

School Choice, Neoliberalism, and Racial Inequality: How Black and White Parents Manage Schooling in the Cleveland, Ohio, Metropolitan Area

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ABSTRACT

Proponents of “school choice” argue that offering parents public school options other than traditional neighborhood schools empowers parents to secure the best education for their children. But because school choice was introduced into an education system where Black, Latino, and poor parents are more likely to send their children to neighborhood schools that fail to meet state academic proficiency standards, than are their White and middle class peers, and because racial residential segregation persists in most U.S. metropolitan areas, parents’ exercise of choice reflects and reinforces, not ameliorates, already-existing inequality. School choice itself is constitutive of neo-liberal, or market-based solutions, to the provision of public goods, which transfers responsibility and failure risk from government to families. While there are studies on students’ performance in traditional and non-traditional public schools, our study contributes an understanding of *how* choice is exercised and experienced day to day by Black and White parents. We use interviews with 42 Black and White parents who have children in elementary school in the Cleveland, Ohio, metropolitan area, to compare the processes Black and White parents use to: (1) decide where to send their children to school and (2) manage daily schooling routines. We find that, regardless of class background, most White parents send their children to their neighborhood school because they are satisfied with it, while most Black parents seek alternatives because they are not. As a result, White parents have a “package deal” and Black parents a “parenting tax.”

INTRODUCTION

Proponents of “school choice” argue that offering parents public school options other than traditional neighborhood schools empowers parents to secure the best education for their children. School choice, which started to influence state and local K-12 school policy in the 1990s, is an umbrella term for charter, magnet, specialty and other tax-payer funded schools that allow school administrators who run them more curriculum autonomy than their traditional public school counterparts. However, because school choice was introduced into an education system where Black¹, Latino, and poor parents are more likely to send their children to

¹ We use the terms African American and Black, and European American and White, interchangeably. Though after 1965 immigration reform (Alba and Nee 2005), there is a notable increase in the number of brown-skinned people

neighborhood schools that fail to meet state academic proficiency standards, than are their White and middle class peers (Vanneman, et al., 2009), and because racial residential segregation persists in most U.S. metropolitan areas (Pint-Coelho and Zuberi 2015, Frey 2011, Charles 2006), parents' exercise of choice reflects and reinforces, not ameliorates, already-existing inequality (Renzulli and Roscigno 2007).

More broadly, school choice itself is constitutive of neo-liberal, or market-based solutions, to the provision of public goods, goods whose benefits redound to individuals and society as a whole (Harvey 2005). School choice policies transfer responsibility and failure risk from federal, state, and local governments to families. While there exist studies on students' performance in traditional and non-traditional public schools (Bifulco and Ladd 2007, Sass 2006), the limitations of market-based policies for public goods provision (Centeno and Cohen 2012), and racial and ethnic disparities in access to high-quality public education, our study contributes an understanding of *how* choice is exercised and experienced day to day by Black and White parents.

We use interviews with Black and White parents who have children in elementary school in the Cleveland, Ohio, metropolitan area, to compare the processes Black and White parents use to: (1) decide where to send their children to school and (2) manage daily schooling routines. We also compare traditional and non-traditional schools' performance in the neighborhoods where our respondents live. We find that most White parents send their children to their

from African and Caribbean countries, we do not make a distinction between native and foreign-born Blacks, but we do exclude Black and White Latinos. We have no self-identified Black immigrants in our study and Black immigrants are less than 10 percent of the Black population nationwide, so we believe this decision does not compromise our findings and analysis.

neighborhood school because they are satisfied with it, while most Black parents seek alternatives to their neighborhood school because they are not.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Is this Help Helping?: School Choice and Student Achievement

Parents whose children attend failing or low-performing schools have more publically-funded alternatives to their neighborhood public school than they would have had 25 years ago.

Forty two states and the District of Columbia have enacted school choice legislation, which permits public school money to follow students wherever children attend school, whether that be a traditional public school or public school alternatives, such as charter and magnet schools (NCES 2015). In 2015, about six percent of all public schools were charter schools (Ibid.). Thirty five percent of charter school students are White and about 28 percent are Black (NCES 2015), demonstrating a disproportionate demand for public school alternatives among Black parents, given that 16 percent of the student population is Black and 50 percent are White (NCES 2013).

School choice policies, which are enacted at the state level, executed at the local level, and bolstered through federal legislation—most recently, No Child Left Behind (2002) and Race to the Top (2009)—have expanded in the first two decades of the twenty first century. But the record on whether, how, and if so, to what extent, school choice improves students' access to higher quality schools is at best inconclusive, with many studies showing charters perform below their traditional school counterparts (Bifulco and Ladd 2007, NAEP 2003). Comparing Black and White parents' experiences in selecting a school across a set of districts in a metropolitan

area allows researchers to understand racial variation within and between districts. We turn now to the case of the Cleveland metropolitan area.

School Choice in Context: Cleveland, Ohio, and Its Suburbs

Cleveland's Demographics²

Cleveland is a mid-western city on the southern edge of Lake Erie. According to the 2010 Census, this rustbelt city is home to about 400,000 people. Compared to other United States cities, Cleveland skews poor. The median household income in Cleveland in 2010 was \$26,217, while the national household median in 2010 was \$51,939 (U.S. Census Bureau). Blacks' household median of \$34,598 nation-wide is significantly lower than Whites' median of \$58,270 (U.S. Census Bureau). A quarter of the households in Cleveland have children, and nearly half of these children live in families with incomes below the U.S. poverty line, which in 2013 was \$19,530 for a family of three (U.S. Health and Human Services 2013).

