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Characteristics of Elementary Students as Predictors of Enrollment in Schools of Choice in Texas

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Abstract

The school choices programs in Texas allow school-age students across the state to enroll in either public independent school districts, or other enrollment options, such as intra-district/inter-district transfers, and charter schools. This study explored the relationship between the academic and nonacademic characteristics of students and the type of school chosen for their elementary level enrollment. Seven variables were examined on their relationship with elementary enrollment choices (i.e., traditional elementary school assigned by residential address, a public elementary school of choice without admission requirements, and a public elementary magnet school with admission requirements). A multinomial logistic regression analysis revealed a significant relationship between the seven variables and the odds of choosing either a traditional elementary school or a public elementary school of choice without admission requirements, relative to magnet schools with admission criteria.

Keywords: elementary schools, schools of choice, student characteristics

Introduction

The question of whether traditional public elementary schools have adequately addressed the diversity of student needs is under debate. Public schools have historically assigned children to schools based on their home address (Merrifield, Warne, Bentsen, O'Sullivan, & Barnett, 2013). Often referred to as residential school choice, this option affords families the choice of where to live to guarantee attendance at the desired neighborhood school (Wolf & Egalite, 2016). This practice results in students of similar socioeconomic status (SES), race, and ethnicity being assigned to the same school, thus resulting in a segregated school system. It has been argued that the quality of student's education should not be decided by his or her zip code and parents should be offered school choice options that would allow them to change their child's education. In the state of Texas, private school is currently not subsidized as a choice option thus the school choice options discussed in this paper include public school choice programs available, including charter schools and transfers within or outside their school district. In Texas, the state allows for school choices in more than 1,100 independent school districts across the state, including intradistrict and interdistrict transfers, charter schools, online-virtual learning, and homeschooling (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2016). With the increased school choice options, statistics show a declining

enrollment of students in the public school assigned by address over recent years. Between 1993 and 2007, the percentage of students attending their address assigned public schools decreased from 80 percent to 73 percent (The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as cited in Grady, Bielick, & Aud, 2010).

Parents are usually the most qualified to decide what type of education their child receives. The fundamental factors parents normally consider include the family's financial status, the quality of schools in the neighborhoods, and, most importantly, the academic abilities and disposition of their child. Public schools serve 87% of the school-aged population nationwide (Center for Public Education, 2015). Meanwhile, only 16% of students select charter, magnet, or other school choices within the public education system. So, the question remains as to whether any patterns of student characteristics would decide the type of elementary school parents decide over another.

Understanding the characteristics of those students who are more likely to elect to attend a school different than the residentially zoned school may assist building administrators in marketing their school better and also allow district administrators to better predict the appeal of what is offered at a school of choice in different neighborhoods. The purpose of this non-experimental quantitative study was to examine what factors, if any, are predictive of a family's choice of public schools at the elementary level. Seven demographic factors of families and children were examined between those who chose either a traditional elementary school, a public elementary school of choice that does not have admission requirements, or a public elementary magnet school with admission criteria.

Education Reform and School Choices

Education reform has been a top priority for more than a quarter of a century. In 1983, President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education issued A Nation at Risk, which spoke of a mediocre education system and recommended significant improvements to public schools. President Ronald Reagan stated, "Parental authority is not a right conveyed by the state; rather, parents delegate to their elected school board representatives and state legislators the responsibility for their children's schooling (para. 13)". In 1989, President George H. W. Bush avowed, "We must give choice to parents, students, teachers, and principals. And we must hold all concerned accountable. In education, we cannot tolerate mediocrity" (as cited in Vinovskis, 1999, p. 27).

Shortly after President George W. Bush was elected to office in 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), also known as Public Law 107-110, was adopted into law in January 2002. As a federal law, the act contained many goals aimed to guarantee children were proficient in reading and math by the year 2014, a system of accountability was established, and federal spending on education was increased. In the area of school choice, the NCLB Act provided parents with two opportunities to choose a different public school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). First, if the Title I school their child attends is identified as in need of school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, then students must be provided an opportunity to attend a different public school within the district or take advantage of free tutoring (NCLB, 2002). School districts were required to inform parents of this option as well as pay for the transportation cost to the other schools. Second, if a school is found to be unsafe, an option to transfer to another school must be provided (NCLB, 2002). Historically, determining enrollment in a public school was often controlled by residential addresses (Butler, Carr, Toma, & Zimmer, 2013). Today, most students still attend schools based on the residential address assigned to particular school districts; however, families have many more school choice programs from which to choose to find the school that best meets their child's needs.

