Parents Want Their Voices to "Matter":

Perspectives on School Enrollment in a Shrinking Urban School District

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the school selection process of parents whose children attended an urban school district in Northern California. Like numerous urban school districts across the United States, the district highlighted in this study also encountered students exiting its schools for the past decade. The findings shared in this paper from a mixed methods case study of parents whose children attend school in the district. Data were based on a quantitative survey and qualitative focus groups. The data indicate parents consider several key factors when selecting schools for their children including academics, class size, and differentiated instruction and support for their children; the school and administration's relationship to diversity and the community; and the overall enrollment process. The parents' narratives also revealed educational leaders must create a culturally relevant learning community in order to ensure parents, students, and community stakeholders will garner the support, resources, curricula, and learning activities to stop the exodus of children from schools within the school district.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the number of K-12 students attending U.S. public schools in urban centers across the country has shrunk enormously (Aron, 2017; DeNisco, 2013; McCoy, 2016). For instance, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUD), which had its district's enrollment peak "in 2004 at just under 750,000, began to drop" (Aron, 2017). Gradually, schools within the district, which were once overcrowded, became under-enrolled (Aron, 2017). According to school board member Ref Rodriguez, the LAUD currently contains "buildings built for 1,000 kids," but has "something like 400" kids per building (Aron, 2017). In 2018, the District's enrollment was about 453,000 students (Blume, 2019). The District now grapples with a lack of resources to support its under-enrolled schools. It is now a cash-poor and land-rich district (Aron, 2017).

One of the most important factors behind the shrinking of urban K-12 schools across the U.S. is school choice. School choice stands as a pillar of the corporate reform movement in education (Anyon, 2014; Gilbert, 2019; McLaren, 2015). In fact, school choice is viewed by some as the solution to a U.S. public school system that is often described as failing. According to numerous scholars, school choice shows no sign of going away as more for-profit corporations seek to pull students away from existing public schools through opening and managing charter schools (DeArmond, Jochim, Lake & University of Washington, 2014). For-profit corporations feed their coffers when they manage the schools, construct buildings to launch schools, sell curricula, and sell supplies and services so as to support day-to-day classroom operations (Prothero, 2018). Others factors behind shrinking urban schools include families across the U.S. having less children, the relocation of families from urban centers to inner-ring suburbs, and the disenchantment of some urban families with their children's schools (Gorlewski, 2010).

The research team, consisting of three educational faculty members from comprehensive universities in the U.S. launched a mixed method study in 2017 within a large urban school district in Northern California. The district has been dealing with an exodus of students from its schools for the past several years. For instance, in 2014-2015, 33% of students between 5th and 6th grade and 27% of students between 8th and 9th grade left the district. Consequently, there are less resources to serve students, which has resulted in cutting of academic programs, elimination of staff and teaching positions, and rollback of other services for students and the broader community.

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of parents in relation to how and why they selected schools for their children to attend in an urban school district with declining enrollment. The study was based on a mixed methods case study design that used an online quantitative survey followed by qualitative focus groups with parents in the district. The focus groups were designed to provide further depth and expand on the survey findings, as well as provide an additional platform for parents to share their own narratives and insights of how urban schools can be equipped to support student learning, foster community engagement, and stem the exodus of students leaving urban K-12 schools.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is informed by the collective work of critical pedagogues who capture how schools in the U.S. function to maintain the dominant social order along the lines of race, class, gender, disability, and sexuality (Darder, Mayo, Paraskeva, 2016; Goodley, 2016; McLaren, 2015). There are numerous policies, practices, and pedagogies responsible for educational institutions breeding oppressive conditions within schools as well as perpetuating inequitable educational outcomes. For instance, in 2009, the Obama Administration "enacted a $4.35 billion, competitive, voluntary grant program," Race to the Top (RTT), which further propelled educational disparities in the U.S. (Onosko, 2011, p. 1). The plan had several components that were devastating for minoritized students who attended K-12 schools in urban contexts (Onosko, 2011, p. 2). RTT was responsible for creating national common standards in mathematics and language arts; for supporting evaluation of teachers, students, educational leaders and school districts through high-stakes standardized testing; and for devaluating academic subjects and co-curricular activities that were not part of the common standards or testing mandates (Ososko, 2011). The components of RTT homogenized knowledge and standardized teaching and learning practices in schools, which, to echo Freire (1985), blocked students to have the "passion to know" why there are power differentials in school settings, urban contexts, and the broader global world. The plan also supported the opening of numerous for-profit charter schools in the U.S., which played a significant role in shutting local neighborhood public schools in urban communities including schools within the school district of this research study (Bryant, 2018).

