

SCHOOL CHOICE AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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Harvard Education Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Communication Breakdown

Informing Immigrant Families About High School Choice in New York City

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More than fifty years after the historic Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to end the practice of race-based school assignments, considerable school segregation along racial or ethnic and class lines remains. In fact, according to a report from the Harvard Civil Rights Project, black and Latino students are three times as likely as white students to be in high-poverty schools, and twelve times as likely to be in schools in which almost everyone is poor.¹ These youth also attend predominantly minority schools in disproportionate numbers.² The severe isolation of low-income children of color, many of whom come from immigrant homes, constitutes a significant challenge to successful immigrant integration and to social equality more generally.³ The latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that racial (or ethnic) and class-based disparities also persist in primary and secondary grades and affect students' academic performance.⁴ Along with growing school segregation, many researchers, policy makers, educators, and citizens understand this so-called achievement gap to be one of the most pressing educational and social justice issues of our time.⁵

Scholars have long pointed to the concentration of low-income children of color in high-poverty, racially segregated, and low performing schools as a key explanatory factor of race- and income-based differences in academic achievement.⁶ Since the early era of school desegregation, school choice policies—ranging from magnet and charter schools to vouchers, controlled choice, or open-enrollment plans—have been implemented, in part,

to address these long-standing problems in education. Districts across the United States have adopted school choice with renewed vigor in recent years in the face of poor student performance on international exams, the widespread academic failure of disadvantaged students, and glaring inequities in students' access to high-quality educational opportunities.

According to the Education Commission of the States and the Center for Education Reform, forty states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws, and all but four states have some form of inter- or intradistrict open-enrollment policy.⁷ The U.S. Department of Education estimates that 1.4 million of the country's 50 million public school students, or 2.8 percent of the total, are currently being educated in charter schools, only one of a variety of school choice options.⁸ These figures are expected to rise with the Obama administration's avowed support for increasing the number of charter schools nationwide.⁹ Finally, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that between 1993 and 2003, the proportion of children enrolled in assigned public schools declined from 80 to 74 percent, whereas the proportion of students enrolled in chosen public schools increased from 11 to 15 percent.¹⁰

Accessing high-quality educational options by students through participation in any number of school choice programs can require a significant amount of knowledge and time investment on the part of families.¹¹ Navigating these often complex and bureaucratic processes may be particularly difficult for low-income immigrant parents who, on top of the challenges associated with poverty, were raised and educated outside the United States, may face language barriers, and may lack some of the critical contextual knowledge they need to fully understand educational practices, policies, and expectations in their adopted country. Few studies have examined low-income immigrant families' experiences with school choice. Furthermore, little is known about how the expectations of parents' knowledge, behavior, and resources embedded in choice policies align with or depart from various immigrants' social practices, cultural models, and resources or about the implications of these convergences and divergences for immigrants' participation in school choice.

Given that children in immigrant families currently account for an estimated 25 percent of all primary- and secondary-school-age children in the United States, it is of growing importance that we understand how educational bureaucracies respond to their needs.¹² An investigation of school-based and districtwide approaches to informing families about school choice represents one entry point into understanding the challenges that immigrants may face in comprehending often unfamiliar educational policies and pro-

cedures. This chapter uses ethnographic data from research in three middle schools in New York City and analyzes school choice publications created and distributed by the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) to answer questions about how the district- and school-level communication strategies and materials facilitate or complicate Latin American immigrant families' understanding of the choice process. New York is home to one of the largest and most heterogeneous immigrant populations worldwide. The city's diversity, coupled with the fact that participation in school choice is mandatory for all students who wish to attend public high school in the district, make New York an interesting place to examine immigrant families' experiences with this one aspect of educational integration.¹³

Three main questions drive this chapter. First, what do the central district office personnel and school-based staff do to inform students and families about high school choice in New York? What materials do they provide, what events do they organize, and what resources do they dedicate to explaining the process? Next, in light of the materials, events, and school-based support that exist, how might Latin American immigrant parents' language proficiency, cultures, and educational backgrounds impact their understanding of the process and therefore their ability to assist their children in applying to appropriate and high-quality schools? Finally, in what ways, if at all, do district- and school-level communication and outreach efforts take into account the range of support that immigrant families may need if they are to understand and participate in the potentially foreign practice of school choice? The data for this chapter are derived primarily from ethnographic observations, focus groups with middle school guidance counselors, interviews with guidance counselors and school-based parent liaisons ("parent coordinators"), and informational materials developed and distributed by the NYCDOE and three middle schools.

The discussion begins with a brief review of some of the main conversations in the contemporary school choice literature. It also identifies some of the key gaps in this literature with regard to immigrants and school choice. This is followed by a summary of the extensive scholarship on conflicts between home and school as they relate to Latin American immigrant families' experiences with the U.S. school system. Next are described the methodology and research sites and an overview of the New York high school choice process, its goals, and the diverse portfolio of high schools from which students make their choices. An in-depth discussion of the study's main findings and their significance for current school choice and integration research follows. The chapter concludes with a discussion of policy implications and recommendations for future research.

SCHOOL CHOICE IN THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

School choice reforms have been at the center of public and political conversations about education and equity since their inception. Most empirical studies of school choice have focused on evaluating the outcomes of these policies by examining three indicators. One indicator is the academic achievement of students in choice programs compared to those in nonchoice public schools.¹⁴ A second factor is the impact of choice on school segregation.¹⁵ Third, studies examine the implications of district choice programs for existing public schools and students attending these schools.¹⁶ Evidence on the effects of school choice in each of these areas is highly contested, and scholars are pursuing new and increasingly sophisticated ways to measure the impact of school choice on student achievement and equity.¹⁷

The question of whether students who participate in choice differ from those who do not is another chief concern in the literature. Decades of research have shown that on average, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds enroll in chosen schools at higher rates than their disadvantaged peers. Studies in districts with open-enrollment plans, voucher programs, magnet school options, and interdistrict choice have all concluded that there is in fact a "creaming effect," in which children of more highly educated parents with more material resources are more likely than their more disadvantaged peers to participate in school choice.¹⁸

The stratification trends are less clear in the case of charter schools, many of which are located in impoverished urban neighborhoods and thus attract a lower-income student population. However, activists and researchers alike continue to debate the merits of charter schools and other choice programs on equity grounds.¹⁹

Although social stratification and equity concerns have motivated studies of school choice for many years, an analysis of the trends in immigrant families' participation in choice has been conspicuously absent from this literature. In fact, few studies disaggregate by immigrant origin, and therefore little is known about how the enrollment patterns of children of immigrants compare to those of their native-origin peers. Given the growing share of children of immigrants in U.S. schools, however, it is increasingly important to learn more about their experiences with this education policy. Research on New York's mandatory high school choice process represents a unique opportunity to capture a population of students and families often absent from school choice analyses.

