1.8 billion dollars in taxpayer money will be lost to malfeasance and fraud associated with loose oversight of charter schools (The Center for Popular Democracy, 2016). Opponents of market-led reforms point out a variety of other concerns relating to privatized school choice programs. They claim, among other things, that privatized school choice has not delivered on the promise of improving student achievement and bringing about greater equity in schools (see, for example, Center for Public Education, 2017). The National Education Association (NEA), for example, officially opposes school voucher programs on the grounds they pose a threat to separation of church and state (85% of private schools are religious). They and other scholars claim that special interest groups, lobbying politicians to support privatized school choice, endanger the fundamental precepts of participatory democracy, exerting disproportionate influence over policy outcomes (Au & Ferrare, 2014; National Education Association, n.d.). Harvey (2007) took this idea a step further, asserting that privatization amounts to the surrendering of public assets to the privileged class and, in so doing, the "commodification" of public resources (p. 35).

The Latino Context: Educational and Social Inequities

Latinos are expected to represent approximately 25% of all public school students by the year 2021 (Gándara, 2010). While achievement gaps between Whites and Latinos have narrowed slightly in recent decades, the gap between Latino English Learners (ELs) and non-Latino ELs has remained steady or grown marginally (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The aforementioned point is important because it alludes to potential vulnerabilities for the broader Latino population,

especially if population growth is fueled in large part by ELs. According to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data for 2015, 24% of Latinos in the twelfth grade were proficient in reading and 12% reached proficiency in math, compared to 46% and 32% respectively for Whites. Results from 2015 were slightly lower for Latinos than their achievement in 1992 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). In 2014, over 12 million Latino students were enrolled in public schools across the country. Roughly 6% of those students attended charter schools. Latinos are proportionally overrepresented in charter schools, accounting for over 30% of all enrollees (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b). Some scholars have pointed out that Latinos are highly segregated in certain categories of both TPSs and charter schools. Orfield and Frankenberg (2008) indicated that over 60% of Latinos attend what they call intensely segregated schools in the larger cities of the west coast (i.e., schools that are at least 90% non-White).

The Latino population is highly stratified both in terms of their educational attainment and their academic achievement. Roughly 31% of the 31.5 million Latinos in this country 25 years of age or older do not hold a high school degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Between 1971 and 2005, the bachelor degree attainment rates of Latinos held relatively constant, fluctuating between 9% and 12% (Gándara, 2010). By 2014, the percentage had risen to 15%. Latinos are less likely than Whites or other groups to assume debt in order to pay for college. Additionally, due to the prohibitive cost of four-year colleges, they are much more likely to attend community colleges than Whites (Krogstad, 2016); this includes high-achieving Latino students (Kurlaender, 2006).
Over 77% of all Latino children participating in the National School Lunch Program receive free or reduced lunch and roughly 28% live in food insecure households (Delgado, 2015). Roughly 25% of all Latinos in the United States live in poverty and are uninsured (Stepler & Brown, 2016). About half of all employed Latino males are clustered in low-skilled labor occupations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). Moreover, both male and female Latinos are overrepresented in occupations of low status and minimal social mobility (Kochhar, 2005).

Privatization and Educational Equity for Latino Students: A Synthesis of Findings

Despite the growing enthusiasm for privatized school choice, there is little scholarly consensus over whether or not such options will best ameliorate the cultural and socioeconomic disparities extant in U.S. schools. For example, a variety of studies found that students attending charter schools do not outperform their peers who attend TPSs (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006; Chingos & West, 2015; Hanushek et al., 2006; Nelson, Rosenberg, & Van Meter, 2004; Scott & Villavicencio, 2009). A large scale quantitative study of reading and math performance in 27 states, often referred to as the CREDO study, however, found that Latinos of low SES in charter schools marginally outperformed their peers in TPSs (Cremata et al., 2013). A recent review of the methods employed in that study, nevertheless, raised some doubts over its empirical validity. Maul (2015) pointed out that: 1) the effect sizes were quite small; 2) the samples excluded some of the worst performers in charter schools; and 3) the matching techniques were atypical for regression analysis. In a similar way, Vasquez Heilig et al. (2011) offered a pithy deconstruction of African-American achievement in Texas charter schools, pointing to the high attrition rates of such students as a counter-narrative to the so-called Texas

miracle (i.e., a reference to the assumption that school choice and accountability had significantly improved achievement in Texas during the early years of reform).