Numerous critical pedagogues also remind us that there are fissures within schools that allow leaders, parents, youth, and concerned citizens to challenge inequalities, entrenched power relationships, and oppression (McLaren, 2016; Prier, 2017; Wright, 2016). The researchers believe examining the perspectives of parents in relation to the school enrollment

process in a school district with declining enrollment affords educational leaders, families, and government officials vital information to thwart the exodus of minoritized students from public K-12 schools in the U.S.. In the pages that follow, the study will show how the parents' insights may lead to the development of resources, programs, and curricula designed to enable the most marginalized children to become successful academically as well as ensure urban schools in the U.S. reflect family and community priorities, rather than the values embraced by the dominant culture.

Literature Review

This study examined how and why parents select K-12 schools for their children. Most researchers who have engaged in similar investigations were particularly informed by rational choice theory (Scott, 2000) and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital. Rational choice theory suggests that parents engage in a school choice process that employs individual, cogent decision-making after investigating salient school factors (Bosetti, 2004). The school choice movement presumes that parents, armed with a complete understanding of their child's learning needs and each school's attributes, will engage in a "spirit of competitive individualism" (Bosetti, 2004, p. 394), making rational decisions, while also putting pressure on all schools to be more responsive to parents. In short, rational choice theory stands as a critical element of a market-driven theory to improving our schools, further espousing the idea that weeding out unsuccessful schools works in the same way unsuccessful businesses are weeded out in a competitive environment (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1962).

Rational choice relies on information about the conditions at hand (Scott, 2000). In order to make a reasonable choice and access the means for attaining that choice, an individual must have adequate information (Bosetti, 2004). Studies have shown that parents often obtain information about schools and the school choice process through their social network (Bell, 2009; Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Klute, 2012; Villavicencio, 2013); thus, a well-informed, well-connected social network serves as a critical purveyor of information. Bourdieu (1986) stated that "the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (p. 249). This begs the question of who can readily access thorough information, thereby calling for not only an examination of how and why parents make a school choice, but the process for school choice including dissemination and acquisition of information.

Parents choose a school for many different reasons. In a report

sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Boyer (1992) stated,

> At the heart of the [school choice] argument is the expectation that parents will choose schools of higher academic quality [...] However, evidence suggests that [...] academic concerns often are not central to the decision. [...] Many parents base their school choice decision on factors that have nothing to do with the "quality of education. (pp. 12-13)

Several prior studies shed light on the factors that parents consider when selecting a school for their child (Jochim, DeArmond, Lake & Gross, 2014; Goldring & Rowley, 2006;). We use three categories to organize the research salient to this study: (1) academics, (2) geographic factors, and (3) social influences. We conclude with comments on the school choice process.

Academics

Although the architects of school choice view academics at the forefront of the school selection process, in reality, parents grapple with a complex interplay of factors. In a report to the Center on Reinventing Public Education, researchers found that a strong majority of 4,000 parents surveyed in eight major cities listed academics as the first priority in school selection (Jochim et al., 2014). However, Goldring and Rowley (2006) conducted a study in a countywide system of 129 schools serving 70,000 students, and found that most parents ranked academic achievement as their first priority in school selection, but several factors ranked closely behind academics: safety, convenience, and school characteristics.