Despite the lack of empirical studies of immigrants and school choice, there is much to learn from the existing evidence of the ways parents gather information about choice programs and the various strategies that schools and districts employ to inform them about choice options. As with partici-

pation in school choice, sources of information tend to vary by class and education level. Low-income parents and parents with limited education rely heavily on school-based sources of information and formal channels such as the radio, newspaper, and television.²⁰ In contrast, parents with high education levels tend to depend more on social, professional, or informal information networks.²¹

Researchers have discovered differences along racial and ethnic lines as well. Schneider and his colleagues found that black and Latino parents were more likely to use school-based and formal outlets, and they depended less on friends, family, or social contacts than white parents.²² These findings were not surprising given the strong correlation between race or ethnicity and class background. The salience of social networks for families of high socioeconomic status links strongly to earlier work on the interaction between class background and the significance of social networks in a person's life.²³

The role of school districts in providing information to families about school choice is also featured prominently in the scholarship. The parent information centers (PICs) that operated in six Massachusetts school districts having school choice plans are one of the most extensively researched examples of district-based information and outreach.²⁴ These centers were easily accessible by public transportation, and counselors gave visitors written materials in multiple languages about the available school options. Notably, counselors were not allowed to make specific recommendations to parents and students, and independent evaluations found that even after PICs were established, many parents selected low-quality schools.²⁵ Other districts, such as the large urban Southern California district in Andre-Becheley's qualitative study on intradistrict choice, rely on traditional outreach methods such as mailing flyers, distributing pamphlets and school directories, and advertising on television and in the print media, and these districts tend to be considerably less attentive to the varied needs of the public.²⁶

Related studies have investigated the extent to which parents understand their district's school choice policies and how well informed they feel. Multiple studies have demonstrated that most parents, regardless of income, tend to have limited understanding of school choice policies and procedures and lack accurate information about test scores, demographics, and other data on the schools in the district.²⁷ Although this situation can be explained, in part, by the school districts' failure to make some of this basic information easily accessible to parents, it reflects a potentially larger underlying issue: the mismatch between district communication strategies and parents' information-gathering behaviors.²⁸

CONFLICTS BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL FOR LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

We know little about immigrants' experiences with school choice and, more specifically, the ways immigrant parents digest information about choice programs provided by districts, but the role of culture in exacerbating or attenuating school failure has been an object of scholarly inquiry for many years. Researchers have examined how differences between home and school cultures, practices, norms, values, and expectations have impacted child development, parent-child relationships, identity formation, and academic achievement.²⁹ These studies have covered considerable ground in illuminating how an individual student's background interacts with the social and cultural context of a school environment, a pedagogical practice, or policy to put the student at a relative advantage or disadvantage. The absence of this type of cultural analysis applied to questions about school choice participation represents one of the most significant lacunae in these literatures.

A substantial body of work also highlights the primacy of cultural values in explaining how and why many low-income immigrant parents interact with schools in the ways they do.³⁰ This scholarship highlights the need to investigate the assumptions about shared knowledge and values embedded in school policies and practices: a dangerous form of the "hidden curriculum."³¹

Much of the research on the involvement of low-income Latin American immigrant parents in their children's schooling in the United States shows that they tend to defer to teachers on academic matters, avoid challenging the school administration on educational decisions, and rarely make requests.³² Their behaviors and attitudes, although corresponding to the cultural scripts and expectations of their countries of origin, are often contrary to common conceptions of what constitutes "good" and involved parenting in the United States. Their actions (or assumed "inaction," as the case may be) contrast starkly with the behavioral patterns of many middle-class parents, such as those in Lareau's studies, who do not hesitate to make demands of teachers or request additional support for their children.³³ As a result, Latin American immigrant parents are often demonized for not caring about their children's education. In this way, the children whose parents are not clued in to the implicit rules of the education game are doubly disadvantaged.³⁴

This research literature substantiates the importance of considering institutional responsibility in perpetuating or combating educational inequality. Analysis of the information that districts and schools provide and what they do—and do not—make explicit may serve to identify the unarticulated aspects of the dominant culture that immigrants (and perhaps native groups

as well) may have greater difficulty accessing. Such research may also help explicate the larger factors that contribute to the misalignment between home- and school-based practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research presented here involved observations of a series of events related to New York's high school choice process held at three large middle schools in Queens, New York; observations of citywide informational events; focus groups with middle school guidance counselors; and interviews with parent coordinators at these middle schools. Compilation and analysis of the school choice materials developed by the Office of Student Enrollment Planning Operations (OSEPO) at the New York City Department of Education also formed a key component of the study. These data were collected as part of a larger ongoing mixed-methods comparative study of the experiences of Latin American immigrant and African American families with high school choice in New York.

Ethnographic observations were conducted at school-based events for parents and students about high school choice, including workshops about how to fill out the high school application form and high school fairs held at individual middle schools. During these observations, participants went about their regular activities without interference, and I took notes on who attended the events, the format and content of the information provided by school personnel, whether translation and interpretation services were available, whether translation and interpretation included contextual information or consisted only of direct linguistic translation, the questions that parents asked, and the interactions between parents and school personnel and among parents. These observations enabled me to learn in detail about the school-based communication efforts, compare the various middle schools' approaches to outreach, and, perhaps most important, monitor interactions between students, parents, and school personnel at events specifically designed to inform parents about school choice.

Focus groups with guidance counselors at the middle schools constituted another main part of the data collection. These group discussions centered on the guidance counselors' roles in preparing middle school students and families for participation in high school choice, their explanations of the outreach strategies, and their perspectives on the strengths and drawbacks of the choice process generally. In addition, focus group prompts asked participants to reflect on their experiences in working with immigrant families on high school choice and the challenges that families encounter during the

process. I also conducted informal and semistructured interviews with individual guidance counselors and parent coordinators at each middle school. These interviews followed a similar protocol to that used in guidance counselor focus groups. The aim of these interviews was to understand the roles played by the informants vis-à-vis the high school choice process, their participation in and assessment of the effectiveness of school-based and district-wide efforts, and their reflections on working with immigrant families on school choice.

Document analysis complemented the ethnographic observations and interviews by connecting the form and content of the school choice publications created by the NYCDOE with narratives from school personnel and observations of workshops and other outreach events. OSEPO produces a host of materials about high school choice, including the six-hundred-page *Directory of New York City Public High Schools*, which is distributed to each prospective eighth-grade student at the end of seventh grade. This office also develops shorter brochures and pamphlets that offer tips for parents about how to work with their children to select high schools. My analysis of these materials considered the type of media used (e.g., electronic, print), its accessibility (language, technological requirements), the content of the information, and the criteria emphasized in determining appropriate school selections. Finally, as with analysis of the live interpretations provided at events, to investigate the concept of cultural translation I examined whether the translated documents included contextual or background information or simply translated words and concepts in purely linguistic terms.