Digging deeper into the CREDO data, one also finds that growth comparisons to White students were much less favorable for charter schools. Latinos of low SES enrolled in charters grew at a far slower pace than Whites in TPSs. Furthermore, Latino ELs, who constitute 80% of all ELs (National Education Association, n.d.), grew at a lower rate than Whites enrolled in TPSs (Cremata et al., 2013). A study of Michigan's charter schools showed that Latino students underperformed in comparison to their TPS peers (Michigan Department of Education, 2010). The aforementioned study did not disaggregate Latinos by SES, and thus it is difficult to determine whether poorer Latinos fared better, worse, or the same as their TPS peers. Controlling for demographics and location, Lubienski and Lubienski (2006) came to the conclusion that charter schools underperformed TPSs, but that Latino achievement was relatively low across all categories of schools.

In their examination of racial and ethnic segregation in public schools, Frankenberg and Lee (2003) found that disadvantaged minorities attending charter schools tended to be clustered in institutional settings with more uniform demographics. At that time, Latinos were equally segregated in both TPSs and charter schools. Since then, their clustering in both demographically isolated TPSs and charter schools has increased (Frankenberg et al., 2012; Ladd, Clotfelter, & Holbein, 2015; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Whitehurst, Reeves, & Rodriguez, 2016). The aforementioned trend is observed alongside overall increases in charter school attendance by Latinos. The total number of Latinos enrolled in charter schools more than doubled between 2007 and 2014, increasing their overall representation from 24.1% to 30% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b). Other studies have shown that charter schools contribute to the deepening of school segregation across categories of minorities (Brunner, Imazeki, & Ross, 2010; Cobb & Glass, 1999; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Jabbar et al., 2015; Garcia, 2008). Some scholars have asserted that charter schools tend to replicate the resource deficits that are found in their neighboring public schools (Ascher, Jacobowitz, McBride, 1999) or exacerbate preexisting ones (Baker, 2016), calling into question the notion that such alternatives offer an "educational oasis" for disadvantaged minorities. Others demonstrate how charter schools intentionally exclude certain types of students (Bancroft, 2009; Buckley & Schneider, 2007; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002).

Research has suggested that school integration can have a positive impact on learning outcomes for all students (Armor, 2002; Eaton, 2011; Ellsworth, 2013; Mickelson, 2012; Wells et al., 2009; Wortman & Bryant, 1983). Conversely, school segregation can have a negative impact on achievement for students of low SES (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Coleman et al., 1966; Entwisle & Alexander, 1992; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). One particular study, which focused on the segregation of Latinos in school settings, found that socioeconomic clustering had a negative influence on the achievement of low-income Latino students (Ryabov & Van Hook, 2007). It also showed that first-generation Latino immigrants were negatively impacted by both ethnic and socioeconomic segregation.

This brief review of the literature dealing in school segregation is troubling, especially when considering that 65 years have passed since the Brown v. Board of Education decision. In seeking to amend the social injustices that are reproduced through educational inequities, the reversal of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic isolation would seem to be of utmost relevance to the U.S. Department of Education's overall strategy. Instead, it appears that neoliberal approaches to addressing educa-

tional inequities have been favored by its leadership in recent decades. The persistence of various inequities in schools, including the segregation of Latinos and other minorities, calls into question the logic of focusing on the expansion of privatized school choice, especially when it seems evident these models, at a minimum, replicate patterns of segregation or, more than likely, accentuate them. If the latter is true, then a compounding effect on social stratification is likely to occur in the decades to come since Latinos are 1) growing in population size and 2) increasingly overrepresented in demographically-isolated charter schools and TPSs.

The above discussion sets the stage for a brief treatment of an important but less- rigorously documented topic: Latino parents and their decision-making around schooling. Haynes, Phillips, and Goldring (2010) found that Latino parents who chose magnet schools tended to be second generation immigrants and middle-income earners. Intuitively, these findings make sense considering that first-generation immigrants of Latino origin, by and large, will have less access to information due to language barriers (Fry & Gonzales, 2008; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014), as well as less direct involvement in academic matters due to limited English proficiency (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). Low income parents, more generally speaking, have less access to privileged forms of social capital when making choices about schools (Bell, 2009; Gamoran, Turley, Turner, & Fish, 2012; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau; Perna & Titus, 2005). Income itself also will influence decision-making about schooling. Bell (2009), for example, found that pragmatic choices about cost and transportation were significant factors for parents of low SES (i.e., in terms of weighing different school options). In a mixed-methods study, Mavrogordato and Stein (2014) determined that Latino parents rely heavily on informal networks when choosing schools, but also weigh indirect costs to construct their choice set. Considering that 35% of foreign-born Latinos live in poverty, indirect costs will likely impact first-generation students and parents more directly than their second- or third-generation counterparts (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008). All of these considerations raise doubts concerning the fundamental assumptions of privatized school choice, especially the notion that parents examine the marketplace through a similar lens.