In fact, in an analysis of 23,254 school choice forms in the Denver Public Schools, Klute (2012) found that parents often indicated multiple reasons for selecting a school, even when specifically asked to indicate the "most important single reason" (p.7) Bell (2009) found that in addition to academics, parents also focused on the child's overall well-being—whether or not a child could thrive in the school environment—and social aspects, considering friendships and if the child knows other students who attend the school. When it comes to convenience, parents consider location and transportation options. Klute (2012) found that 48% of parents who completed a school choice form for Denver Public Schools indicated a school's proximity to their home, work or other family members as a factor in their selection of a school. Moreover, De Jarmond, Jochim and Lake (2014) found that lack of transportation serves as a factor that may eliminate a choice in their decision-making process.

Geographic Factors

Jochim et al. (2014) also found that although parents prioritize academics, some parents face trade-offs with safety and location; it is likely that less advantaged parents are forced to consider safety and location when available schools are unsafe, or when few good schools are available near home. Similarly, distance to a child's school was a significant consideration in a study conducted among parents in the Denver Public Schools (Together Colorado, 2012). Finally, based on a survey of 1,500 parents in schools across Alberta, Canada, Bosetti (2004) found that 50% of public-school parents indicated *proximity to home* as the most important factor in choosing a school. Lack of transportation may also force difficult choices, including the availability of free school transportation, geographical constraints in a city or region, and the quality of a public transit system (Jochim et al. 2014).

Social Influences

Villavicencio (2013) referenced Bell's (2009) assertion that parents do not choose among every school accessible, but rather that they choose among much smaller choice sets (Lurie, 2004) determined in part by a parent's social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). When parents select a school, including charter schools, they are influenced "not only by what options are readily available, but also by individual choice sets (or the perceptions thereof)" (Villavicencio, 2013, p.4). In a study conducted with 42 mostly white, middle-upper income parents Holme (2002) found that most parents selected a school based on information from their social network. Similarly, friends, neighbors, and other parents were cited as the most important source of information in the survey of 1,500 parents conducted by Bosetti (2004). In a system dependent on accurate information in order to exercise rational choice, it appears that parents use social networks to not only base their decision on what may or may not be accurate information about school quality, but actually construct the quality of a school, good or bad (Holme, 2002; Roda & Wells, 2013).

School Selection Process

Many parents, especially those who lack social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) face limited choices in school selection, often due to barriers such as inadequate information, lack of transportation, and uneven school quality (DeArmond, Jochim & Lake, 2014). Although parents want to exercise school choice, current research indicates that parents often have few options that fit their child's needs, with an even greater struggle if a child requires special education (DeArmond et al., 2014; Jochim et al.,

2014; Roda & Wells, 2013). Intense competition over the highest quality schools means that some families end up no better off, no matter how hard they try.

Jochim et al. (2014) indicated that information is a key barrier to school choice, and that parents with a bachelor's degree or higher reported using more information sources than parents with a high school diploma or less. Sadly, Jochim et al. (2014) found that even in school systems with the most comprehensive information systems, parents were no more likely to report having the information useful to their school search. This affirms the recommendation in Zaich's (2013) study that educators must improve communication regarding school options, and increase the amount and attention placed on the information used to determine school effectiveness so that all parents become well-informed consumers.

Summary

School choice has moved from the margins to the mainstream, including the opportunities and challenges choice brings and under what conditions (DeArmond et al. 2014). Although academics often rank highly in parents' decision making, it is one of several factors including geography and social influences that make choosing a school a complex process.

Methods

This study was based on a mixed methods case study design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Stake, 1995) on the enrollment processes for the district and the factors that parents identify as most important when selecting a school for their child. Although a case study design limits our ability to make generalizations, this design allowed us to investigate the perspectives of parents in a much more detailed fashion than another design would have allowed (Stake, 1995). The study used a two-phased approach. Stage 1 entailed online surveys distributed to two parent groups: (1) parents of all current students in the district and (2) parents whose students were no longer in the district (but for whom the district still had contact information). Stage 2 entailed follow-up focus group interviews with parents in the district.