Site Selection

New York's historic and enduring role in the U.S. immigration narrative and its current leadership in urban school reform make it a fitting location to explore immigrant families' experiences in educational integration. With more than three million foreign-born residents, New York is one of the most dynamic centers of immigration in the United States and, in fact, the world.³⁵ The diversity and scope of immigration to the city are unparalleled; however, cities and towns all over the United States are now faced with the challenge of facilitating immigrant integration into unfamiliar institutions and policies. What makes New York an ideal place to study the integration experiences of immigrants and their children is that, unlike many other urban immigration hubs—which tend to have one or two dominant national-origin groups—New York is home to numerous large immigrant communities. According to the 2007 American Community Survey, the Hispanic immigrants in New York alone hailed from the Dominican Republic (358,376), Mexico (178,713), Ecuador (135,043), and Colombia (74,026)

as well as many other countries across Latin America and Spanish-speaking parts of the Caribbean. Consequently, even a study that focuses exclusively on Latin American immigrant families and school choice stands to yield important new comparative data on integration.

As the largest single school district in the United States, the New York public schools contain a considerable immigrant-origin student population. Although the precise enrollment of children of immigrants is not publicly available, according to self-reported data in the Home Language Identification Survey, an estimated 42 percent of students speak a language other than English at home.³⁶ This figure serves as a rough proxy for the percentage of students from immigrant families. During the 2008–2009 school year, Hispanics were the largest racial or ethnic group of students enrolled in New York public schools (39.4 percent), followed by black (30.6 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (14.6 percent), and white students (14.4 percent).³⁷ Moreover, students whose dominant language is Spanish constituted more than two-thirds of the English language learner (ELL) student population. The relevance of a study about Latin American immigrants and school choice is clear, then, given their substantial population share in New York as well as across the United States.

High-School Choice in New York

School choice has been a fixture of the educational policy landscape in New York for decades. A long-standing district policy requires all eighth-grade students who plan to attend a traditional public high school to submit an application in which they rank as many as twelve high schools or programs.³⁸ According to the NYCDOE Web site, "The high school admissions process is centered on two principles: equity and choice." In a system that is responsible for educating more than 1.1 million students, realizing these goals can be a difficult endeavor.

Each year, the roughly eighty-five thousand eighth-grade students who participate in high school choice must choose from among six hundred programs in the approximately four hundred public high schools across the five boroughs. These schools and programs vary widely in terms of size, quality, and academic outcomes. Although the district has shown gains in recent years on a number of educational indicators (including graduation rates and the percentage of students reaching proficiency on the NAEP), there continues to be an undersupply of high performing high schools. According to an analysis conducted by researchers at the Center for New York City Affairs at the New School, only 38.3 percent of high schools with graduating classes in 2007 had a graduation rate of 75 percent or higher.³⁹ This figure includes students graduating with a Regents diploma as well as those who received

the less rigorous local diploma. Students who entered ninth grade in the fall of 2008 are now required to pass five Regents exams with a score of 65 or higher in order to graduate; local diplomas will no longer be awarded. If the Regents diploma is used as the threshold for graduation, Hemphill and Nauer's analysis shows that only 12.6 percent of high schools had a graduation rate of 75 percent or higher in 2007.⁴⁰

Graduation rates constitute only one measure of school quality; however, given the significance of obtaining a high school diploma for lifetime earnings, graduation rates are a particularly important metric.⁴¹ Schools in New York also vary dramatically in size, concentration of low-income students, safety record, teacher stability, and student satisfaction, among other characteristics. The unevenness in school quality is evidenced in the publicly available progress reports, annual school report cards, quality reviews, and learning environment surveys published by the NYCDOE.

New York high schools run the gamut in size, theme or specialization, and admissions criteria. Since 2002, more than two hundred small schools (with enrollments of fewer than six hundred students each) have been created, thereby significantly adding to the supply of small schools from earlier reform movements. Most students, however, continue to attend large, comprehensive high schools that serve more than fourteen hundred students each.⁴² In addition to small schools and large, comprehensive high schools, students may attend career and technical high schools, small learning communities within high schools, and charter schools. Charter high schools, however, do not participate in the NYCDOE high school application process; instead, students must apply to each individual charter school through a separate lottery system.

High schools in New York use varying selection criteria, and there are seven mechanisms by which students gain entry into a particular school or program within a school. The most competitive (and often highest performing) schools admit students based on their scores on the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), an exam that is offered annually to students in the fall of their eighth-grade year. Other schools—namely, those that concentrate on visual and performing arts—require students to audition. Screened schools tend to be academically rigorous, highly sought-after schools and programs, and they rank applicants based on their seventh-grade academic average, standardized test scores, attendance, and punctuality.

Most new small high schools fall into the category of "limited unscreened." They have no grade or test score requirements for acceptance but give priority to students who attend a school information session. Educational option ("Ed-opt") schools choose students according to a bell curve whereby 16 percent of students accepted are in the high reading range, 68 percent are

in the average reading range, and 16 percent are in the low reading range. Zoned schools are large, comprehensive high schools that give priority to students who live in their geographic catchment area. Finally, unscreened schools have no admissions requirements, and a computer randomly selects students for admission based on available seats.

A variation of the current high school choice process has existed in New York since the 1970s.⁴³ The current iteration was launched in the 2003–2004 school year and is modeled after the matching process for American physicians, the National Resident Matching Program.⁴⁴ The official goals for the new matching formula were to increase the likelihood that a student would be assigned to his top-choice school and to distribute low-achieving students as evenly as possible across high schools.⁴⁵ To that end, the latest revision expanded to twelve the number of schools or programs that students could rank. During the 2008 matching process, the NYCDOE boasted a 90 percent success rate at matching students with one of their twelve choices.⁴⁶ In 2009, nearly 50 percent of all applicants received their first choice, and 80 percent were matched with one of their top three.⁴⁷ However, that same year, seventy-five hundred students were still rejected by all of their choices and had to participate in supplementary rounds.⁴⁸

Each eighth-grade student receives an individualized application form in early October and is required to return a completed form by the first week of December. The application is printed with the student's final grade point averages from seventh grade, her latest (seventh grade) standardized test scores in reading and math, and average yearly attendance. These data determine a student's eligibility for certain screened schools and programs that have specific attendance, grades, and test score requirements. In addition, where applicable, the student's local zoned high school is listed at the top of the application. Not all students have a zoned high school, because twenty-one large high schools have, since 2002, been closed for poor performance.⁴⁹ Twelve additional high school closures were recently announced.⁵⁰

Oversight of the high school choice process falls under the auspices of the Office of Student Enrollment and Planning Operations, which is housed in the district's central administrative offices in Manhattan. Much of the school choice policy and the related informational materials are developed in this office, but middle schools are granted considerable autonomy in determining how to work with students and families to complete the applications. OSEPO does not require that middle school personnel attend trainings about high school choice, but they organize optional workshops and offer support for guidance counselors upon request. District administrators reported to me in an interview that they expect middle school guidance counselors to review all of the high school applications before they are

submitted. Yet there is negligible monitoring of school-based efforts concerning high school choice.

Sample

The three middle schools included in the study were selected based on two primary factors: their location in densely populated Latin American immigrant neighborhoods and the demographic features of the students enrolled at the school. I looked for schools with, relative to the districtwide averages, large Hispanic student populations (50 percent or higher), a high percentage of recent immigrant students (5 percent or higher), a high percentage of students classified as English language learners (20 percent or more), and a high proportion of students eligible for free lunch (a proxy for school poverty). In addition, I sought schools of similar size and grade distribution—in this case, large middle schools with more than fifteen hundred students in grades 6 through 8. The pertinent student demographic information for each of the three middle schools and districtwide averages are provided in table 8.1.