In terms of racial composition, 53 percent of residents in Cleveland identify themselves as Black, 37 percent identify as White, and other racial groups compose the remaining 10 percent (U.S. Census). The city is racially segregated. According to the metropolitan-wide black-white dissimilarity index, a measure of the degree of segregation in a geographic area, Cleveland scores a 74 out of 100, with 0 indicating a perfectly even distribution of racial groups and 100 meaning total geographic separation among racial groups. Cleveland is among the top-10 most segregated cities in the United States (Scommegna 2011). The eastern suburbs are majority-Black and the western majority-White, largely mirroring the city's racial divide. Inner-ring

² See Appendix 2 for a map of the Cleveland metropolitan area.

suburbs on the city's east side discussed in this study include: Maple Heights, Garfield Heights, and Warrensville Heights. West-side suburbs include: Lakewood and Rocky River (see Appendix 1 for a map of the metropolitan area).

School Choice in the Cleveland Metropolitan Area

Ohio has one of the most robust and well-utilized school choice regimes in the nation. Choice in Ohio includes charter schools, vouchers for private schools, and a system of open enrollment. Since state legislation was passed in 1997 to establish a system of “community schools,” charter school enrollment and spending has grown. In the 2014-2015 school year, over 120,000 Ohio public school students were enrolled in charter schools, and the state allocated over \$1 billion in educational funding towards charters. Charter schools receive funding on a per-pupil basis, and this funding is allocated by and through the student's catchment area. The allocation was \$5,800 per pupil in 2015, plus additional allocations for disability or special needs. The home district of each charter school student is responsible for providing transportation for that student to the charter school, as long as it is no more than a 30 minute drive from the neighborhood school the student is zoned to attend.

Charter school utilization varies by geographical location and they tend to be concentrated in urban areas. Whereas only 2.4 percent and 3 percent of public school students in suburban and rural areas (respectively) were enrolled in charter schools, almost 1 in 5, or 17.7 percent of urban public school students attended a charter school (Rembert et al., 2016).

However, charter schools in Ohio have not been shown to increase student achievement significantly. In fact, a report evaluating the performance of charter schools in Ohio for the 2007-

2008 and 2012-2013 school year showed that the average charter school student actually achieved less academic growth than the average traditional public school student (CREDO, 2013). This negative relationship between charter school attendance and achievement showed heterogeneity for certain groups however: Black students living below the poverty line were more likely to succeed academically in a charter school than were Black students in poverty who attended a traditional public school. Additionally, elementary and middle charter schools often have more positive outcomes, compared to their traditional counterparts, than do high schools.

But research on charter school effects is generally fraught with too many unaccounted for variables for researchers to conclude that charters have led to improved achievement (Rembert et al., 2016). For example, in Ohio, 178 charter schools have opened and then ultimately closed since 1997, when charter schools became an education intervention in the state. These schools, on average, are open for five years before shutting down. Therefore it is likely the case that there are many effective charters in Ohio. But it is unclear which ones remain open over time, and of those that remain open, which are effective. Ohio's trends are beared out in the Cleveland metropolitan area.

How Do Cleveland Charter Schools "Measure Up"?

Each year, the Ohio Department of Education releases individual "school report cards," grading schools on a variety of indicators with letter grades A through F. We conducted the following analysis on the 2016 report card data using cross tabulations in STATA. Public schools are compared to charter, or "community," schools.

Two grades are considered in our comparison:

1.) “Performance Index Grade”: This indicator uses an average across Ohio standardized tests to assess whether students in a particular school meet grade level expectations. It measures performance at a particular point in time. The indicator follows the national trend established by legislation like No Child Left Behind in 2002 because it relies on standardized knowledge.

2.) “Value-added Grade”: This indicator assesses how much progress schools have enabled in students’ learning, using the starting and end points of student knowledge in the course of a school year as a guide (as opposed to an objective measure of where the student should be at a particular grade). Many charters favor this indicator, as it allows them to measure student achievement as an output of a particular school.

Two subgroups of public schools and charter schools are considered:

Traditional Public Schools

1.) The largest group of traditional public schools considered includes the predominantly Black Cleveland Municipal School District itself, as well as the majority or plurality White suburbs (including Shaker Heights, Garfield Heights, Maple Heights, Garfield, Lakewood, University Heights, Cleveland Heights, and Rocky River) represented in the “How Parents House Kids” study original sample (see Data and Methods below for study details). Additionally, the predominantly black area of East Cleveland is considered.

2.) The second, smaller group of public schools considered is within the Cleveland and East Cleveland school districts only. These two areas are majority Black, providing a more conservative estimate of how public schools measure up against charter schools.

Charter Schools

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1.) The largest group considered here is all charter schools for Cuyohoga County, Ohio. This area is conceivably the universe of charter school possibilities for Cleveland Metropolitan area students, given the directive from the state that transportation must be provided up to 30 minutes away from a student’s home district.

2.) The second, smaller group of charter schools consists of those that exist only in the HPHK neighborhoods. Strikingly, and following the geography of charter schools mentioned above, only one of these schools (the only charter in Maple Heights, a mixed inner-suburb, is not within the City of Cleveland itself).

