

**A National Study On The Viability
Of School Choice:
An Option For *All* Students**

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this article is to report on three national studies conducted from 1994 to 1996 by the authors who were directly concerned with School Choice. The first study dealt with inter-district School Choice—that is, urban students attending public suburban schools under a School Choice Plan. This study was reported in the NATIONAL FORUM OF APPLIED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL (1995-96). The second study titled, "School Choice: Education's Trickle Down Theory for Urban Students Attending Private Schools," Study II (1996) dealt with urban students attending private schools in their city. The third study (Study III) focused on Choice for Urban Students Attending Catholic Schools (1997). It should be noted, however, that none of the three studies tackled the issue of Choice from an educational approach, a philosophical position, a constitutional issue, or as a political stance. Rather, the authors were more concerned as to the viability of Choice from a more administrative reality base.

There are many articles and position papers related to School Choice, both pro and con, in terms of (a) the educational value, (b) the philosophical issues, and/or (c) the political positions taken by governors, politicians, educators, and others who have joined the debate. The reader is referred to the Appendix of Suggested Readings to get a fuller understanding of the complexities and involvement of Choice from any of these three positions.

The authors decided to look at School Choice from a reality position since they have had extensive experiences in both urban, suburban, and rural districts regarding the debate swirling around School Choice. Suffice it to say that School Choice is really not a new issue. With the advent of the public school systems in the 1840s and 50s, parents could elect to send their children to either public or private schools, which is in itself a choice. The modern concept of School Choice finds its genesis in Milton Freedman's free market concept. As a footnote in Study I, the authors raised the issue of whether or not there is such a thing as a free market in the larger business arena. One only needs to look at federal, state, and local regulations concerning both large and small businesses, the regulations in the commodities market, corporate welfare, and so forth, and the various bail-outs of corporations and industries in the last several years to raise real questions about the concept of free market. That notwithstanding, however, the first study concerned itself with inter-district Choice as opposed to intra-district Choice (within the public urban schools). Many urban school districts have intra-school Choice through magnet schools or open district admissions that allow students (parents) options in the nature and type of the school they attend; they are not necessarily geographically bound within a neighborhood of the city.

The Studies and Procedures Followed

In the first study, the following assumptions were made: (a) School Choice Programs passed by the state would permit inter-district movement; (b) the students (via their parents), at this point in time in urban districts, would select a school in a suburban district because of its perceived reputation for quality education; (c) students currently attending school in suburban districts would, on the whole, not move into schools in urban districts; (d) surveyed districts in Study I were nominated via the Internet and deserve to be designated high quality districts; (e) the selected districts were adjacent to large urban areas; (f) School Choice legislation would provide funding to parents for their students to attend across-district lines; and (g) funds may not cover the full tuition of the receiving district.

The names of the participating districts in Study I were obtained through a three-step nomination process using the Internet. The selection criteria were (a) suburban districts coterminous to large urban communities, such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, St. Louis, Omaha, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Louisville, Houston, District of Columbia, Denver,

Miami, and so forth; (b) commuting time for urban students to the nominated district was not to exceed one hour from any location in the urban area; and (c) district must provide exemplary educational programs as perceived by the nominators. A variety of list servers via the Internet were used. These list servers included Educational Policy Discussion List (EDPOLYAN), American Educational Research Association Affiliated List (ERL-L), and the Curriculum Discussion List (CURRICUL). Those geographic areas not covered in the initial list of nominated school districts were targeted by soliciting nominations from educators identified through the Biographical/Membership Directory, 1993 to 1994, published by AERA. In addition, the authors used the National Center for Educational Statistics' Directory of Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies (1993) to find districts adjacent to the remaining urban areas. The total number of urban students attending the targeted urban areas was 3,341,750 as reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics (1993).