RESULTS

School Quality Excluded

The most striking aspect of the information that the NYCDOE and individual middle schools provided to students and families about high school choice was the exclusion of school quality from the list of important decision-making factors in school selection. This major criterion was conspicuously absent from the various publications and from the live presentations I observed. Instead, students' academic and extracurricular interests, school location, and school size were repeatedly highlighted as vital characteristics for families to consider when choosing schools. Furthermore, aside from a brief paragraph description hidden within the high school directory, families received no explicit instruction about the type of school quality information that was publicly available or how to access it. This is remarkable given the number of school-level reports that the NYCDOE produces containing detailed data on a range of school quality measures.

The *Directory of the New York City Public High Schools* was the most comprehensive resource that OSEPO published and distributed to families. This directory, the size of a telephone book, comprised more than six hundred pages of individualized descriptions of the approximately four hundred high schools in New York. Included were the school's address, contact information, programs offered, and eligibility requirements. At the beginning of the directory, general information about the school choice process was provided. This section reviewed the various types of schools and described

TABLE 8.1 School and districtwide demographic information

| School name | Total enrollment | Race/ethnicity | % English language learners | % recent immigrant | % eligible for free lunch |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| New York City School District | 1,018,546 | American Indian: 0.41%, Asian/Pacific Islander: 14.6%, Hispanic: 39.3%, black: 30.6%, white: 14.4% | 14.4% | N/A | 73% |
| IS 725 | 2,103 | American Indian: 0.10%, Asian/Pacific Islander: 10.9%, Hispanic: 80.4%, black: 6.7%, white: 1.8% | 37.9% | 10.8% | 80.7% |
| IS 633 | 1,899 | American Indian: 0.11%, Asian/Pacific Islander: 9.16%, Hispanic: 85.2%, black: 3.6%, white: 2.0% | 24.2% | 8.6% | 75.2% |
| IS 545 | 1,681 | American Indian: 0.06%, Asian/Pacific Islander: 35.5%, Hispanic: 55.0%, black: 2.4%, white: 7.1% | 19.9% | 5.1% | 71.5% |

Note: Based on data from June 2009.

the various selection methods. A short list of the publicly available data reports and the Web site where they can be accessed appeared near the end of the preface. It was buried between a paragraph about the services available for students with special needs and a list of schools deemed in need of improvement (SINI) by the state. Each of the three main reports—the Progress Report, the Quality Review, and the Learning Environment Survey—was described in a single sentence. The elements that factor in to a school's progress report grade ("school environment," "student performance," and "student progress") were also identified and defined.

It is notable that this one-page description of the accountability reports was the only place in the entire directory in which some of the traditional school quality metrics—graduation rate, Regents passing rate, and credit accumulation—were mentioned by name. These important data points were not provided on the individual school pages, however, and the onus of finding this information was thus placed on students and parents. Furthermore,

although the directory's discussion of these indicators was limited in scope and did not explicitly use the language of "quality," it was the only publication that made reference to using these data as a tool to evaluate and compare school performance.

The other high school choice publications that OSEPO has developed were revealing in the strategies that they suggested to parents and students for reviewing and selecting appropriate schools. For example, "Choosing a High School," a fifteen-page pamphlet distributed at events and available online, contained a "student interest inventory" consisting of questions about a student's interests and career goals, willingness to travel far distances to school, preferences for school size, and English language skills or need for English as a Second Language (ESL) services. In fact, every publication that was distributed at middle school events emphasized a student's interests, school location, and school size as important selection criteria. These factors were also repeated during each citywide and school-based presentation on how to choose schools.

The individual middle school events, although varied in audience size and in the availability and quality of interpretation services, offered nearly identical information and instructions to those in the OSEPO publications. All three middle schools held high school choice workshops for parents on evenings in mid- or late October. The turnout ranged from approximately 10 parents and students at IS 633, to between 150 and 200 parents and students at both IS 725 and IS 545. The format of the events was similar: an hour-long PowerPoint presentation led by a guidance counselor or the school's parent coordinator, followed by a brief question-and-answer session. The content of the presentation also was generally uniform because of the use of the same PowerPoint presentation template provided by OSEPO. In addition, a variety of printed materials was distributed to attendees at the start of each event. These included copies or shortened versions of NYCDOE publications, a calendar of citywide high school choice events such as high school fairs and workshops, and a list of school open houses being held across the city.

The themes of students' interests, school location, and school type and size were prominent in each school's presentation, echoing the main messages transmitted in the OSEPO publications. In fact, all of the guidance counselors and parent coordinators leading the workshops discussed location—and, more specifically, the distance of a school from a student's home and the time required to travel to and from school—more frequently than any other topic. The presenters at all three schools even encouraged families to do a test run of the travel distances during regular school transit times.

This strong emphasis on school location as a key, or perhaps even a primary, criterion for applying to a school contrasted with the lack of discussion about school quality metrics at any of the school-based workshops.

Variation in Availability and Quality of Translation and Interpretation Services

To achieve the most basic level of equity, all parents must, at a minimum, receive information about high school choice in a language they understand. Often, however, schools and districts fail to meet even this minimum threshold. All OSEPO publications are available on the NYCDOE Web site in the nine most commonly spoken languages (English, Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Urdu, Bengali, and Arabic), a fact that signifies the district's recognition of the linguistic diversity and translation needs of the families it serves.

In fact, in September 2006, after substantial lobbying by a coalition of community-based organizations, the NYCDOE created a Translation and Interpretation Unit to provide on-demand translation and interpretation services to schools and the district at large. This represented an important step forward in overcoming the persistent language barriers that immigrant parents face when dealing with their children's schools. However, few of the translated materials, particularly the high school directory, were made available in printed format to the families and schools in this and other studies.⁵¹ As a result, despite the NYCDOE's ostensible commitment to providing translation and interpretation services, ultimately parents who were not literate in English had access to fewer sources of information.

The content of the school-based presentations about high school choice was virtually identical across sites, but the interpretation services provided at the middle school workshops were varied. Whereas at one school, a native Spanish-speaking guidance counselor translated each PowerPoint slide to Spanish in real time, another school provided interpretation only during a fifteen-minute question-and-answer session that occurred after an hour-long presentation in English. The latter event was the most extreme example of a school's failure to provide adequate translation and interpretation services. It illustrates the severity of the obstacles that non-English-speaking immigrant parents may face in learning about and understanding school choice.

IS 545 hosted its major high school choice informational event, "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the High School Application Process," in late October, slightly more than a month before the application was due. The event began with Megan Dowd, the school's parent coordinator, announcing to an audience of approximately two hundred adults and

children that there would be no simultaneous interpretation during the main part of the presentation.⁵² Instead, she would respond to Spanish-speaking parents' questions with the help of a volunteer interpreter after the English portion of the program was completed. After making this announcement, Ms. Dowd instructed the people requiring interpretation to move to the back of the auditorium so that they would be ready for the question-and-answer session at the end. Approximately one-third of the audience moved to the back of the auditorium.