School Choice Programs

School choice programs vary among states. In general, there are two categories of school choices: private schools and public school options (e.g., residential address, charter school).

Private Schools

Private schools are schools run independently of the government. There are currently 30,861 private schools operating within the United States (NCES, 2013). The U.S. Department of Education estimated 10% (4.9 million) American students in Grades PK-12 in the fall of 2015 attended a private school (NCES, 2016). In Texas, data from 2013 revealed 312,640 students enrolled in 1,740 private schools (NCES, 2016). All schools in Texas, including private schools, are required to meet health, safety, and fire code regulations. However, private schools

in Texas are free from other state regulations. Private schools can design their curriculum, not required to administer state accountability exams, nor do they receive state accountability ratings (Texas Association of School Boards [TASB], 2012). Private schools are independently funded, so they are not required to provide breakfast or lunch to economically disadvantaged students, nor do they have to provide transportation to students. Furthermore, private schools can deny enrollment for a variety of reasons, including educational performance, disciplinary problems, or special needs (TASB, 2012). Private schools are not required to follow federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guidelines for serving special needs students (Raise Your Hand Texas, 2016).

Public School Options

Most large school districts offer public school choice. Parents have the option to choose from a variety of educational opportunities, including residential address schools, charter schools, online learning, or homeschooling.

Residential Address. A school that is zoned based on residential address is the most common type of public school choice. Typical public school districts utilize residential addresses to establish attendance zones and assign students to their schools. Attendance zones are geographic areas used by local school districts to determine attendance at a local school. A national survey by the U.S. Department of Education revealed that 18% of family with children who attend public schools moved to their current neighborhood to gain access to the local school (Wolf & Egalite, 2016). According to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, school districts must guarantee that zoning of students to schools regardless of the race, color, or national origin of the student. Establishing and making adjustments to attendance zones are the responsibility of the local education agency. TEC Section 13.010 requires all Texas school districts to file a description of the boundaries of the district, a map, and a list of voting precincts in the districts.

Concerns have been registered that residential boundaries often promote segregation based on ethnicity (Roda & Wells, 2013; Scafidi, 2015) and SES (Holley-Walker, 2008). Families do have the option to move to gain access to a preferred school by living in the neighborhood of the desired school. Parents must consider that on occasion, attendance boundary lines are redrawn to meet the need to balance campus enrollments. Relocating can be expensive and can also result in changing jobs or leaving friends and family behind. In addition, this school choice poses challenges to the families who want to make different choices for different children.

Charter Schools. Charter schools are the most prominent type of public school choice (Cunningham, 2013). Charter schools are state-funded, tuition free, and operate on the principles of choice, accountability, and freedom (Center for Education Reform, 2010). Charter schools must follow the same education laws and regulations, meet fiscal and managerial standards as all other public schools are required (Center for Education Reform, 2010). For example, charter schools in Texas are subject to Chapter 39 of the Education Code, including state assessment requirements, accountability, and accreditation sanctions. Charter schools are required to meet the 75,600 minutes requirements established by HB 2610 (TEA, 2016). Charter schools are required to participate in the relevant employee retirement systems. Charter schools do have flexibility and benefits that are not provided to traditional schools, including autonomy in hiring practices, flexibility in scheduling, and budget (Cunningham, 2013). Charter school teachers are not required by Texas law to be certified except for special education and bilingual education teachers.

The Texas Legislature authorized the creation of charter schools in 1995 (TASB, 2012). The Texas Charter Schools Association reported in the 2016-2017 school year that there were 676 charter campuses run by nearly 200 charter holders, in one of three forms of charter schools: home-rule charters, campus charters, and open-enrollment charters (Alvarez & Plocheck, 2014). Home-rule charters allow the whole school district to transfer to charter status. Currently, there are no home-rule charters in Texas. Campus charter schools are charters provided to a group of parents or teachers overseen by superintendent and board of trustees, and the district remains accountable for the performance of the campus. As of July 2013, eight districts in Texas created campus charter schools. The most popular are open-enrollment charters, which are public schools governed by the charter but are exempt from the local districts regulations. Open-enrollment charter schools operate under charter guidelines that include specified grades that can be served and a cap on the total number of students it may serve. Due to popularity, many open-enrollment charter schools use a lottery process to select students for available seats.