Study II focused on private schools in the above targeted urban areas. A membership list was obtained from the National Association of Independent Schools and, from that list, 200 private schools located in large urban areas from all regions of the country were randomly selected. The third and final study (Study III) selected Catholic schools from the urban areas that were the focus of the first two studies. Although the number of Catholic schools represent 40.7% of all religious private P-12 schools in the nation, they teach the largest number of students attending private religious schools—59.9% (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Surveys were sent to 170 diocesan and "private" Catholic schools located in the above urban areas. The surveyed recipients were selected from a membership list obtained from the National Catholic Education Association; however, this study was not sanctioned by the NCEA.

The survey instrument was developed and field tested for Study I and was adapted with very few changes, except where appropriate, for Studies II and III. The instrument solicited information dealing with demographic data (i.e., size of district, available classroom capacity, increase in student population, possible expansion); effects of Choice (i.e., possible participation in Choice, areas that would be affected by participation in Choice); district's/school's per pupil cost, funding of Choice; selection of students participating in Choice (i.e., criteria for selection and exclusion of Choice students); and finally climate and parental involvement (i.e., how Choice students might affect the school, reaction to students, parents and community to Choice students, and the possible role of Choice parents in the receiving school or district). The instruments were sent to suburban public school district superintendents (Study I), headmasters/principals of the identified private schools (Study II), and superintendent/principal/chief Catholic school administrators (Study III).

The response rate for the three studies was as follows: Study I—90 instruments were sent and 37 (41.11%) were returned; Study II—200 instruments were sent with a response rate of 27% or 54 schools (all areas of the country were represented in the 54, however); Study III—170 instruments were sent with 44 usable instruments returned, yielding a response rate of 25.88% (again all regions of the country were represented in the study). While only 44 instruments were returned in Study III, 49 postcards from 28 states requesting results of the study were received by the authors. Since many of these cards were received before the completed instruments were received by the authors, the actual response rate was much greater than 25.88%. In addition, two letters were received by the authors further debating the study, its purpose and validity. In fact, several members of the National Catholic Education Association attended a meeting in Philadelphia in January of 1996, and the authors received several inquiries from these educators about the study—especially whether or not it was a legitimate survey.

The number of students attending the schools that returned the survey instruments was as follows: Study I—311,858; Study II—27,680; Study III—302,775 for a total of 642,313 students (Table 1). Thus, the school districts and/or individual schools serviced a very large number of students. The student populations of the suburban public schools adjacent to the urban communities surveyed and the urban Catholic schools were very similar in size. As would be expected, the private non-religious schools in the urban communities surveyed educated a much smaller number of students.

Classroom Capacity - Present and Future

The respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of classroom capacity presently being used (Table 1). It should be noted that the studies were completed in 1994, 1995, and 1996, respectively, and that the U.S. Office of Education has reported that, as of September 1996, the largest number of children ever educated in the United States are presently in the schools of this country. Yet, in 1994, the urban adjacent school districts were operating at 91.99% capacity; in 1995, the non-religious private schools in the urban communities were operating at 92.3% capacity; and, in 1996, the urban Catholic schools were operating at 81.24% capacity. Thus, in Study I, the public suburban adjacent districts could receive an additional 27,155 students to run at 100% capacity. In Study II, the respondents could only accommodate 2,309 new students. The urban Catholic schools could accommodate 71,021 students. The respondent school districts and schools across all three studies could accommodate 100,485 additional students. This represents only 3% of the total population that could be accommodated by the responding schools from the targeted urban school districts. If the reader assumes that the respondents in the three studies represent the larger population of

students/schools found throughout the United States in the public urban fringe, the private non-Catholic center city schools, and Catholic center city schools and, if the capacity rates of the three studies accurately reflect the schools in the urban fringe and in center city, then the available capacity changes dramatically. The total 1993-94 population in the three targeted school areas was 15,520,523. The total population of 100% would be 17,087,598 and the available new seats would be 1,567,075 (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Given that in 93-94, there were 13,496,625 public school children attending schools in center city, only 11.6% of them would be able to attend schools of their Choice in public urban fringe, private non-Catholic urban, or Catholic urban schools. Thus, Choice would only be a reality for approximately 1 out of 10 children or, put another way, 90% of the urban children would not have an opportunity to attend schools in public suburban districts, private urban schools, or in Catholic urban schools at this point, given 100% capacity. Obviously, if these schools were to build larger facilities, increase class size, and so forth, the picture could change drastically.