The main presentation at IS 545 consisted of a roughly one-hour PowerPoint slideshow in English led by a monolingual male guidance counselor. As he reviewed each slide, he provided additional commentary and offered tips to students and parents about how to effectively search for schools. At one point, when he was discussing the difference between the main round of choice and the supplementary round, he told the audience, "I highly recommend that you take advantage of the first round. List all twelve choices. That way you give your child a chance to get into a school he/she really wants to go to." Only parents who could follow along in English would have been able to understand this potentially valuable message.

Once the slideshow was finished, Ms. Dowd approached the group of parents and students at the rear of the auditorium awaiting interpretation. She explained that Mrs. Ramirez, a Spanish-speaking parent volunteer, would translate parents' questions and her answers. Mrs. Ramirez, a diminutive Latina woman whose children attended IS 545, stood in the aisle next to Ms. Dowd. One parent asked a question about the Ed-opt schools and the selection mechanism for these schools. Ms. Dowd responded in English to Mrs. Ramirez, explaining the bell curve allocation of slots to students based on their reading scores. Before she was able to translate into Spanish, Mrs. Ramirez had to ask Ms. Dowd to clarify her response at least three times. In this way, she evidenced her limited familiarity with the details of the high school choice process or, at a minimum, her confusion about the various school selection methods.

Ms. Ramirez's poor understanding of the high school choice process was only one of the weaknesses of the interpretation provided to parents at IS 545. When she spoke to parents in Spanish, Mrs. Ramirez's voice projected poorly over the conversations that individual parents were having at the front of the auditorium with guidance counselors; people in the audience struggled to hear both the questions that other parents were asking and Mrs. Ramirez's translated answers. Ten minutes after the interpretation session began, a voice came over the loudspeaker to announce that the school building would be closing and people had to get ready to leave. Most of the

parents in the Spanish-speaking section, many of whom already appeared frustrated, got up and exited the auditorium.

The inadequate provision of interpretation services at IS 545 reflected the school's lack of awareness or negligence in taking into account the school community's needs when planning the high school choice event for parents. First, the assumption that the same people who require interpretation of the English-language presentation would be able or likely to generate specific questions and would benefit from a Q&A session proved to be faulty. Only four people raised their hands with questions, not all of which were answered before the meeting abruptly ended. The rest of the group sat quietly, straining to hear and staring at Ms. Dowd and Mrs. Ramirez with blank faces. Next, because of the limited time allocated and the chosen format of the interpretation session, virtually none of the information covered in the hour-long presentation was conveyed to the Spanish-speaking parents. Finally, the parents who sat for interpretation missed a valuable opportunity to speak with their child's guidance counselor individually (many eighth-grade counselors were in attendance). Instead, they wasted time and learned very little about high school choice while other parents took advantage of the guidance counselors' presence at the event.

At the other end of the spectrum, IS 725 offered immediate, comprehensive, and well-informed interpretation services to Spanish-speaking parents in the audience. Mr. Sanchez, a guidance counselor originally from the Dominican Republic, stood at the front of the auditorium next to Ms. Perolli, his colleague, who was leading the workshop in English. After each PowerPoint slide and commentary in English, Mr. Sanchez translated her explanations to Spanish. The fact that Mr. Sanchez is a bilingual guidance counselor who works directly with students on high school choice meant that he was intimately familiar with the process and could understand and then translate all of the details and nuances that Ms. Perolli covered in her presentation. This benefited the Spanish-speaking members of the audience, because they received all the information that had been provided in English. For example, one of the PowerPoint slides showed a sample application form. When she reached this slide, Ms. Perolli advised,

You should list the programs according to preference. If you are not crazy about your zoned school but you are willing to have your child go there, put it last. Anything you put below your zoned school doesn't matter because once they get down the list to the zoned school they will automatically assign you to the zoned school [meaning that the student was not matched to any of the schools higher up on the list]. If you don't put the

zoned school, there is a chance that your child won't get any of the schools on his list and will have to go to the supplementary round.

Mr. Sanchez's verbatim translation relayed to Spanish-speaking parents Ms. Perolli's suggested strategy of putting the zoned school last in order to ensure the student a seat in at least one school. Parents do not receive this sort of additional information when they read translated materials alone. If equitable access to information is to be achieved, immigrant parents need careful, detailed interpretation of everything that guidance counselors say in English. An estimated seventy-five hundred students, or nearly 9 percent of the eighth graders who applied in 2009, did not get matched to any high school in the first round of applications.⁵³ This figure attests to the importance of knowing how to use one's zoned school as a default option. Students who do not get a first-round match must participate in the supplementary round, where there is a much smaller pool of generally less desirable schools from which to choose. By translating all of Ms. Perolli's commentary offered during the workshop, Mr. Sanchez ensured that Spanish-speaking parents received equivalent information and guidance to that of the other families in the audience.

The Limits of Linguistic Translation

The availability of interpretation services is one measure of a school's effectiveness in informing non-English-speaking parents about high school choice. Another measure is the degree to which the translations approximate the information provided to parents in English. However, even when accurate translations and interpretation are given, they may not be sufficient to explicate the intricacies of complex bureaucratic processes such as high school choice. Rather, immigrant parents who were born, socialized, and educated in countries having different school practices, policies, social mores, and cultural models may require translations that include contextual background and clearly articulated expectations. Thus, a third consideration is whether the translations take into account parents' potentially limited knowledge of certain norms, expectations, and quotidian school practices and therefore make them explicit.

In conducting this research, I witnessed the failure of direct linguistic translations to effectively communicate information to parents on a number of occasions. These ethnographic data also contain poignant examples of school personnel going beyond simply translating directly and instead including additional details and culturally relevant references in their explanations. In one case, the parent coordinator leading a workshop actually articulated parental rights that are often assumed to be universally known.

These illustrative moments differentiate cultural from linguistic translation, supplying evidence of the relevance of the concept of *cultural translation* and highlighting the potential value of including culturally sensitive, contextual details in translated communication to immigrant parents.

The limits of linguistic translation were perhaps most powerfully revealed when, at one middle school event, a Spanish-speaking woman repeatedly expressed confusion about the meaning of the phrase "Specialized High School Admissions Test." Nine of the most elite and competitive schools in the New York public school system require students to take a standardized exam for admission. Each year more than twenty thousand students sit for the Specialized High School Admissions Test to vie for approximately four thousand spots at these schools.

A key component of New York's portfolio of schools, the specialized high schools and the entrance exam itself were referenced in each of the NYC-DOE publications and at every citywide and middle-school-based workshop. The direct Spanish translation of the phrase "Specialized High School Admissions Test" to *examen especializado* or "specialized exam" was sprinkled throughout the school choice materials and was used countless times in presentations. During my observations, however, it became evident that many Spanish-speaking parents did not understand what the phrase actually referred to. For example, after hearing Mrs. Ramirez use the term *examen especializado* during the question-and-answer session at IS 545, one woman stood up and asked aloud,

Que es especializado? Es como en mi pais con las humanidades o letras?
No es como en nuestros paises, verdad? *What is specialized? Is it like in my country, [choosing an academic track like] humanities or letters? It's not like in our countries, right?*

Neither Mrs. Ramirez nor any of the other Spanish-speaking parents in the audience responded to the woman's question—perhaps because they did not hear her or because no one else understood what the phrase meant. Regardless of the reason, the comment itself serves to demonstrate her evident confusion with a grammatically correct, and yet conceptually limited, translation of an important element of the larger choice process. High-achieving students who may be strong candidates for gaining admission to one of the prestigious exam schools stand to lose out if they or their parents do not know what it takes to apply to these widely coveted schools.