Analysis 1: Charter Schools (large group) versus Public Schools (large group)

PERFORMANCE INDEX SCORE GRADE	charter		Total
	0	1	
A	2 1.01%	1 1.52%	3 1.13%
B	10 5.03%	1 1.52%	11 4.15%
C	18 9.05%	3 4.55%	21 7.92%
D	58 29.15%	32 48.48%	90 33.96%
F	111 55.78%	29 43.94%	140 52.83%
Total	199 100.00%	66 100.00%	265 100.00%

OVERALL VALUE-ADDED GRADE	charter		Total
	0	1	
A	31 16.06%	15 23.08%	46 17.83%
B	7 3.63%	2 3.08%	9 3.49%
C	23	14	37

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	11.92%	21.54%	14.34%
D	22 11.40%	9 13.85%	31 12.02%
F	110 56.99%	25 38.46%	135 52.33%
Total	193 100.00%	65 100.00%	258 100.00%

As shown by the tables above, public and charter schools match rather evenly across the Performance Index grades, with the majority receiving D’s and F’s. Indeed, about 85 percent of public schools received D’s and F’s in performance, while 92 percent of charter schools across the larger areas receive these failing grades. Notably, 15 percent of public schools versus eight percent of charter schools receive “passing” performance indicator grades, though only 44 percent of charter schools, versus the 56 percent of public schools, get the lowest grade of F. However, more charter schools than public schools get passing “value-added” grades, with almost one quarter of charter schools in the larger area (23 percent) getting this grade.

Analysis 2: Charter Schools (large groups) versus Public Schools (small group)

This analysis is performed to take out the more advantaged public schools in the majority or plurality White suburbs that most Black students in the Cleveland area do not have access to because of residential location. Thus, the larger charter network of Cuyahoga county is compared to the smaller group of public schools (those only within the majority-Black cities of Cleveland and East Cleveland).

PERFORMANCE INDEX SCORE GRADE	0	1	Total
	charter		

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A	1 0.65%	1 1.52%	2 0.91%
B	2 1.31%	1 1.52%	3 1.37%
C	7 4.58%	3 4.55%	10 4.57%
D	40 26.14%	32 48.48%	72 32.88%
F	103 67.32%	29 43.94%	132 60.27%
Total	153 100.00%	66 100.00%	219 100.00%

OVERALL VALUE-ADDED D GRADE	charter		Total
	0	1	
A	20 13.42%	15 23.08%	35 16.36%
B	3 2.01%	2 3.08%	5 2.34%
C	17 11.41%	14 21.54%	31 14.49%
D	16 10.74%	9 13.85%	25 11.68%
F	93 62.42%	25 38.46%	118 55.14%
Total	149 100.00%	65 100.00%	214 100.00%

As shown in the first table, proportionately more public schools than charter schools in this group (67 percent versus 44 percent) have F grades for performance index; however, failing grades of D or F are given to 93 percent and 92 percent of traditional public versus charter schools, respectively, making them similar in overall failing rate. Proportions of A, B, and C grades in performance indicators are also similar across the two types of schools.

The value-added grades of these schools (those traditional public schools in the majority Black cities in the locations we sampled, as well as the entire collection of Cuyahoga county charter schools) show that Charters have a notable advantage in value-added grades.

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Analysis 3: Charter Schools (small group) versus Traditional Public Schools (small group)

This analysis looks at the most probable comparison for most Black families in our study: local traditional public schools (in majority Black neighborhoods) or Charter schools within the Cleveland city limits. Though the local district is supposed to provide transportation up to 30 minutes of driving time for each student who attends a charter outside that district, many families in practice will not travel this far for school choice. This comparison we think is the most realistic for most families and thus the most important in assessing the difference in performance between traditional public schools and charter schools.

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PERFORMANCE INDEX SCORE GRADE	charter		Total
	0	1	
A	1 0.65%	1 2.22%	2 1.01%
B	2 1.31%	1 2.22%	3 1.52%
C	7 4.58%	2 4.44%	9 4.55%
D	40 26.14%	19 42.22%	59 29.80%
F	103 67.32%	22 48.89%	125 63.13%
Total	153 100.00%	45 100.00%	198 100.00%

OVERALL VALUE-ADDED GRADE	charter		Total
	0	1	
A	20 13.42%	12 27.27%	32 16.58%
B	3 2.01%	0 0.00%	3 1.55%
C	17	11	28

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	11.41%	25.00%	14.51%
D	16 10.74%	5 11.36%	21 10.88%
F	93 62.42%	16 36.36%	109 56.48%
Total	149 100.00%	44 100.00%	193 100.00%

The tables above show that, even limited to the smaller catchment areas, traditional public schools and charter schools have similarly failing performance indicators, with 91 percent of charter schools receiving a D or F on this measure and 93 percent of traditional public schools receiving a failing grade. However, overall value-added grades show that traditional public schools are graded worse, with 73 percent receiving a failing D or F grade, than charter schools, where only 47 percent receive such a grade. Over a full quarter of the charter schools in Cleveland itself receive an “A” grade and a quarter receive a low but passing “C” grade. Taken together, it is clear that there is considerable variation in charter schools, with many helping students to attain more than a grade level in knowledge in the course of a year. But it is also clear that a significant number of charters are subpar. Therefore parents who seek an alternative to their neighborhood school are at great risk of sending their child to a charter that is not an improvement to their neighborhood school, especially if parents have not done considerable research on charter options and are not willing to integrate a long commute into their family routine.