Open-enrollment charter schools in Texas are exempt from disciplinary provisions of Chapter 37 of TEC and are free to design their discipline plans. Meanwhile, they still abide by their written charter for parameters related to student-teacher ratios, class-size limitations, calendars, and hours of operation (TASB, 2012).

School Choice Programs in Texas

Texas currently educates 5.3 million children in Texas public schools, ranking second in the United States to California's enrollment of 6.3 million children (TEA, 2016). Approximately 94% of Texas children are educated in Texas public school districts or charter schools (Raise Your Hand Texas, 2016). About 18.7% of Texas school-aged children are enrolled in a Texas open-enrollment charter school (TEA, 2017). In the 2016-17 school year, 59% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged as determined by eligibility under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program (TEA, 2017). TEA (2015) reported that Texas school districts spent a total of $53.4 billion in 2012-13 to provide services and facilities to students, or $8,324 per student, ranking Texas 47th in the nation. Besides state funds and federal funds, most of the funding for public education comes from local property taxes. The TEC is a set of statutes that govern Texas public education and applies to all educational institutions supported by state tax funds. Texas public education's mission is to "ensure that all Texas children have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation" (TEC, 2015, para. 1).
Children in Texas must abide by compulsory attendance laws. Under TEC Section 25.085 (2015):

Compulsory attendance applies to students who are at least six years old as of September 1 of the applicable school year. The law requires a student to attend public school until the student's 19th birthday unless the student is exempt under TEC §25.086 (2015). Under the compulsory attendance laws, parents are held responsible for their children's school attendance. Penalties, such as fines or jail sentences, can be handed down to parents if their child fails to meet minimum attendance requirements.

TEC Section 25.031 (2015) also provides school officials with the authority to assign students to particular school and classrooms. School districts can decide the structure of the school for its students (Bentsen & Odom, 2013). The menu of options allows students to attend the school they are geographically zoned to attend, to transfer to another public school, or to transfer to a magnet or charter school. However, students have a limited choice in most independent school districts in Texas due to offerings or space availability (Bentsen & Odom, 2013). Under TEC Section 25.033, parents may petition the board to have their child placed at another campus.
Benefits and Criticisms of School Choice Programs

Many benefits to school choice programs have been cited for both the schools and the families. All school choice programs provide parents with options and empower parents to evaluate their child's unique needs and learning styles when selecting the school their child enrolls. School choice Programs are found to generate competition and improve public school performance (Center for Education Reform, 2010; Fernandez, 2013; Figlo & Hart, 2011; Wolf & Egalite, 2016).

Figlo and Hart (2011) studied the effects of competition generated by scholarship programs that transferred students to private schools in Florida. Data showed that the private school competition generated by the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship generated positive results at the public school. Students who remained in the public school setting showed a marked increase in student performance on math and reading state assessments. Likewise, Wolf and Egalite (2016) claimed that public schools are threatened by loss of financial funding and loss of student enrollment; thus charters, vouchers, tax credit scholarships, or ESA programs increase competition between private and public schools. For families, parents who enroll their child in a choice school program are granted an opportunity to select a school that best matches their beliefs and their child's abilities and needs (e.g., religion, moral, and pedagogical) (Moe, 2008; Rabovsky, 2011). Students in underperforming schools are provided an opportunity and a mean to receive a better education (Rabovsky, 2011). School choice promotes competition and improves student achievement and graduation rates (Center for Education Reform, 2010; Rabovsky, 2011). Criticisms of school choice remains though leaving some issue controversial. Rabovsky (2011) reported that choice increases inequality and can lead to school segregation by race and class. He claimed choice promotes skimming, or creaming, of the best students. In contrast to previously mentioned research, Greene et al. (2010) asserted that school choice promotes competition that does not lead to improvement.