Discussion

Broadly speaking, privatized school choice, by itself, does not help to ameliorate educational inequities for Latino students of low SES. Although pockets of success (linked to school choice programs) may be detectable in terms of improved academic achievement (Cremata et al., 2013; Hoxby, Murarka, & Kang, 2009; Rouse, 1998), it is not yet evident these gains are (a) generalizable to all Latinos of low SES nor (b) enduring over the long-term (see, for example, Dobbie & Fryer, 2016). Given the uncertainty of the claim that charter schools improve the long-term achievement of Latinos, a more cautious and intentional policy approach toward privatized school choice is advisable.

The issue of segregation is even more troubling when considering the Latino context. Here, it seems clear that, at best, charter schools reflect similar patterns of Latino segregation in TPSs and, at worst, they intensify them. Desegregation can bring with it benefits for all types of students, including but not limited to the empowerment of their social networks (Braddock, 1980; Wells & Crain, 1994; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 2003). Social capital plays a significant factor in the overall educational attainment of Latinos (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Generally speaking, it also contrib-

utes to social mobility or, alternatively, immobility (Bourdieu, 1992). The sustained (or deepened) segregation of economically disadvantaged Latino students might explain why the overall trends relating to social mobility have not changed significantly for this group. Thus, even if privatized education improved such things like standardized test scores for Latinos of low SES, its overall impact on their college and career success is likely to be mitigated by other factors (e.g., issues relating social capital).

Literature dealing with the topic of how low-income Latino parents make decisions about schools is far from complete. Yet, there is some indication that, although academics are indeed important to them, other factors limit the extent to which they can take advantage of all possible options. Their reliance on localized social networks, for example, appears to set perceived boundaries around their decisions, especially where it concerns ELs of Spanish-speaking background (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014). A more recent study conducted in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), for example, found that ELs were statistically less likely to participate in school choice programs when compared to non-ELs (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017). Also, convenience factors, which are related to the indirect costs of school alternatives, seem to influence their decision-making (Haynes, Phillips, & Goldring, 2010). Altogether, these trends seem to indicate that at least two key assumptions of the privatization model are potentially flawed. First, Latinos of low SES do not have equal access to information about schooling options. Second, accountability metrics (e.g., test results, graduation rates, etc.) are not the only factors they consider (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2014).

Recommendations: Federal-State Level

Current federal policy sets the stage for the continued expansion of charter schools through competitive grants. Thus, recommendations for the short-term will focus on how this growth occurs. Federal grants earmarked for charter school expansion should carry with them the following addendum stipulations: 1.) Awardees should commit to operating schools that are socioeconomically and racially/ethnically mixed, 2.) Secondary level charter schools should offer college-preparatory coursework that is open to all enrollees, 3.) For-profit operators should contribute a portion of their profits to high poverty districts in the states where they operate, and 4.) Secondary level charter schools must demonstrate a strong record of placing minority students of low SES into four-year colleges who are underrepresented in said institutions—or risk losing their charter.

In the medium-term, the recommendation is for the U.S. Department of Education and state lawmakers to, at a minimum, pause and reconsider the headlong policy plunge into the murky waters of privatized school choice. There simply is not enough definitive evidence supporting the idea that privatization helps to reverse inequities for disadvantaged groups such as Latinos. Generally speaking, long-term investment in improving TPSs, particularly those in distressed urban areas, represents the more ideal direction. However, the evaluation of school improvement efforts needs to consider more than just test results. For high schools, the college placement rates of traditionally marginalized groups would be a better place to start, but even those metrics are incomplete when considered in isolation. Access to college-preparatory classes, including Advanced Placement coursework, is an essential part of the equation. In her seminal examination of school knowledge and curricula, Anyon (1980) found that students from low-income families are typically excluded

from privileged areas of knowledge. To that end, school reform efforts should focus on issues of expanding curricular access to targeted groups such as Latinos of low SES. Carnoy (1989) suggested that a "counterhegemonic" approach to schooling is one that engenders greater inclusiveness, while also adopting more accommodative approaches to learning (p. 22). When evaluating school reform efforts, state auspices, thus, should consider how schools both counteract the exclusionary distribution of knowledge (Harvey, 2007) and engender curricula that is inherently meaningful to all students (see, for example, Nozaki, 2006).