DATA and METHODS

During the summers of 2013 and 2014, we were part of a team of Johns Hopkins sociology department researchers who conducted an interview-based study called “How Parents

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House Kids,” under primary investigators Kathy Edin and Stefanie Deluca. We examined the tradeoffs parents make between the quality of their housing unit, relative to the quality of their neighborhood, and the schools their children attend. About 65 percent of the parents in our study are non-Latino Black, and 25 percent non-Latino White, with the remainder Latino White or Black, or Asian. Respondents were selected using Census block groups in the Cleveland metropolitan area as the primary sampling unit.

The sampled block groups were stratified into one of three categories: low income (<\$25K), middle income (\$25K to \$50K), and high income (>\$50K). We randomly selected households from within the sampled block groups. The strata were sampled to interview a larger proportion of low-income families—the ratio for the sample was 3 (low income): 2 (middle income): 1 (high income). Most of the respondents are women (85 percent), have between two and four children, and have full-time jobs, though just over a quarter (28 percent) were experiencing unemployment when interviewed. The majority of respondents have at least a high school diploma and many have done college coursework. A sizable minority of respondents—16 percent—have a college degree or more education. Almost 40 percent of respondents make \$25,000 or less per year and just over 40 percent make more than \$50,000. The sample size for our analysis is 42 respondents—28 Black and 13 White parents, and 1 Black-White bi-racial parent (see Appendix 1 for respondent demographic information).

While not enough households were interviewed for the sample to constitute a statistically random sample, our respondents are a systematically selected group that captures a broad range of the Cleveland area’s race and economic variation. The two-year total response rate of households was 87.95 percent. The interviews lasted one to two hours. Fieldworkers performed

most of the interviews in respondents' homes; less than five were conducted in public venues, such as a coffee shop. Most interviews were carried out by two-person teams. Study participants received a \$50 honorarium. We used the qualitative analysis program Atlas.ti to look for themes and patterns in how parents selected their children's school and how they managed their children's daily routines.

FINDINGS and ANALYSIS³

We find that "choice" exacerbates the inequities it purports to solve because the cost of finding and managing children's attendance at a non-neighborhood school amounts to a risk and burden transfer from the state to parents. When parents decide not to send their children to a neighborhood school, we argue that parents "pay to choose." That is, to facilitate their children's educations at a non-neighborhood school, parents bear significant financial, time, effort, and emotional costs. School choice is only nominally a cost-free opportunity. And just as importantly, parents' efforts are not rewarded because more often than not the non-neighborhood schools parents select are not better than their children's neighborhood school. Below we compare what Black and White parents told us regarding how they found their children's school and what they experienced once they settled into their school day routines.

*Black Parents: Process for Deciding Where to Send Children to School*⁴

Black low- and moderate-income parents are quite conversant in Ohio's school choice policy and the discrete steps parents must take to enroll their children in non-traditional public

³ See Appendix 1 for a breakdown of Black and White parents': income category, whether their home is in an urban or suburban district, whether their children attend public or private school, and the type of school their children attend.

⁴ We do not have a counterpart section of White parents' decision-making process. Because they are satisfied with their neighborhood school, they do not talk about mulling their school options.

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schools. Regardless of where a child attends school, parents must first register their child. However, the process for enrolling a child in a non-neighborhood school involves more than basic knowledge about the schooling system, as the default is for children to attend a neighborhood school, not an alternative school. Parents must avail themselves of information about the charters in the Cleveland metropolitan area, determine which of those opportunities to pursue, and then learn the enrollment requirements. Barriers and bottlenecks in charter enrollment include: waiting lists at charters with the best reputations, parents' ability to provide consistent transportation to and from school, and the provision of required paperwork in a timely manner. Despite these challenges, many Black parents successfully enroll their children in charter schools and many report taking active steps to move their children out of traditional public schools and into charters.

Ella, an above-moderate income Black mother who recently moved to Garfield Heights from Stow, uses Ohio's school choice option to keep her children enrolled in Stow's public schools. She does this because the schools her children are zoned for in her east-side Cleveland suburb of Garfield Heights are on "academic watch." Here, Ella discusses the process of deciding to re-enroll her children in Stow's schools and how this decision has affected her family's daily routine:

I have to be up by 5:30 to get them up, so that we can make the drive to Stow. It's a long drive...But it's just a better school district...I thought that I would at least make it a year in Garfield, so I was shocked when that did not happen. It was a sacrifice for me to make the commute for them, but the kids are more important.

Ella also emphasizes that her family's morning routine has tight scheduling windows, highlighting the burdens many Black parents who exercise school choice must endure:

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We usually leave out right at 7:00. We drop her off and then jump back on the freeway, circle around, and then once I get to the daycare, I've got it timed down to the minute...but if one person is just not in the mood or not being a team player, then it throws off the entire team... You can put your shoes on in the car.

Tonya is a below-moderate income Black single mother of two and her daughter is starting kindergarten in the fall—this is her rationale for selecting her daughter's school:

Tonya: I don't like Cleveland Public School District. If I'd stayed in the suburbs, she would have gone to a suburb school like I wanted her to.

Interviewer: Tell me about the charter school. How did you find it?

Tonya: I drive past it all the time and my little cousin he go there. So I was talking to his mother about it and she said it was a pretty good school.

Interviewer: How did you get them in there? Tell me about that process.

Tonya: I called up there and asked them – “What do you have to do to get your kid enrolled?” They said you could fill out an application online or you could just come up there, so I just went up there and got the application. Returned it with two past addresses, her birth certificate, shot records, and that was it.