This second qualitative phase was included to provide further depth to the first quantitatively oriented phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2009). The two stages were integrated by identifying demographic groups for the focus groups based on survey responses compared to district demographic data, using findings from the quantitative phase as a deductive framework to analyze the qualitative

phase data, and presenting the findings in an integrated way. The findings from the data from parents in the district are the focus of this article.

Setting

This study was conducted in a large, urban, Northern California school district that at the time of the study was serving almost 37,000 students. More than half of the students spoke a language other than English at home, and the majority of students received free or reduced priced lunch. Latina/o students comprise almost half of the student population, with additional demographics reported as follows: 25.4% African American, 13.3% Asian, 11.4% White, 4% Multiple Races, 1.1% Pacific Islander, 0.8% Filipino, 0.3% Native American, and 2% not reported.

Quantitative Survey Data Collection and Analysis

Stage 1 of the study entailed a 16-question anonymous, online survey hosted on SurveyMonkey. The survey was shared with all parents of currently enrolled children in the district. Parents were notified via email, robocall, newsletter, and/or a posting on the district website. We received 882 completed surveys. Since students' ethnicity are reported measures from the district, the survey asked parents to identify the ethnicity of their oldest child. Based on this question, we received an over-representation of respondents who selected White (38.4% in the survey, 11.4% in the district) and an under-representation of respondents who selected Latino (9% in the survey, 41.8% in the district) or African American (12.9% in the survey, 25.4% in the district).

Descriptive statistics were used to provide information to the district regarding respondent demographic data and quantitative data regarding the closed-response questions on the survey. Open-response survey questions were coded for emergent themes, and focus group transcriptions were recorded, transcribed, and coded for emergent themes.

Qualitative Focus Group Data Collection and Analysis

Stage 2 of the study entailed four focus group interviews. Focus groups were used rather than individual interviews to encourage more self-disclosure and to create a welcoming environment for conversation (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The focus groups were conducted by members of the research team at three of the district's elementary schools on four different days. Since the surveys from Stage 1 under-represented African American and Latina/o students compared to the demographics of the district, the researchers used these focus groups to better understand their experiences with the enrollment and school selection process in the district (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Participants were then identified

for the focus group interviews by the site administrator. A total of 12 parents, all women, participated in the focus groups.

Each of the focus groups were run by 1-2 members of the research team. When the participants' primary language was Spanish, an interpreter was present to help. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed (with Spanish components both transcribed in Spanish and translated into English).

The three major themes from Stage 1 were used as a deductive analytical framework (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018): the importance of academics, class size, and differentiated instruction and support for their children; the school and administration's relationship to diversity and the community overall; and the overall enrollment process and specific suggestions from improvement. A fourth "other" category was used to code salient quotes not represented in the original framework. Each English transcript was coded individually, and then reviewed for any missing coded passages after the initial round of coding. Contextualized coded passages were then grouped together so that the original interviewer question and participant response were included together with all other similarly coded passages across the four transcriptions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 1994). These coded groupings were then analyzed for common themes, support for the quantitative findings from Stage 1, and any new nuances that would shed light on the Stage 1 findings.

Findings

The findings presented below are organized by the major categories identified during the quantitative analysis phase: academics, class size, and differentiated instruction and support; relationships of the school to diversity and the community; feedback on the enrollment process and how to improve it; and other salient quotes and topics. Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data are presented with each category.

Making the Choice: Factors Parents Consider in Selecting Schools

How and why a parent selects a school for their child is multi-faceted. Responding to a survey question that listed school choice factors, parents of current students indicated that the top four most important factors in selecting a school are, in order: safety at school (and the school neighborhood), special needs programs, teachers, and academics (see Table 1).

Concerns about students who "inevitably fall through the cracks": Meeting students' individual needs through smaller class sizes. Looking at the survey data holistically, respondents seemed

concerned that their child would or did "inevitably fall through the cracks," as one respondent put it (though four participants used this imagery in at least one of their responses). This seemed to be an issue both in terms of the large number of students per school/class, as well as in terms of the lack of support or accommodation for students ($n = 15$). As one respondent wrote, "By keeping schools under-resourced, [the District] fosters high turnover, and keeps our schools constantly in crisis."