As another approach to looking at availability of space, respondents were asked to indicate whether their school population was expanding (Table 1). In Study I, 91.4% of the respondents indicated that their own school population was expanding. In Study II (private schools), 70.2% indicated that their school population was expanding. In Study III (Catholic schools), 77.3% of that group indicated that their school population was expanding. This expansion existed without Choice students; the expansion has continued, as can be seen by the large number of children who entered American schools as of September, 1996. The majority of respondents in all three studies indicated that they expect to expand their school population over the next five years. When asked whether or not the respondents were planning to expand the availability of classrooms (Table 1), 74% of the respondents from suburban districts indicated that they intended to expand the availability of classrooms, 56.6% of the private schools were going to expand their classrooms, and 80.4% of the Catholic schools were going to expand their classroom facilities. However, note that only 35% of the suburban districts plan to build new facilities, 50% of the private schools were going to expand through new facilities, and 46% of the Catholic schools were going to build new facilities to accommodate classroom expansion. Even more interesting, none of the suburban districts reported any decrease in school population, while five private schools indicated a decrease in population and six Catholic schools indicated a decrease in school population from their present number (see Table 1). If one looks at the population expansion and the restricted expansion of classrooms, it is apparent that student population growth compounds the availability of space for Choice students.

Participation, Accommodation, and Acceptance

If, given the option that schools or districts could participate in a School Choice Program, 28.6% of the suburban districts and 19.2% of the private schools indicated that they would participate in the Choice Program, while 73.8% of the Catholic schools would participate in such a program (Table 2). Of the remaining districts in the three studies, 31.4% of the suburban districts were not sure as to whether they

would participate and 73.1% of the private schools were not sure of whether or not they would participate in a Choice Program. Catholic schools were committed to participating in the Choice Program since only 26% of the Catholic schools responding to the survey indicated that they were not sure about participation (refer to Table 2).

When asked whether the school or district could accommodate Choice students (Table 2) 44% of the suburban districts indicated they could accommodate Choice students, while 51.9% of the private indicated they could accommodate Choice students at the time they responded to the instrument. Again, the Catholic schools were more receptive and indicated that 80.6% of the respondents could accommodate Choice students (at the time of the survey).

The average number of Choice students that could be accommodated, at the time of each survey, was: 191 per suburban district, 25 per private school, and 203 per Catholic school (Table 2). Both the suburban public districts and the Catholic schools could accommodate more students at the elementary level than at any other level in their "system." The private schools could, on the average, accommodate more students at the senior high level than at the elementary or middle school levels. The ranges were 25 to 1000 in the suburban schools, zero to 100 in the private schools, and 10 to 3000 in the Catholic school districts. It is apparent from the ranges that both the suburban schools and the Catholic schools responded as districts, whereas the private schools are individual schools (buildings), thus the large discrepancy among the three groups. Regardless of the discrepancy, however, it is apparent that, at the time of each survey, the responding schools or districts could not accommodate a large number of Choice students.

When asked to indicate what areas would be affected by the acceptance of Choice students in their school district, the suburban districts listed physical facilities, number of instructional staff, and class size and supplies as being the top three areas to be affected (Table 2). The private schools listed the number of instructional staff as the most affected, physical facilities second most, and co-curricular and transportation as the third most affected areas. The Catholic schools indicated that physical facilities would be the most affected, followed by class size and then supplies. The suburban districts saw the least affected would be the number of administrators while the private schools saw the least affected as security personnel; and the Catholic schools also saw that security personnel would be least affected by the admission of Choice students to their schools (refer to Table 2). Twelve areas that could possibly be affected by Choice students were listed, and in Study I (Suburban), each area was selected at least by 10 school districts. In Study II, (Private Schools), all but one were selected by nine or more private schools, whereas in the Catholic Schools, all were selected by 11 or more except for one. It would appear that the respondents of all the groups felt that: physical facilities, co-curricular activities, counseling/child study teams, class size, number of instructional staff, number of administrators, number of teacher aides, inservice training, security personnel, library, transportation, and supplies would have been affected by the admission of Choice students.