Like Tonya, most parents who send their children to charters describe trusting a friend or family member's account of a charter's quality. Many parents also said they looked online at the state “report card” (Ohio's assessment of school and student achievement) to compare charters to public schools and charters to each other. Nonetheless, when parents describe how they came to send their child to a particular charter, they often state that information gleaned from publicly-available sources was consulted to substantiate what they learned first from family and friends, rather than the other way around. Personal networks are an instrumental resource as parents search for school options.

However, a few Black parents were not conversant in Ohio's school choice policy and some were open to giving their local public school an opportunity to demonstrate competence, though even these parents voiced some concerns about what their children might experience. Lynn, an above-moderate-income Black married mother of twins who runs a daycare business

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out of her home said the following when discussing what she has heard about public schools in Maple Heights, a predominantly-Black east-side Cleveland suburb:

Cause from what I'm hearing, it's gonna be like 30 kids to one teacher. And I'm not feeling that. When I was pregnant, I said my kids was going to private school. But then I found out that's like 4,000 each. I probably wouldn't qualify for the grants.

Lynn's dream for her children's education is seemingly independent of where she lives. She said that when she was pregnant, then not living in Maple Heights, she wanted to send her children to private school. Hence, prior to direct experience with any particular public school system, she evinces a general skepticism about public schools: "it's gonna be like 30 kids to one teacher. And I'm not feeling that." Upon learning what she believes it would cost to send her children to private school, she decided to give her neighborhood school a chance to prove itself.

Lynn's belief that she would have to cover the full tuition of private schooling demonstrates that she is not familiar with Ohio's school choice policy. This might be due to the fact that her children are just reaching school age, making this her first encounter with a school system outside of her own schooling. She is also a fairly new resident in Maple Heights—she moved there two years ago. In addition, that Lynn feels comfortable supplementing her children's education may also factor in: she notes that though her children are just starting kindergarten they "already know their ABC's; they can count to 100; they know some addition problems." However, similar to most Black parents in our study, Lynn seems to decouple school satisfaction from home and neighborhood satisfaction, in contrast to White parents who usually talk about the "package deal" of home, neighborhood, and schools (Rhodes and Warkentien forthcoming).

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Elizabeth, a Black moderate-income Cleveland resident, seeks to take advantage of Ohio's school choice policy by sending her children to private or charter schools. Elizabeth's account shows the amount of effort and frustration involved when parents decide not to send their children to neighborhood public schools:

I actually signed him up for a scholarship for them to go to private schools. They pushed the deadline back so far this year that it's like I won't find out if the youngest got accepted until school starts. But then [when looking at other options] I was calling around—[asking]: 'do you pick up and drop off?' I would really hate for him to have to go to a public school especially in kindergarten. It's when they're impressionable. I did find a decent charter school. I actually selected the one that's right there [pointing catty-corner from where the interview was conducted] but because they want the child to be five by the end of August, he doesn't qualify. He's going to the Breakthrough Schools. So now I could send him to the [local public] elementary school I went to but I heard people say they wouldn't dare send their child there.

In addition to wanting schools with records of high academic achievement, Black parents routinely brought up discipline. One aspect of their interest in discipline is in terms of wanting the school to be well-regulated, where teachers and staff have affirmative control over student behavior and where students feel safe. The other aspect of discipline parents seek is a school that teaches children to learn to follow rules and to respect authority, likely reflecting parents' concerns about how Black children's behaviors are interpreted by authority figures. Guaya, a Black, below moderate income, mother of two boys, sends her sons to an all-boys public school in Cleveland in part "so they would not have the opportunity to be distracted by gender stuff." Her school choice knowledge is deep, but she reports first becoming aware of the all-boys school through another parent. Guaya argued that it is vital to support traditional Cleveland public schools, not charters, because charters take money away from traditional public schools; a high quality public education, Guaya said, was part of the Civil Rights Movement's agenda.

The burdens Black parents endure when searching for a school continue as they settle into their school day routines.

Black Parents' Daily Routines

Because most Black children in our study did not attend their neighborhood school, Black parents had longer, more complicated, and ultimately more emotionally taxing and precarious, family routines. The more demanding parents' routines were, the more they required significant support from family members, partners, friends, and paid daycare to meet children's daily needs.

Amina's child attends a charter school. Amina is a 26 year-old Black single mother of two, who earns less than the Cleveland household median income. She explains the importance of family in her daily routine this way when discussing why she moved from the west side of Cleveland to the east side: "I have family here and I have more support, so if I need something...they have cars and they're in walking distance. But over on the west side, it was difficult to get help and I was literally kind of by myself." Amina's experience illustrates that family is like an insurance plan for being confident she can manage her day, regardless of the inevitable, but unpredictable, hiccups that disrupt family routines, like a child's illness.

Another respondent, Monique, an above-moderate income Black married mother uses state vouchers to send her daughter to Catholic school several miles from her home. She lives in the east-side majority-Black suburb Maple Heights. The Maple Heights neighborhood public school Monique's daughter is zoned to attend is on "academic watch." Monique relies on a carpool with another parent to transport her daughter to school and back home: "My oldest girl—she goes to a Catholic school way on the other side of town. She was going to the school up the street...[now] she goes to school across town and I carpool with another family."

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Elizabeth, a Black mother of two with an above-moderate income, has a son who attends a Cleveland magnet school for the arts several miles from the family's home. He uses mass transit to commute. Recently, however, she has started to worry about her son's transportation arrangement:

I have an aunt who does security for the Cleveland Public School System and she's concerned about his safety on public transportation. For her to see it every day now I'm kind of concerned. She said there have been a lot of robberies.