Supporting the survey data, the focus group data similarly revealed a close connection in parents' minds between class size and individualized support for their students' needs. One focus group participant stated that families will have different experiences with this issue, but that she "siempre abog[a] porque las escuelas identifiquen a los niños, que se les ayude de acuerdo a las necesidades de cada uno. No en general, sino basado en las necesidades de cada uno, porque no es lo mismo" ("always advocate[s] that schools identify children; that they be helped according to the needs of each one. Not in general, but based on the needs of each because [their needs] not the same"). The participants shared that this kind of individualized support could have many manifestations, e.g., after school and special education programs, more academic tutoring and support, and more psychologists to help students express themselves.

"What extra is [the student] going to gain?": Importance of academics outside of the classroom. The focus group data revealed some of the complexities parents' face when they consider a school's "academics." Their responses revealed the various types of academics

Table 1
Current Parents' Most Important Factors in Selecting a School

	N	*Mean**	*SD*
Safety at school and school neighborhood	872	4.72	0.597
Teachers	877	4.69	0.593
Academics (classes, curriculum, school test scores)	880	4.67	0.620
Safety to and from school	881	4.48	0.803
School climate	870	4.24	0.865
Location	862	4.19	0.935
School principal	876	4.18	0.878
Extracurricular (sports, music, clubs, etc.) or after school activities	876	4.04	0.907
Diversity	880	4.01	0.998
School reputation	879	3.93	0.960
Parent leadership	879	3.84	0.966
School size	876	3.37	1.129
Child's friends attend the same school	879	3.07	1.168

*Minimum value is 1, maximum is 5.

taken into consideration: after school programs, the breadth of the curricula offered, hands-on activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the "extras" a school has to offer academically. As one participant put it, "Most of the schools, they are going to get the same core, the same values about math, science, and everything else, but what extra is [the student] going to gain? That's my priority." When asked to elaborate on the "extras," she shared examples of schools that had students learning to read music and doing scientific experiments and projects each month. Others shared that they wanted more "action about science. It doesn't have to be rockets," but more hands-on activities. They offered that these activities could take place outside. As one participant shared,

> Something more open. I don't like the idea that all day [they are] in a class. For example, my daughter comes here at 7:30 to practice music and after that, it's school and after that it's school. I pick her up at 6:00. Today I am going to pick her up at 6:30, so it's 12 hours [sic] inside a building.

Another participant stated that she wanted schools to offer "more realistic courses" with practical applications, like budgeting, home economics, and cooking. The women connected this need to how some children have to feed and take care of themselves when they get home.

"Me pueda ayudar si necesito ayuda": Connecting with school staff through a shared language. The focus group data in particular emphasized the importance of communicative relationships between the community, parents/guardians, and school staff. For one participant, the principal's communication was especially important when selecting a school:

> Is he very communicative? Is he outreaching? Does he reach out to parents? Does he email us back? [laughs] Because I've heard some schools where they don't even email them back or they're not on top of it like most principals are. It's really about [the] administrator and how comfortable my child will feel there.

For this participant, the principal served as a model for what communication would look like in the school and how her child would feel there.

Parents themselves also wanted to have connections with school staff, which was a finding unique to the focus group data. In particular for one participant, she wanted resources in Spanish and to know that one or more staff members at her school could speak in Spanish: "Como para mí también que no hablo mucho inglés, saber que en la oficina hay alguien que hable español y me pueda ayudar si necesito ayuda" ("As for me also I do not speak much English, knowing that there's someone in

the office who speaks Spanish and can help me if I need help"). Another Spanish-speaking participant said that having more Latinas in the school would help her feel "more confident that they speak the same language as [you]" ("Esta escuela tiene mucha gente que es latina, como que te sientes más seguro de que hablan el mismo idioma que uno"). Having someone on staff from the same cultural heritage and/or who can speak the same language could help parents and guardians feel more comfortable at the school.