A focus group with guidance counselors and the parent coordinator at IS 725 elicited another example of the weakness of linguistic translation without embedded cultural knowledge. In this instance, the unsuccessful translation attempt involved notices sent home to parents about the Learning

Environment Survey—a survey distributed to teachers, students, and parents at every school and used to evaluate the school environment. Although it is not directly related to high school choice, this example brings to life the ways in which apparently straightforward attempts at communication with immigrant families may miss the mark.

During a discussion with the guidance counselors and Ms. Torres, the parent coordinator, about the school's outreach and communication strategies with families generally, Ms. Torres recounted, "The flyers [sent home to parents about filling out the Learning Environment Survey] are translated into Spanish, but parents still come in with the flyers, and they don't know what they mean."

Ms. Torres and the rest of the guidance staff did not understand what could have possibly been wrong with the flyers. This puts into sharp relief the mismatch between school personnel's comprehension of what they should be doing to explain policies, procedures, and concepts to parents and the depth and the breadth of support that some parents may need if they are to understand the messages sent from their children's school. If parents do not have a notion of what the Learning Environment Survey is or why they should fill it out, and if they have no reference point in the education system in their countries of origin, simply translating the words into Spanish may not be enough to convey meaning and produce understanding.

The Possibilities of Cultural Translation

In the midst of numerous missteps in the middle schools' and district's outreach to families, I observed a few instances in which school personnel took alternative and possibly more promising approaches to informing parents about high school choice. In these cases, they inserted contextual information and provided cultural translations in explaining the process. These enhanced translations explicated normative practices that are often taken for granted and did so in language and concepts with which immigrant parents could identify.

In many low-income Latin American immigrant families, the tendency to view school personnel as the ultimate authority on a child's academic education and to avoid confronting or challenging them may be even more exaggerated given the deeply rooted cultural history of such traditions.⁵⁴ Explicitly stating the school's expectations of parents as well as their rights to ask questions, request meetings, or appeal for specific support or services (for themselves or for their children) may be one way to help low-income and immigrant parents develop some of the cultural capital that has historically produced educational advantages for children in middle-class homes.

The articulation of parental and student rights and responsibilities constitutes a critical element of cultural translation. School personnel's impromptu comments made in the course of their planned presentations about high school choice often contained the most valuable insights and suggestions; some of these comments also exemplify this form of cultural translation. At one point during the workshop held at IS 633, Ms. Jean-Baptiste, the Spanish-speaking parent coordinator, mentioned the importance of attending open house events at prospective high schools. After reviewing some of the open house dates that had been scheduled, Ms. Jean-Baptiste then told parents that if they were unable to attend a scheduled open house, they should contact the high school directly to set up a tour. With this unscripted remark, she named for an exclusively immigrant audience (of approximately ten adults) some of their privileges and responsibilities as parents of eighth-grade students applying to high school in New York. Whether or not it was conscious, by telling parents about their right to call schools and request visits, Ms. Jean-Baptiste's remark equipped them with cultural capital that may help them navigate school choice and learn about school options. Asserting the propriety of requesting a school tour represents important support for families who may not be familiar with the cultural norms and expectations in the United States. This is especially true for low-income Latin American immigrant parents who come from traditions in which making requests of schools is not customary nor condoned.

Reliance on the Internet as a Primary Method of Disseminating Information

The increasing ubiquity of the Internet and growing computer literacy across many age, income, geographic, and racial or ethnic groups have led companies, governments, individuals, and school districts alike to rely progressively more on Web-based sources of information. The New York City Department of Education is no exception. The practice of referring students and families to Web sites and other electronic resources related to choosing a high school was widespread in New York.

Immigrant families experienced considerable difficulty accessing translated versions of the high school directory in printed form. Although the directory was made available in nine languages on the NYCDOE's Web site, parents in all three middle schools I studied complained about the school's failure to provide printed Spanish copies. These results echo Hemphill and Nauer's findings that, for the past two years, the directory was unavailable in any language other than English.⁵⁵ There are serious costs and time implications associated with downloading and printing a six-hundred-page

document. Furthermore, other than the single-page description of each high school in the directory, virtually no information about individual schools was readily accessible in printed format. The same was true of school-level performance reports, such as the *Learning Environment Survey Report*, *Quality Review Report*, *Progress Report*, and the *Annual Report Card*. These reports can be retrieved only through the main NYCDOE Web site. As a result, access to information about school quality was even more elusive for the people on the disadvantaged side of the digital divide.

The NYCDOE also depended heavily on third-party sites to provide tools to assist families with school choice. In a number of OSEPO publications, students and parents were referred to Internet-based resources such as Hop Stop.com or the Metropolitan Transit Authority to get estimated travel times to schools. During workshops and presentations, guidance counselors and parent coordinators repeatedly suggested that parents visit these Web sites. Moreover, many of these Web-based resources are available in English only, thereby compounding the difficulties for people who cannot read English. For many immigrant families, the NYCDOE's reliance on Web sites and electronic documents may combine with their existing language barriers, lack of familiarity with the U.S. education system, and poverty to dramatically hamper their efforts to understand how to find a suitable high school for their child.

DISCUSSION

Barriers to Low-Income Immigrants' Access to School Choice Information

Immigrant parents with minimal English skills and limited financial resources face considerable challenges in learning about high school choice in New York and discovering how to successfully negotiate the process. Inadequate provision of translation and interpretation services constitutes perhaps the most basic and fundamental obstacle. The implications of a district's or a school's failure to meet parents' linguistic needs, however, may transcend the issue of an information vacuum. When parents make an effort to attend a school event and the school neglects to provide information that is comprehensible to them, these parents might take it as a signal that the school does not value them. Moreover, it might dissuade them from attending events in the future or from reaching out to their children's teachers and guidance counselors. Ultimately, poor or insufficient translation may alienate immigrant families and potentially multiply the struggles that many low-income immigrant-origin students already experience in school.

A more subtle, and yet similarly powerful, challenge to immigrant families' comprehension of school choice is related to the quality of the translations they receive. This question of quality refers to two main elements: first, it refers to interpreters' comprehension of the content material and their ability to translate the details that are provided in English. Direct translation of words may not be enough to explain a complicated bureaucratic process like high school choice. Therefore, a second aspect of quality refers to the level of cultural translation, or the degree to which a translation embeds additional contextual information about English terms, U.S.-specific concepts, and assumed knowledge about rights, expectations, and norms.