As Elizabeth implies, she has limited options for getting her son to and from school each day and getting herself to and from work. She cannot be two places at once, but she wants her son to attend the school she believes optimal for him, so she allows him to use mass transit, even as she learns of safety risks.

White Parents' Daily Routines

By contrast, regardless of income level, White parents, on average, are satisfied with their neighborhood schools. White parents, in contrast, are satisfied with their neighborhood schools, including parents with low incomes. For instance, Julie is a White, above-moderate income, married mother of two. She lives in a west-side suburb of Cleveland, Rocky River. She and her husband use a combination of daycare and family care to meet their childcare needs. While her daughters go to daycare before and after school on most school days, Julie relies on her mother-in-law to pick up her girls when she or her husband work late, there is traffic, or the school closes on short notice, such as when a snow storm hits suddenly: "My mother-in-law...jumped to the rescue and went and got her in the snowstorm and she had already been out once to get Mary [her other daughter] for us 'cause we both work downtown." In fact, this same grandparent wishes she could help more, so in lieu of babysitting her grandchildren more often,

she pays her granddaughter's daycare expenses; Julie recounted how this came to pass: "I mean, it's definitely helped because his mom said, 'I feel bad because I can't commit to babysitting'...So she's like, I'll help you out.' So she's taken care of one of the daycares for us, which is really nice. That's been huge." Thus, in Julie's case, family support comes in the form of in-kind benefits, like babysitting and transportation for her kids, as well as access to family wealth shared inter-generationally. Julie has a supportive bundle: high quality neighborhood schools, a safe neighborhood, and nearby family that augments her childcare arrangements.

Suzie, another White, above-moderate income, married mother of two daughters, who lives in the west-side suburb of Lakewood, is thrilled with her daughters' school. Like Julie, Suzie relies on family to meet her childcare needs. Her reliance on family is even greater than Julie's. She explains her in-laws' involvement in the daily family routine this way:

Grandma and Grandpa live on that side [said as she points to the other half of her duplex]. So the mornings that I'm working I leave the house typically around 6:20. My husband leaves by 7:40. And then my mother in law comes over to get the girls up at 8:00. So there's really such a perfect set up. I just keep telling people it takes a village to raise kids.

Suzie lives in a duplex—she, her husband, and their two daughters live on one side and her mother and father-in-law, the girls' grandparents, live on the other. Clearly the grandparents play an integral role in the girls' daily routine during the school year and Suzie feels very comfortable with it—"there's really such a perfect set up." Similar to many lower-income respondents, Suzie benefits from unpaid informal care and therefore does not have childcare expenses. Suzie does not seem stressed about how to meet her work demands and her daughters' daily needs and she trusts her daughters' caregivers. In fact, she touts the merits of her arrangement—"I just keep telling people it takes a village to raise kids."

Implicit in Suzie’s gratitude for her in-laws is the peace of mind that Amina, the low-income Black mother above discussed having after she moved from the west side of Cleveland to the east to be close enough that her parents could be regularly involved in her children’s lives. However, Suzie and Amina are not similar in that Suzie has supportive in-laws who live in a school district that this is high performing. Thus, Suzie is not trading access to family support for access to high-performing neighborhood public schools. Furthermore, the effort Suzie expends to coordinate her daughters’ day requires comparatively less effort than parents who do not want to send their children to traditional public schools. It is unclear, for instance, whether Suzie’s in-laws would be able and willing to help manage their granddaughters’ morning routine were it to require driving the girls across town, as many Black parents report.

Exceptions that Prove the (Segregation) Rule: White Parents Dissatisfied with Their Neighborhood School

White parents, regardless of income, are more likely to send their children to their neighborhood public school. For instance, two White parents in the study who live in the relatively-poor section of the generally affluent west-side suburb of Lakewood describe some of the ills poor Black parents note about their neighborhoods, such as loitering they suspect is related to drug activity. But these low-income White parents, unlike their low-income Black peers, have access to Lakewood’s social services, including the suburb’s high-performing schools. One of the parents, Rose, describes her section of Lakewood as: “the low end of Lakewood,” but when describing her son’s public school experience, states that overall her son is: “doing great—his grades and stuff are good, he is ‘mister popular.’” Most importantly, in

terms of education equity, Lakewood public schools perform at a significantly higher level than the public schools in Black respondents' suburbs.

However, not all White parents in the study were satisfied with the school their children attend. Big Red is an example. She is an above moderate-income married mother of two daughters, both of whom attend a Cleveland public school. Big Red's experience demonstrates how the geographic location of one's home determines access to high quality schools. She is disappointed with her daughters' school. Her dissatisfaction with the public schools is similar to many Black mothers' experience with their school districts. When we interviewed her, Big Red was considering charter schools for her daughters:

Big Red: Sometimes I say, wow, I'm not driving all the way downtown every morning. A lot of them that send flyers – I CAN is one that we get a lot but they don't have any location that's convenient. There's a certain amount I'll drive...

Interviewer: How long a ride?

Big Red: Probably not more than 15 minutes, which I guess downtown isn't more than 15 minutes away, but there's also rush hour traffic...you can get stuck.

Overall, the findings above demonstrate that White parents, regardless of income, live in neighborhoods with high performing schools, while Blacks parents do not. Consequently, Black parents pay a "parenting tax" relative to White parents because Black parents feel compelled to search for alternatives to their low-performing neighborhood schools, whereas White parents can take high-quality neighborhood public schools for granted—they get the "package deal."