To families looking to enroll their child in a school of choice, many difficulties exist, including transportation, inadequate information to make an informed choice, difficulty understanding eligibility, and choices that exhibit racist motivations (DeArmond, Jochim, & Lake, 2014; McShane, 2015; Moe, 2008). In 2012, the Center on Reinventing Public Education conducted a survey of 4,000 parents across eight cities. The results showed 33% reported understanding eligibility as the primary barrier. Finding transportation (26%), getting information (25%), and different application deadlines (21%) were also seen as a barrier to exercising choice. McShane (2015) delineated the types of information that parents need to consider and how that information can be communicated. First, parents need information about the school being considered. This information includes the location, grades served, the academic performance of the school, the programs available, and facts about the culture and character of the school. Second, parents need information regarding the process and deadlines for enrolling, and if necessary, funding the chosen school. Unfortunately, a lack of information or communication continues to be a struggle when choosing schools.

Most past research on school choice focused on the characteristics of parents who have utilized school choice options for their children (Rabovsky, 2011; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Yang and Kayaardi (2004) conducted a logistic regression to determine what type of parent chose what type of school (i.e., religious schools, private schools, and homeschooling). Family religion, SES, family structure, and demographic variables were assessed. Results showed that SES played a role when choosing between a public and private school, but not when selecting homeschooling options for their child. Religion, older age, foreign-born, and higher SES characteristics had a significant influence on parents selecting a private school. Interestingly, low income minority parents were found to be equally likely to be non-choosers or choosers of non-magnet schools (Goldring & Hausman, 1999). And white parents (67%) and high-income parents (86%) were found to prefer magnet schools for their child. Furthermore, the decision to transfer into a school was found to be motivated by academic performance and the racial makeup of the school population (Rabovsky, 2011)

Texas Governor Greg Abbott's 2015 State of the State address promoted school choice options in Texas: "Parental involvement is critical to student achievement. The ultimate parental involvement is giving parents more choices in their child's education. The truth is when parents have more options, students win" (Office of the Texas Governor, 2015, para. 21). Epstein (2010) outlined a framework of six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Epstein suggested that increased parental involvement leads to enrollment in more challenging academic programs and increased self-confidence in guiding students through school. Schneider and Buckley (2002) showed parents are more interested in student demographics of schools than academic performance and location is one major factor that affects the choice of school. Goldring and Hausmann (1999) studied parents in St. Louis who chose from three types of schools: magnet schools, integrated non-magnet schools, and non-integrated non-magnet schools. Results showed issues with their current school, the proximity of the school to home, and the desire for good schools were the major driving force. Harris and Larsen (2015) also found extended hours and extracurricular activities important factors. The lowest-income families had a stronger preference for schools that were nearby, offered extended days, and offered extracurricular activities, such as high school band and football programs. The quality of a student's education should not be decided by his or her zip code. To further examine the role students characteristics play in school choice parents made for their children, this study looked at how characteristics of the students affect family's choice of public schools at the elementary level. Do they choose a traditional elementary school, a public elementary school of choice that does not have admission requirements, or a public elementary magnet school with admission criteria?

Method

In this study, a non-experimental quantitative research method was used to explore the academic and nonacademic characteristics of students (i.e., SES of a family, child's gender, ethnicity, ELL status, identified learning differences status, academic performance, and gifted and talented status) as predictors of a family's decisions to enroll their child in particular types of elementary schools. A multinomial logistic regression was conducted to explore which independent variables predicted enrollment decisions of schools of choice: (a) opted to attend the school assigned by their residential address, (b) opted to attend a district magnet school with enrollment criteria, and (c) who opted to attend a district school of choice without enrollment criteria. The study

was done in a large urban school district in North Texas with more than 157,000 students in 243 schools during the 2016-2017 school year.

Population and Sample

The site for this study was a large urban school district in Texas that serves more than 157,000 students in 243 schools with 70% Hispanic and 23% African American. Fifty-one percent of the students are male, and 49% of students are female. Eight percent of students are in special education programs, 13.6% of students are gifted and talented, and 87.5% of the student population are economically disadvantaged. The target population for this study included the student enrolled in three specific types of elementary schools within the district—the traditional residential traditional school, a public elementary school of choice that does not have admission requirements, and a public elementary magnet school with admission criteria.