Employing bilingual guidance counselors may be one effective way to offer Spanish-speaking parents access to virtually identical information to that of their English-speaking counterparts. However, the realities of school budgeting and the supply of such personnel in the marketplace mean that not every middle school with a large Latino, immigrant-origin student population may be able to hire a bilingual guidance counselor. Therefore, districts must make translated materials widely available in printed form so that parents who need them can easily access information without incurring substantial costs.

Translated materials and live interpretation must be comprehensive and culturally sensitive to address persistent problems of information asymmetry. As these data show, linguistic translation alone is frequently insufficient to equip immigrant families with the information they need if they are to successfully negotiate school choice or many other educational policies. Even if certain information is not provided in the original version of a document or presentation, understanding the consumer public includes recognition that some knowledge is culturally bound and must be communicated. In fact, often what is not articulated in direct linguistic translations is more meaningful than what is, and it may be necessary to unpack the implicit social and cultural messages embedded in seemingly neutral policies such as school choice. Providing cultural translations represents one potential avenue to achieve this goal. Such translations may also serve to help immigrant parents generate valuable cultural capital and challenge the "hidden curriculum" that has previously contributed to cycles of social reproduction and inequality.⁵⁶ Finally, incorporating cultural translation into school outreach practices may resolve some of the seemingly endless communication breakdowns between school personnel and immigrant families that contribute to the range of home-school conflicts discussed earlier.

For immigrant families with low-level computer skills, restricted access to the Internet, and minimal English literacy, the limited availability of non-electronic and translated resources is another formidable obstacle to obtaining

information about school choice. Although there are obvious benefits in cost savings and convenience in using its Web site to post announcements, reports, and documents, the NYCDOE excluded a considerable segment of the public when it replaced printed materials with electronic versions and reduced mailings in favor of e-mailed notices. The consequences for low-income Latin American immigrants may be especially severe, because access to computers tends to correlate directly with one's income level and because translated versions of many of the major NYCDOE reports and publications were available exclusively online.⁵⁷ The NYCDOE's reliance on third-party Web sites only intensifies the problem. Like the inadequate interpretation and translation, this uneven provision of information also symbolizes the district's inattention to the range of resources, skills, literacy levels, and languages that must be satisfied for families to be fairly and equally informed about the high school choice process. Finally, it may further serve to deter frustrated parents from engaging with their children's schools generally.

It should not be taken as a given that all families will investigate and consider traditional school quality measures—including graduation rates, test scores, and student satisfaction—in their selection process; some families may not be aware of the importance of or need to evaluate schools according to these metrics. In fact, many low-income Latin American immigrants come from countries and cultures in which competition, choice, and school quality comparisons are not a routine part of the educational process. These parents often assume, at least initially, that all schools in the United States are good or at least better than the schools in their countries of origin.⁵⁸

OSEPO's publications and school-based workshops were nearly devoid of references to school quality as an important criterion for school selection; this amounts to one of the most serious limitations of the district's and schools' work to inform families about high school choice. Excluding from informational materials and events a discussion about what constitutes a high-quality school, how to access this information, and why seeking it is a critical part of the high school selection process puts those families who do not already know this at a distinct disadvantage. To address this potential source of inequality, all school choice publications and workshops should contain an explicit review of school quality metrics used by the city, state, and federal government to evaluate schools, a discussion of where school evaluations can be found, and instructions on how to use them.

Given the current emphasis in federal, state, and district accountability frameworks on traditional school quality indicators such as graduation rates and student academic proficiency, it is surprising that the official district school choice materials virtually ignore these data points. It is even more striking considering the substantial investment that the NYCDOE has

made, both financially and politically, in creating publicly available school-level reports. The Office of Accountability of the New York City Department of Education has spent millions of dollars in the past four years to develop the progress reports, learning environment surveys, and quality reviews. In light of Hemphill and Nauer's data on the vast undersupply of high performing high schools in New York, however, the district's failure to mention school quality or these reports in its school choice publications and presentations may be better understood.⁵⁹ Encouraging families to investigate schools on the basis of these metrics might only call attention to the fact that the NYCDOE currently does not have enough good schools to meet student demand. Yet, until the NYCDOE reaches its goal of improving all schools, it has a responsibility not only to make these data available to the public but also to facilitate dialogue about the current condition of schools and ways to use data to make school choice decisions.

IMPLICATIONS

This preliminary research offers a small window into one district's high school choice process and shows how the weaknesses of its communication and outreach strategy may interrupt efforts to achieve equitable access to high-quality education. Through an examination of the obstacles that immigrants face in gathering information about school choice, this study also delves into the nuanced process of immigrant educational integration. The results illuminate how unsuccessful dissemination of information and inadequate translation and interpretation—about school choice or any other regulation, policy, or procedure—may explain long-standing conflicts and misunderstandings between schools and immigrant families and may thwart the larger social goals of facilitating immigrant families' integration.

The United States has seen spectacular growth in its immigrant population in recent decades, not only in traditional gateway cities but also, increasingly, in cities and states that have never before received large numbers of immigrants.⁶⁰ These post-1965 immigration waves have been accompanied by a rise in the number of children of immigrants being educated in U.S. schools. Thus, understanding immigrant families' experiences with integration across multiple social realms—not least of which is the education system—and learning about the various kinds of support these families may need if they are to be successful have taken on unprecedented urgency.

Informing immigrants of their rights and responsibilities as members of society and explaining bureaucratic procedures is only one element of the larger work of assisting integration. Yet, as this research shows, successfully reaching out to immigrant families and communicating critical information

are more complicated than may be expected. Knowledge about how to negotiate institutional relationships, environments, and processes (e.g., finding an appropriate high school for one's child as part of a school choice plan) constitutes a valuable form of cultural capital that, by virtue of having been educated and socialized outside the United States, many immigrant parents may lack. Linguistic translation rarely includes essential background and contextual information—clues that immigrant parents need to be fully educated about the rules of the game. Effective support of immigrant integration would include cultural translations of policies and procedures (educational or other) and would make explicit social norms, expectations, and rights that are often assumed to be common knowledge. Hence, cultural translation should replace linguistic translation as the standard of service.

The problems with New York's approach to explaining high school choice to students and families do not only reside in the content of the materials and in the translations provided. Many families, above all those of low-income immigrant backgrounds, may require individual guidance to make well-informed decisions about a child's educational pathway. In their study of how parents search for schools, Teske et al. found that low-income parents relied on people more than printed materials to obtain the type of "soft facts" that they were most interested in learning about a potential school.⁶¹ Current opportunities for parents to speak directly with school personnel to ask questions about schools are inadequate. With caseloads of as many as four hundred students each, guidance counselors find it virtually impossible to spend time with each student. Schools having large numbers of low-income and immigrant-origin students should receive additional budget allocations to cover the cost of providing such necessary, personalized support in making school selections. In addition, schools' engagement with families concerning high school choice should begin well before students reach the eighth grade (or whenever decisions are required).