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

Our study shows that Blacks parents and White parents do not, on average, have the same options when seeking to educate their children. White parents generally have a "package deal" of a high-quality neighborhood, school, and home, while Black parents' are continually re-

optimizing to supposedly better schools by enrolling their children in charter and other non-traditional public schools (Rhodes and Warkentien forthcoming). Despite Black parents' efforts, they receive minimal payoff.

School Choice and Neoliberalism

Neoliberals espouse the idea that unfettered markets enable people to use the marketplace to procure building blocks for crafting a life that matches their needs and preferences, regardless of the good or service at issue. But only mechanisms and values external to markets can achieve broader social goals, like educational equity: markets and market actors in themselves do not seek to preserve and bolster societal interests that do not redound to profit for investors, though neoliberals do not necessarily object to societal goals being reached as a byproduct of market activity. Furthermore, public goods require enormous coordination among many actors and institutions across multiple scales and significant upfront and ongoing capital investment to function reliably and adequately. Equally important, an institution accountable to the public must check whether public goals are indeed attained and offer remedies when outcomes fall short. Markets cannot do this. One societal goal is racial inclusion, particularly given the history of state-sponsored racial segregation (Omi and Winant 2014, Bonilla-Silva 2010), which led to Blacks attending inferior schools for decades, a practice outlawed in the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, though again effectively re-permitted in subsequent cases, so long as racial segregation is not the intentional act of an individual or government.⁵

⁵ Since *Brown* was handed down, two Supreme Court cases have effectively overruled the *Brown* decision: *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (2006). According to these rulings, states cannot force between-school-district-integration, thus allowing school segregation that is not intentionally created.

Socio-historical Analysis of Race, Class, and Geography

Blacks' historic and ongoing experience of segregation and disproportionate poverty means that majority-Black schools, on average, are under-funded and under-performing. In Cleveland, Ohio, and its surrounding suburbs, school funding is a function of state and local tax revenue. But state revenue transfers to locales only seek to provide a minimum level of per pupil investment, not identical levels of funding across school districts. Therefore states do not seek to compensate local jurisdictions that yield less revenue because their properties have lower market value.

In a context where African Americans continue to endure the cumulative effects of slavery (Gutman 1976, Du Bois 1935), Jim Crow segregation (Katznelson 2005, Glenn 2004, Massey and Denton 1993, Drake and Cayton 1935), and present-day color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010, Feagin, et al., 2001), Black families need *more* than White families to receive a truly comparable education to their White peers. Instead, school choice offers Black parents *less*. Scholars have argued for decades (see the 1966 Coleman Report) that it is not income per se that is the driving factor for the Black-White academic achievement gap, but the host of social issues that are interconnected with Black students' separation from White students. Sharkey and Faber (2014) argue: "...[I]nequality does not exist exclusively at the level of the individual or the family; rather, various forms of inequality are organized or clustered in space, and neighborhoods are often the site of inequality" (933). Goyette (2008) contends that "...[P]eople of color are significantly less likely than Whites to consider neighborhood public schools for their children's education. This may be because people of color have fewer financial resources to

choose highly-regarded schools in suburban districts...” (120). Black parents, on average, do not have the resources White parents have to buy into neighborhoods with high quality schools. This is in large part due to the White-Black wealth gap (Oliver and Shapiro 2006), which among the middle class is 14:1 (PEW 2012).

Schools are more likely to achieve the goal of offering a quality education to all students, not just White and wealthy students, when schools have class and race heterogeneity. But schools will not have such heterogeneity until their achievement outcomes improve because, if history is a guide, many White and wealthy parents will use their social and economic advantages to avoid low-performing schools. Studies on how White parents select schools indicate that most White parents do not conduct exhaustive research to find neighborhoods or schools for their children; rather, they rely on the race and class composition of neighborhoods as an indicator of whether schools are high performing (Weiniger and Lareau forthcoming, Holme 2002, Renzulli and Evans 2005, Soporito 2003). Hence, it is at the stage of selecting a neighborhood that middle-class Whites engage in “school choice.” White parents are advantaged both because they are wealthier than Blacks, on average, and thus have more options to choose among, and because they have more robust social networks that can point them to desirable neighborhoods. Furthermore, they do not have to sacrifice their social ties and supports for access to desirable neighborhood amenities and schools, unlike their middle class Black counterparts (Pattillo 2013).

The class and race sorting process described above requires state intervention to force or at least incentivize class and race integration in public schools. States have had some success with metropolitan-wide magnet and specialty schools. Cleveland School of the Arts is an example of

the strategy of attracting students of diverse class and race backgrounds by concentrating highly-coveted resources in certain public schools.

Strange Bedfellows, Pragmatism, and Black Self Determination: Toward an Explanation of Why Some African Americans Support Charter Schools

Despite the challenges most charter schools face, many Black parents embrace charter schools (Schneider and Buckley 2003). These parents contend that: all charters are not created equal and effective ones can be found with effort, and our study bears this out; some charters do help their children advance academically, and if not academically, socio-emotionally, by teaching them non-cognitive skills needed in the workplace and for a strong sense of identity and purpose (Imberman 2011). Nonetheless, given that there is minimal evidence showing that charters are a panacea for the U.S.'s state-administered national school system that fails, on average, to offer Black parents options on par with those their White peers receive, we explore below what perhaps makes school choice appealing to some Black parents.