To obtain an adequate sampling of students who attend each type of school, a stratified random sampling was used for the selection of students for this study. A minimum of 80 cases was required to meet the standard 10:1 cases-to-variables ratio and 160 cases were required to meet the preferred 20:1 ratio (Petrucci, 2009). An approximately equal number of students were selected from each of the three school choice categories.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Data (i.e., students' schools of choice, SES of a family, child's gender, ethnicity, English language learning status, identified learning differences status, academic performance, and gifted and talented status) were obtained from the district database after IRB approval. The MLR function in SPSS was used to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable (school choice) with its three possible outcomes (i.e., a traditional elementary school assigned by residential address, a public elementary school of choice that does not have admission requirements, or a public elementary magnet school with admission criteria) and the seven independent predictor variables (i.e., SES of a family, child's gender, ethnicity, ELL status, identified learning differences status, academic performance, and gifted and talented status).

Results

A total number of 345 students were included in the data analysis. There were 190 (55.1%) females and 155 (44.9%) males. 165 (47.8%) were non-Hispanic, and 180 (52.2%) were Hispanic. The majority of the cases reported being of low SES (n = 204, 59.1%), and 141 (40.9%) did not classify as low SES. 317 (91.9%) of cases did not report a learning difference, and 28 (8.1%) reported having a learning difference. 251 (72.8%) were not classified as gifted and talented, while 94 (27.2%) were classified as gifted and talented. Furthermore, 247 (71.6%) of the cases were not ELLs, and 98 (28.4%) were ELLs. 249 (72.2 %) were successful on their reading achievement assessment during the 2016-2017 school year, leaving 96 (27.8%) who did not pass the reading achievement assessment.

Before running an MLR analysis, assumptions were tested to ensure there was no multicollinearity or intercorrelations between predictors. In the MLR analysis, magnet with admission criteria was treated as the reference group. The whole set of independent variables was found to significantly predict the odds of observing at least one response category of "school" relative to the magnet with admission criteria, $\chi2(14) = 78.37$, $p < .001$, and between 20.3% and 22.9% of the variability could be explained by this set of variables in the model.

An odds ratio (OR) was computed for each independent variable and showed the extent that each independent variable affected the probability that a case was a member of one group versus a reference group. All variables except ELL were found to help discriminate between the family's decisions to enroll in particular types of elementary schools. For the choice school without admission criteria group, students with low SES had a 58% less chance of selecting a choice school without admission criteria relative to a magnet school with admission criteria than students without low SES, $B = -0.86$, $\chi2 = 6.43$, $p = .011$. Male students had a 56% less chance of selecting a choice school without admission criteria relative to a magnet school with admission criteria than female students, $B = -0.82$, $\chi2 = 7.87$, $p = .005$. Hispanic students had a 145% greater chance of selecting a choice school without admission criteria relative to a magnet school with admission criteria than non-Hispanic students, $B = 0.89$, $\chi2 = 6.16$, $p = .013$. Students with learning differences had a 198% greater chance of selecting a choice school without admission criteria relative to a magnet school with admission criteria than students without learning differences, $B = 1.09$, $\chi2 = 4.66$, $p = .031$. Passing students had a 154% greater chance of selecting a choice school without admission criteria relative to a magnet school with admission criteria than students who did not pass, $B = 0.93$, $\chi2$

= 8.21, p = .004. Last but not the least, Gifted and talented students had a 59% less chance of selecting a choice school without admission criteria relative to a magnet school with admission criteria than non-gifted and talented students, B = -0.88, $\chi 2$ = 7.68, p = .006. Also, the gifted and talented students had a 70% less chance of selecting traditional elementary relative to a magnet school with admission criteria than non-gifted and talented students, B = -1.19, $\chi 2$ = 13.31, p < .001.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the relationship between academic/nonacademic characteristics of students (i.e., family SES, child's gender, ethnicity, ELL status, identified learning differences status, academic performance, and gifted and talented status) and the type of school that is chosen for elementary students' enrollment (i.e., a traditional school assigned by residential address, a public school of choice that does not have admission requirements, and a public magnet school with admission requirements) in Texas. The results of analysis suggested that the combination of SES, gender, ethnicity, ELL, learning differences, gifted and talented, and academic performance characteristics had a significant relationship with the odds of observing at least one response category of "school" relative to magnet with admission criteria. Overall, the academic and nonacademic characteristics of a student did affect a family's decision on the type of school chosen for their elementary age children to attend.