State education policymakers should lobby for stricter caps on charter school enrollments. They also can encourage shorter term limits for charter schools. The creation of state-sponsored programs aimed at expanding magnet schools and other publicly managed school choice options within TPS districts is a possible way to tweak the current school choice agenda. This might increase the range of options available to Latinos of low SES, and help them to avoid hyper-segregated/high poverty schools. This paper's analysis, however, showed that more needs to be understood about how Latino parents of low SES make decisions about schooling. Increasing grant funding for research specifically aimed at gaining a better understanding of this phenomenon also is recommended. Yet another important policy change that could happen at the federal level would be to provide grant monies to states stipulating they be used either to (a) incent the retention of high quality bilingual teachers in urban TPSs and magnet schools, (b) attract promising graduates to urban TPSs that are trained in bilingual education, or (c) create or enhance university programs for bilingual teacher education. Finally, states can promote inter- and intra-district transfer programs that enable both city and suburban students to choose amongst TPS options. That being said, it is important that state policymakers combine such transfer agreements with efforts to improve the instructional programs of the public schools with whom such arrangements exist while also eliminating or significantly reducing funding disparities that exist between them.

Recommendations: Local Level

Demographic stratifications between schools within large urban districts are sometimes related to local policy. For example, criteria-based schools will often exclude certain categories of students. One way to discourage the flight of Latino students of low SES to charter schools is to develop admissions criteria that awards diversity to encourage their enrollment in public schools that require an application. Such policies would help to reduce intra-district segregation and encourage the retention of minority students. In cases where magnet or other publicly managed choice schools are available, it is crucial that recruitment efforts target underserved students with specificity. Direct outreach to parents with limited financial means, including home visits, should be done as a means to bridge the information gap that sometimes complicates the decision-making process for families of low SES. In the case of Spanish-speaking parents, it is important that outreach efforts be sensitive to home language considerations. Local policy can support these endeavors by hiring a sufficient number Spanish-speaking staff and faculty in public schools.

Dual language programs can be appealing for Spanish-speaking students and their respective parents. When they are structured for balanced bilingualism, they can be equally attractive to English-speaking students as well (see, for example, de Jong & Howard, 2009). These programs, if promoted and structured properly, tend to be quite diverse in terms of their racial and ethnic composi-

tions. Too often, however, they turn into quasi-honors programs. Thus, local policy must support socioeconomic diversity alongside racial, ethnic, and linguistic pluralism. In this way, dual language programs can serve as catalysts for desegregation. The first policy step that precedes it, of course, is to fiscally prioritize curriculum development and teacher training (Boser, Chingos, & Straus, 2015; Yoon et al., 2007).

Conclusion

In sum, this paper has sought to demonstrate the reasons why policymakers should reconsider the so-called commonsense assumption that privatization is the elixir that will rectify social incongruities for society's most susceptible constituents. It has done so with a particular focus on the Latino context. The primary assertions, however, are likely applicable to other marginalized groups as well. Bowles and Gintis (1975) reminded us that school reform is too often an attempt to redirect attention away from society's inherent inequities, serving to mollify the populous and strengthen the position of the privileged classes. Social stratification, among other things, creates a perpetual stream of cheap labor for the wealthy elites. Our public schools, with all their imperfections, offer the most viable conduits through which meaningful societal change might be harnessed and channeled with greatest ubiquity. If we choose to disinvest from our public institutions, then we cede responsibility for social justice to a much smaller segment of society—a constituency whose interests may or may not align to those who are most vulnerable in society. Yet, if we choose to embrace the challenge of fixing our public schools, at a minimum, we reassert our commitment to democratic principles and, in so doing, retain the hope and promise of an education that can be reconstituted by a broader coalition of voices, perspectives, and backgrounds. To that end, it would seem illogical to expect our egalitarian ideals to be accomplished in an educational system that is defined by greater opacity and, therefore, diminished capacity for public scrutiny.

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