The answer is likely at least dual-pronged. On the one hand, Black parents are frustrated that their neighborhood schools are low performing, which leads them to be receptive to any options that allow them to escape their current school—charters and magnet schools just happen to be what states and locales offer. On the other hand, due to the history of systemic, state-organized exclusion of African Americans from mainstream U.S. institutions, Black parents are probably less likely than White parents to expect that government will meet their needs without their having to petition and exercise other forms of agency. Therefore many African American parents enter the schooling landscape with a different inherited wisdom than European American parents.

This wisdom is informed by what political scientist Michael Dawson (2001) calls the “Black counterpublic.” The Black counterpublic has developed “semi-autonomously” and “interact[s] with the political debates coursing throughout the polity” at the time (24). Blacks’ historic and ongoing marginalization has meant that they have had to create opportunities for themselves in an unwelcoming world. African American-run institutions, such as the Black church and Black press, have been sites for negotiating Black political ideology. For some African Americans, charter schools are not simply inferior to mediocre alternatives to high-quality neighborhood schools, as we suggest in our analysis, they are viable options for African Americans to continue to fight for their children’s just inclusion in White-dominated institutions.

In their search for schooling options, Black parents sometimes incorporate other strains of Black political thought, including Black nationalism, which prizes African American self-determination and encourages varying degree of social and economic separation from Whites. That is, they practice a form of strategic retreat from seeking full access to certain mainstream institutions. In the case of charter schools, many parents prize the Afro-centric curriculums of some charters and/or the processes charters use to instill discipline (e.g., the use of uniforms). Scholars have found that even middle and upper middle class African Americans, the segment of the Black population with the greatest access to mainstream institutions and resources, selectively culturally assimilate with Whites. This is likely because African Americans enjoy the folkways and social reinforcement of affirming Black identity practices that predominate in majority-Black spaces—from speech patterns, to music and theater, to religious practices, to shared understanding of significant current and historical symbols—and because they seek a

haven from White social exclusion, including subtle slights, sometimes called micro-aggressions (Lacy 2007, Feagin 1991).

A less prominent strain of thought among African Americans is Black conservatism, sometimes called self-help,⁶ which eschews government intervention on behalf of Blacks as a group and posits Blacks do not need or deserve special treatment, as such treatment undermines Blacks' 'honor' and creates an unhealthy dependency on the state; economic development and reliance on the market are sufficient for Black progress, conservatives contend. Confidence in market forces as a cure-all is consistent with neoliberal beliefs that school choice is the remedy for low performing traditional schools.

Ohio is among the states with the most comprehensive school choice options and so is likely a harbinger for what other states will face as they adopt more expansive school choice policies. The Cleveland metropolitan area experience with charter schools shows that school choice cannot overcome deeply embedded social inequalities that have existed for centuries. Racial integration of schools and equity in school funding and other supports is the remedy.

⁶ This philosophy is often associated with Booker T. Washington, the prominent 19th century African American leader garnered significant contributions for all-Black institutions of higher learning, most famously the Tuskegee Institute.

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Appendix 1

Black Respondents

<u>Name</u>	<u>Family Income</u>	<u>Home Location</u>	<u>Private or Public Schooling</u>	<u>Specific Type of School</u>
Amina	Below median	City	Public	Charter
Annette	Below median	Suburb	Private	Catholic
Dawn	Below median	Suburb	Public	Charter
Delores	Below median	City	Public	Charter
Elizabeth	Above median	City	Public	1 Child Charter, 1 Child Magnet**
Ella	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional***, outside of neighborhood
Guaya	Below median	City	Public	Traditional, all-boys
Jan	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Jennifer	Below median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
June	Below median	Suburb	Public	Daycare
Kenya	Below median	City	Public	Traditional
Kim	Below median	City	Private	Catholic
LaTonya	Above median	Suburb	Public	Charter
Kim	Below median	City	Private	Catholic
Leann	Below median	City	Private	Non-parochial
Lynn	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Michelle	Below median	City	Public	Charter
Monique	Above median	City	Public and Private	1 Child Traditional, 1 Child Catholic
Rhianna	Above median	City	Public	1 Child Traditional, 1 Child Charter
Sasha	Below median	City	Public	Traditional outside of neighborhood
Shantay	Above median	City	Public	Magnet
Sonia	Below median	City	Public	Traditional
Starr	Below median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Tamika	Below median	Suburb	Public	Charter
Tasha	Below median	City	Public and Private	1 Child Charter, 1 Child Catholic

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Ta-Khala	Below median	City	Public	Head Start
Tay	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Tonya	Below median	City	Public	Charter
Kara	Below median	City	Public	Charter

* Relative to \$26,000 Cleveland median household income

** Public specialty school that requires separate application

*** Public school within neighborhood school zone

White Respondents

<u>Name</u>	<u>Family Income*</u>	<u>Home Location</u>	<u>Private or Public Schooling</u>	<u>Specific Type of School</u>
Ann and Steve	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional**
Autumn	Below median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Big Red	Above median	City	Public	Traditional outside of neighborhood
Brad	Above median	City	Public	2 Children Charter, 1 Public
Joe	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Julie	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Justin	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Linda	Below median	City	Public	Traditional
Lisa	Below median	City	Public	Charter
Mary	Above median	Suburb	Private	Catholic
Rose	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Sally	Below median	Suburb	Public	Traditional
Suzie	Above median	Suburb	Public	Traditional

* Relative to \$26,000 Cleveland median household income

** Public school within neighborhood school zone

Appendix 2

Map of Cleveland Metropolitan Area