Interpreting School Information: Parents Need Support When Selecting a School

Parents of current students who responded to the survey were asked to rank the level of challenge (1 = not challenging, 5 = very challenging) associated with six factors of the school enrollment process. There was also an option to write in a factor not represented in the original list. On average, all factors were "moderately challenging." School performance was considered a "challenging" factor (see Table 2).

"It's a lot": The amount of information for school selection. Adding depth to the discussion on academic scores, one parent in the focus group stated that she would like to see more information on the score distributions across subjects and groups of students. When asked if she felt she had enough information from the school, she said,

> *La verdad no. Las veces que me he venido a las reuniones que hacen regularmente los viernes se hablaba de que había niós que estaban teniendo problemas—un porcentaje, pero no recuerdo bien—de niños que estaban teniendo problemas para la lectura, u otros en matemáticas. Pero no estoy muy segura de eso*. (Not really. The times that I came to the regular meetings on Fridays talked about that there were children who were having problems—a percentage, but I do not remember well—of children who were having trouble reading, or others in math. But I'm not sure about that.)

Table 2
Most Challenging Factors in the Enrollment Process for Parents of Current Students

	N	*Mean*	*SD*
The school in my neighborhood attendance area was not performing well	876	2.70	1.655
Available schools were not a good fit for my child	879	2.48	1.468
Neighborhood safety of school options was a concern	878	2.43	1.534
Complex application	877	2.01	1.158
Available schools were too far from my neighborhood	882	1.97	1.301
Transportation options were not acceptable or available (AC transit, carpools, etc.)	877	1.94	1.343

Another participant said,

> I had the opportunity to go and check the school, and the [test scores] and all the district's information [is there] but you have to go one-by-one. If I don't know the area or I don't know… So it takes a lot of time to go one-by-one.

In another focus group, a parent shared that although she understood a school's desire to collect all of the information from parents at one time, she said "meet the teachers and go from station to station and find out, 'Do you want to be in this class' or 'What elective' and all that stuff. It's a lot." Another said "The class schedule is there, but then you have electives. You're picking stuff. There's just so much going on that day." These examples point to how overwhelming the enrollment process can be to newer families and/or non-English speaking families.

"What do you think" and "We need translation": Parents need help to interpret school information. One parent in a focus group recommended that schools have a staff member onsite that can help parents navigate the enrollment process, forms, and information.

> I know for some people the language barrier is a hard thing, because I remember I had to help a lot of people with those [enrollment] papers. It was helping them understand, or if they really couldn't understand the booklet about these different schools, they would ask me, 'What do you think," or stuff like that. Maybe if someone was on site. I don't know if there is already. Maybe if someone's on site, even just for that week of the choice paper, so that they can come and be, 'We need translation,' or 'Can you tell me more about this school' I think that'd be great.

Here she shared that her advice was sought because some parents did not know how to interpret the information shared. She was also a parent who had grown up in the area. Although long-standing community members help to fill these needs, such information and assistance could also come from a school staff member.

Looking to the Bigger Picture: Parents Want to See They and Their Communities Matter

There were several important findings in the qualitative focus groups that were not captured in the quantitative data, either due to the nature of the survey and/or the demographic differences between the survey respondents and focus group participants.

Make schooling "more like it was a family thing": Increased community engagement. Participants across several focus groups also expressed wanting more community engagement from schools—a nuance unique to this data set compared to the quantitative Stage 1

data. One participant shared that she enjoyed when a former science teacher invited families to the school to take part in her classes. "We made it more like it was a family thing so everybody had the opportunity to participate." Another participant shared that a school's community program was particularly beneficial to her family. They learned about budgeting, credit scores, tax preparation help, and maintaining a business. However, during the course of the focus group's conversation, another participant shared that the organization the school was working with was leaving, and another one was going to replace it. She was unsure what type of programming would still be offered; the first participant replied "Well, there you have it."