A number of gaps remain in the school choice literature and in the research on educational integration. Additional studies are needed that directly capture immigrant families' experiences with high school choice and include data based on their own narratives to illuminate the challenges they face, examine their sources of information, and reveal how and why immigrant students and families end up making the school selections they do. Current studies of school choice also tend to overlook the role of children in school choice decisions. Investigating the experiences of adolescent children of immigrants might be particularly telling given the complicated dynamics in families where children act as translators and cultural brokers for their parents.⁶² Research that compares the school choice experiences of various immigrant groups—such as low-income Latin American and Chi-

nese immigrants—may shed light on cultural and structural factors that complicate their negotiation of this or other bureaucratic processes. Comparative studies of immigrant and non-immigrant families may also deepen current understanding of the salience of immigration as an explanatory factor of variation in the ability or likelihood of participation in school choice. Finally, a focus on the supply side of this equation—the schools that eventually receive the students participating in the choice process—is also warranted. Further examination of how, if at all, schools reach out to students and families and whether they target certain students and ignore others would round out the picture of the multifaceted process of school choice.

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7. Claire Smrekar and Ellen Goldring, *School Choice in Urban America: Magnet Schools and the Pursuit of Equity* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).
8. Diane Reay and Stephen J. Ball, “‘Making Up Their Minds’: Family Dynamics of School Choice,” *British Educational Research Journal* 24, no. 4 (1998): 431–448; D. Reay and H. Lucey, “Children, School Choice, and Social Differences,” *Educational Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 83–100.
9. Valerie E. Lee, Robert C. Croninger, and Julie B. Smith, “Equity and Choice in Detroit,” in *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of School Choice*, eds. B. Fuller and R. F. Elmore with G. Orfield (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).
10. Christopher Lubienski, Charisse Gulosino, and Peter Weitzel, “School Choice and Competitive Incentives: Mapping the Distribution of Educational Opportunities Across Local Education Markets,” *American Journal of Education* 115, no. 4 (2009): 601–647.
11. Harry Brighthouse, “Educational Equality and Varieties of School Choice,” in *School Choice and Outcomes: Empirical and Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. W. Feinberg and C. Lubienski (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).
12. The original consent decree was modified in 2004 and 2006. CPS was operating under Second Amended Consent Decree until September 2009, when a federal judge terminated the consent decree requiring CPS to use race as a factor in admissions decisions. Current CPS CEO Ron Huberman, however, has stated that race will still be used as a consideration in admissions to magnet and selective-enrollment schools; Rebecca Harris and Sarah Karp, “At Busy Board Meeting, Race Back in Mix in Magnet and Selective School Admission Policy,” *Catalyst Chicago* blog, 2009, http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/notebook/index.php/entry/481/At_busy_board_meeting%2C_race_back_in_mix_in_magnet_and_selective_school_admission_policy.
13. Larry Stanton, “Chicago High Schools High School Transformation” (presentation to the Steering Committee of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, Chicago, 2006).
14. This is a conservative indication of how much “choice” there is in the system, because some students attending their neighborhood school were probably satisfied with their assignment and chose to stay in the neighborhood. Given the high number of special programs offered by neighborhood schools, a portion of students may have applied and were admitted to programs within their assigned neighborhood schools.
15. There is no limit to the number of applications one student can send. However, students can apply to only one program at any school that offers multiple programs.
16. Even though scores do not play a role in selecting students when a random lottery is used, most applications require students to send their seventh-grade scores.
17. This is how the system works in theory, but schools with open seats after April will take students.
18. Brighthouse, “Educational Equality and Varieties of School Choice.”
19. These interviews were collected as part of a longitudinal, multimethod research study examining students’ transition from elementary to high school in CPS.
20. See the appendix online at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/> for a detailed description of the sample of students and the statistical analyses.
21. Students in the top quartile of CPS test takers on the eighth-grade ISAT exam are defined as “top performers” in table 7.1. Students in the bottom quartile on the exam are labeled as “bottom performers.”

22. Students in our qualitative sample were assigned to attend five different neighborhood high schools. Two of the schools contained predominantly African American students; three, predominantly Latino students. The schools ranged from the bottom to the top quartile in graduation rates.
23. For a detailed explanation of the sample of students included in our analyses, see the appendix online at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/>.
24. Chicago Public Schools, Office of Academic Enhancement, “Selective Enrollment High School Data,” http://www.selectiveenrollment.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=72696&ctype=d&termREC_ID=&pREC_ID=123085&rn=6515257.
25. Twenty-seven percent of students who reported not filling out any application attended a high school outside their attendance area. This is plausible given that schools that are not oversubscribed will take students even though they did not apply before the December deadline.
26. See our appendix online at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/> for a detailed description of the model and the results of this analysis.
27. The percentages in this subsection do not add up to 100 because six students did not talk about family involvement in the school choice process.
28. For a detailed description of the measures and items from the survey, see our appendix online at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/>. The appendix also contains a description of all the other data used in the analysis and the details of the models used.
29. Higher levels of parental support means increasing the reported parental support by one standard deviation for all students in the sample. Using the model estimates we can simulate the effects of such an increase.
30. We can simulate the effect of such an increase using the estimates from the model.
31. Strong parental support is defined as one standard deviation above the mean; weak parental support is defined as one standard deviation below the mean.
32. Amy Stuart Wells, “African-American Students’ View of School Choice,” in *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of School Choice*, eds. Fuller and Elmore with Orfield, 25–49.

Chapter 8

1. The term *Latino* is used throughout this chapter to refer to people who trace their origins to Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is replaced with *Hispanic* only when studies are cited that originally employed the latter term.
2. Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, *Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2005).
3. The majority (63 percent) of Latino children in the United States live in immigrant-led households. This figure includes foreign-born first-generation (11 percent) and U.S.-born second-generation (52 percent) children of immigrants. The remaining 37 percent of Latino children in the United States are “third generation or higher,” or native-born children of U.S.-born parents; Richard Fry and Jeffrey S. Passel, *Latino Children: A Majority Are U.S.-Born Offspring of Immigrants* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).
4. Bobby D. Rampey, Gloria S. Dion, and Patricia L. Donahue, *NAEP 2008 Trends in Academic Progress*, NCES 2009–479 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2009).
5. David C. Berliner, “Our Impoverished View of Educational Research,” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 6 (2006): 949–995; Joel I. Klein and Al Sharpton, “Charter Schools Can Close the Education Gap,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 12, 2009, A13; Pedro Noguera

- and Jean Y. Wing, eds., *Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); Richard Rothstein, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2004).
6. James E. Coleman, Ernst Campbell, Carol Hobson, James McPartland, Alexander M. Mood, Frederic Wienfeld, and Robert York, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Education, 1966); Orfield and Lee, *Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality*; Russell W. Rumberger and Gregory J. Palardy, "Does Segregation Still Matter? The Impact of Student Composition on Academic Achievement in High School," *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 9 (2005): 1999–2045; Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).
 7. Education Commission of the States, *Open Enrollment: 50-State Report, 2007*, <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=268>; Center for Education Reform, *Charter Schools, 2007*, www.edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=stateStats&pSectionID=15&cSectionID=44.
 8. Cited in Sam Dillon, "Education Chief to Warn That Inferior Charter Schools Harm the Effort," *New York Times*, June 22, 2009, A10.
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Chapter 9

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