Paying for School Choice Programs

Tuition and costs per student are very important issues related to both Choice students, the parents of Choice students, and the receiving schools. In addition, in order for Choice programs to be feasible, it would appear that policies developed by the state would have to financially support (or come close to) the cost of educating a student. Otherwise, the receiving school district or school could lose a considerable amount of money in tuition if the acceptance of a Choice student would preclude charging the Choice parent to make up the difference between the voucher and the actual cost. Another undesirable option for the private and Catholic schools would be increasing the tuition of non-Choice students to make up the shortfall between state-supported vouchers and the actual cost for educating a Choice student in the private sector. As reported by the respondents, the per-pupil cost for students attending the suburban districts and

students attending private schools were very similar (Table 3), with the private schools being slightly higher at the middle and senior level. The Catholic schools, on the other hand, are markedly different from the suburban public schools and the private schools; the costs are considerably lower per student. The public schools per student average cost ranged from \$6,365 to \$7,874. The privates ranged from \$6,365 to \$9,150 and the Catholic school range was from \$1,743 to \$3,335; thus students would more than likely be able to attend the Catholic schools and be within range of the amount generally found in state voucher programs. This would not be true, however, for the public and private schools unless

the states determined the vouchers to be the average cost of educating a child in the public domain and/or in the private domain (non-Catholic).

If the vouchers would not cover the cost of sending a child to a non-public urban school or a public suburban school, respondents were asked who should make up the difference. Interestingly, the suburban public school respondents felt that the state should be the primary agency to make up the difference; whereas both the private (non-religious) and Catholic schools felt that parents should make up the difference. Other funding sources cited were as follows: suburban districts felt that the home district should make up the difference followed by parents, then Federal Government; the private non-religious schools felt that receiving district/school (i.e., the private school) should make up the difference followed by the home (sending) district. The Catholic schools felt that they should make up the difference or the state should make up the difference. Both the suburban districts and the Catholic schools did indicate that the federal government should be involved, but certainly not as the major or primary source (Table 3).

Selecting Students for Admission

Schools/districts responded to questions regarding the basis upon which the school or the district would accept Choice students and on what basis they would not accept such students (Table 4). Out of the 37 adjacent suburban school districts that responded to the study, 20 indicated that they would choose students based on district criteria and 20 indicated that they would use State Regulations (there were multiple responses from districts dealing with this area of study). Fifteen districts indicated that they would use a lottery only for available seats—that is, after their students are enrolled. Only nine districts indicated that they would select students based on establishing or retaining a diverse population. Fifty-four private schools in urban areas responded to the survey and 47 of these indicated that they would use their own criteria for the selection of Choice students, 34 indicated that they would use school examinations for the selection of Choice students, and 26 indicated that they would select Choice students based on establishing or retaining a diverse population (schools responded often with more than one response to this question).

Thirty-seven Catholic schools/systems indicated that they would use their own school/ system criteria for the selection of Choice students, while 20 indicated that they would use a first-come, first-served admission process after their own students were enrolled (this assumes that the Choice students met other criteria). Twenty-six responding Catholic schools/systems indicated that they would take non-Catholic students.