"What is the foundation of the school": Parents consider the school's core values. A finding that was unique to the focus groups and not represented in the quantitative data was that some parents/guardians consider the school's history and foundational values and beliefs when making school selections. As one participant, who was now helping to send her grandchildren to district schools, said,

> The thought process then [when sending her first child] was more about convenience. I was thinking about, how convenient can this be for me as a parent? Now that I am actually in a different role, I picked this particular school because there was more than one option. I picked that one because my children went to school here. It's more generational for me. I had more information about the foundation of the school. For me, what I looked for at that time was foundation. The statistics and all that that they do, it's like, 'Ok. That's cool, but what is the foundation of the school, and what are they built upon? Are they really built upon success? Are they built upon pride? What will my grandchild gain by participating in the school? Will she get book knowledge and then end up losing her self-identity?

This quote also hints toward a generational difference in what parents and guardians look for when selecting a school.

Demonstrate that parents' voices "matter." One important theme that came solely from the focus group data was that not only do parents want their children to feel supported in the schools, but they themselves also wanted to feel supported.

> I didn't want my grandchild just to be a number so that the school district can say, 'Oh yeah. They got this many kids.' I wanted to know that my child mattered. Not only did she matter, but I mattered. […] To me, that mattered, to be able to know that I had a voice, that what I say, it matters (emphasis added).

She went on to share how she was greeted each morning by school staff when dropping off her students. Earlier in the same focus group, another

participant spoke at length about the community program hosted at the school, and how much her family gained from it.

Discussion

The narratives of parents connected to the school enrollment process in a large urban school district in Northern California capture the myriad of factors parents consider when enrolling in children in K-12 schools in the United States. Like previous studies related to factors impacting parents' selection of schools for children, academics, information from their social networks, and distance to a child's school were key factors behind this study's participants' selection of schools for their children. Yet, unlike previous studies, the participants' narratives provide additional insight as to why the parents selected schools for their children. For example, the participants' narratives reveal they want their children to attend culturally relevant schools that center their needs, the needs of their children, and the needs of stakeholders connected with the school setting. The participants believed it was vital for their children to attend schools where all parents and community members are valued, where their children are supported, and where academic offerings are connected to the needs of the community.

Moreover, this study makes it clear that school leaders must build upon the knowledge of minorized children and community members—in all aspects of the schooling process—if they are dedicated to ending the exodus of children from urban K-12 schools in the U.S. For example, school leaders need to ensure non-English speaking families' culture and linguistic background are infused in the school selection process, which will ensure non-English speaking families select schools consonant with their values (Petri, 2019; Jiménez-Castellanos & García, 2017). These leaders should also engage in inclusive communication practices with all minoritized community stakeholders in order to determine what practices are best designed to keep students safe, what pedagogues best promote students' intellectual development, and what resources will help ameliorate violence outside of schools (Jiménez-Castellanos & García, 2017; Miranda, Radliff, & Della Flora, 2018; Murphy & Louis, 2018)

Finally, the study demonstrates parents believe additional resources are vital for improving the quality of education for children attending urban schools. Schools within the district lacked after school programs for special education, programs for gifted students, curriculum dedicated to the arts, and after-school time to support students' intellectual growth. Other participants believed the lack of resources contributed to large class sizes and a lack of school-community engagement (Jiménez-Castellanos, & García, 2017; Khalifia, Khalli, Marsh, & Halloran, 2019; Miranda,

Radliff., & Della Flora; 2018; Murphy & Louis, 2018; Williams, Horvath, Wei, Van Dorn, & Jonson-Reid, 2007).

Conclusion

For the past decade, the exodus of school children from urban schools in the U.S. has been a vexing problem for school leaders and minoritized parents, children, and urban communities. This study has demonstrated centering the perspectives of parents connected to the school enrollment process provides insight to educational leaders for how to revitalize urban school systems in the U.S. The parents' narrative revealed urban schools ought to create culturally-relevant school cultures, where students, parents, and community stakeholders' values and beliefs are embraced, where schools support minoritized communities in solving problems and where adequate resources and scaffolds ensure parents select schools that promulgate their values. If urban school districts begin to center community voices and values in salient aspects impacting life inside of urban schools, the exodus of children from urban schools has the potential to be ameliorated (Banks, & Meyer, 2017: Khalifia, Khalli, Marsh, & Halloran, 2019).

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