In this study, most students characteristics were found to be predictors of choice of enrollment. For choice schools without criteria relative to magnet schools, the results showed SES, gender, ethnicity, learning differences, gifted and talented, and academic performance significant predictors. The results indicated the categories of Hispanic students, students with learning differences, and students who are passing in academic performance had a greater chance of selecting a choice school without admission criteria relative to a magnet school in comparison to their counterparts. Students with low SES, male students, and gifted and talented students were more likely to select magnet school with criteria. Interestingly, the classification of ELL was not found to be significant in this analysis. For traditional schools assigned by residential address relative to magnet schools, the only variable found to be significant was gifted and talented. Gifted and talented students are 70% more likely to select a magnet school with admission criteria than a traditional elementary school. In contrast, Goldring and Hausman's (1999) found that White parents and high-income parents are more likely to choose magnet schools and low income minority parents were equally likely to be non-choosers or choosers of non-magnet schools.

Gifted and talented status was the only variable that was found to have a significant effect on the selection of a school for both choice without criteria and a traditional school assigned by address compared to a magnet school. Gifted and talented students are 70% more likely to select a magnet school when presented the option in lieu of a traditional school and 59% more likely to select a magnet school when presented the option in lieu of a choice school without criteria. The finding seems in corresponds to past research. Magnet schools are public schools with specific academic focus on a program. They are often equipped to provide the differentiated curriculum, instruction, and resources that are sought after by academically competent students. In this case, enrichment programs and services should be built based upon the characteristics of the students—including learning styles, academic strengths, and personal interests.

It is interesting to find that ELL status was the only variable that did not have a significant relationship with the selection of a school for either a choice school without admission requirements or a traditional school assigned by address relative to a magnet school. Often schools focus on the lack of English skills in reading, writing, and speaking and the need to develop these skills, and in turn, they often forget to evaluate the knowledge and success of the students in their native language. Hence, ELL status may not determine the students' choice in enrolling in a particular type of school, although it was significantly associated with the choice of type of school to attend. As choice schools expand, it is crucial for school districts to educate families on the choice options available. Districts must remove the language barriers and provide information in the preferred language by means of translation of written communication and through bilingual interpreters.

Given academic and nonacademic characteristics of students had a significant influence on the type of school a student attends, it is imperative for school districts to evaluate the variety of programs offered to students of all demographics. When deciding on an educational environment, options should not be limited because of resources in a community or because of the finances of the family. Students' characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, learning differences, academic performance, and GT status, should be included into

consideration. No two children are the same; so are the families and school programs. Educational institutions are no longer a one-size-fits-all solution in meeting students' educational needs.

As unveiled in this study, academic and nonacademic characteristics of students do have a relationship with the type of school parents select for the child. Such information should be well-utilized by families and schools in evaluating the educational needs of the family and the child to make the best decision for a child's educational plan. Local districts need to communicate and educate parents and then allow parents an opportunity to make informed decisions on the school their child will attend. Understanding the personal characteristics of those students who are more likely to enroll in a school different than the residentially assigned school may assist building administrators in marketing their school better and also allow district administrators to better predict the appeal of a school of choice's offerings in different neighborhoods. Districts should not advocate for a particular type of school or program but should advocate for parents to make a choice.

Implications

This study not only fuel the process of responsive school development but also enable educational agencies to alleviate stresses on families. Providing a school that is both accessible and offers programs that embrace the community's culture can alleviate considerable stress for its families. Second, school district personnel can more effectively target educational resources when they become better informed of the needs of students' families and the type of programs they will support. Neighborhood schools enrollment by zip code are largely predetermined and created without regard to the families they are tasked to serve. Magnet schools remain highly selective given their limited enrollment numbers. In contrast, schools of choice without admission criteria offer some relief to the limitations of the previous alternatives. Developing more inclusive, community-responsive schools increases parent engagement. That engagement translates to better schools.

Fully understanding the specific family needs and underlying economic challenges within each community enables a school district to allocate its services better. Specialized educational programs and alternatives can thereby be located in the areas of greatest need and appeal. Utilizing public tax dollars more effectively in this manner enables districts to realize maximum impact from their limited resources. Additionally, when parents feel that their local campuses are responsive to their needs and interests, the resulting support and engagement helps build more effective schools. Parent Teacher Associations, site-based decision making, and a wide array of cultural activities thrive, ensuring that parents are fully involved in their children's education. When a school's leaders show they understand their students' parents, parental appreciation translates into investment as stakeholders. Creating parent confidence in a school can result in higher student appreciation that can improve academic performance.

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