The use of district/school criteria as a basis for the selection of Choice students was the most selected option in all three studies; however, the reliance on district/school criteria as a basis for selection was not equal in terms of the percentages of schools selecting that option. For example, 54% of the suburban public districts would rely on that criteria, whereas 87% of the private schools and 84% of the Catholic schools would rely on a stated set of criteria for selection. Fifty-four (54%) of the suburban public schools would follow State Regulations with regard to Choice students, whereas only 4% of the private schools and 25% of the Catholic schools would follow state regulations. It is difficult to interpret this finding unless state regulations were considered as binding only for public schools and/or that the state regulations were not a law but rather came from the various State Departments of Education and did not include private schools in their regulations on School Choice. Reliance on district/school examinations as a criteria for admission was quite different among the three study groups. Only 8% of the suburban public districts would relay on

examinations, whereas 63% of the private schools would rely on examinations, and 27% of the Catholic schools would use examinations as one of the admission procedures.

Few of the private or Catholic schools would rely on a lottery for available seats (28% for suburban districts, 4% for private schools, 11% for Catholic schools). A lottery system for all students including those previously enrolled in their respective schools/districts and Choice students who wish to enter the schools/districts, were not considered viable options for any of the schools represented in the studies.

First-come-first-served, after district/school students are enrolled, was not popular among the suburban public districts, whereas 33.3% of the private schools and 45% of the Catholic schools would use this approach. Almost none would use a first-come, first-served for all students (previously enrolled students and Choice students). Seventeen percent of the suburban public districts and 13% of the Catholic schools would base the establishment of a diverse school population as part of the criteria for the selection of Choice students, whereas 48% of the private schools would use that as one of the measures for selection. Aside from using district/school criteria previously established for the selection of Choice students, other approaches to the selection of Choice students are quite different between and among the three study groups (Table 4).

When asked on what grounds schools/districts would exclude Choice students, only 19% of the suburban respondents indicated that they would not exclude Choice students under any circumstance; whereas 11% of the private schools and 18% of the Catholic schools would have no exclusionary requirements. Few of the suburban public school districts indicated a specific criteria for excluding Choice students, whereas behavioral or disciplinary problems would be rationale for exclusion in 41% of the private schools and 27% in the Catholic schools. A weak academic record was the primary reason for not selecting students in the private schools (44% of the respondents). Weak academic records did not appear to be a concern of either the suburban public schools or the Catholic schools. Other criteria for the exclusion of Choice students in private schools were as follows: low test scores, inappropriate to the mission of the school, classified as special needs student, failure to meet admission criteria, lack of parental support, low IQ test scores, poor references, financial constraints, non-college-bound, drug use, girls applying to a boys' school, boys applying to a girls' school, and lack of space. Other exclusionary criteria for Catholic schools were poor academic performance; parent and/ or child who does not accept the philosophy of the school or church; no appropriate program available; history of drugs, alcohol, or violence; refusal to attend religious instruction; and fleeing the integration of public schools. The option of selecting Choice students classified as special needs students is much more available in the suburban public districts, than in the private or Catholic schools (refer to the original studies for a complete listing of exclusionary criteria).

Choice Students and the School Culture/Climate

Respondents in the three studies were asked whether Choice students would enhance school culture/climate, would disrupt the school culture/climate, and more specifically, reaction to Choice students by other students, parents, and the community at large (for the suburban study only) (Table 5). Across all three studies, the majority of respondents did not know whether or not Choice students would enhance their school culture/climate (67%, 65.3%, 54.8%, respectively). Twenty-one percent of the respondents from suburban public districts, 26.5% of the private schools, and 38.1% of the Catholic schools felt that Choice students would enhance their school culture/climate. Again, when asked whether Choice students would disrupt the school culture/climate, the majority of the respondents just could not answer the question (did not know—53.3% of suburban, 55.8% of the privates, and 71.8% of the Catholic schools). Few felt that Choice students would disrupt their school (13.3%, 3.8%, 0.0%) whereas 33.3% of the suburban, 40.4% of the privates, and 28.2% of the Catholic schools were sure that Choice students would not disrupt their schools (Table 5).

When asked how Choice students would be received by other students, parents, and the community at large (suburban only), 64% of the Catholic respondents felt that their students would receive Choice students very positively, followed by 50% of the suburban districts, and 34% of the privates. Fifty-three percent of the private school respondents felt that the Choice students would receive a cautious, mixed or neutral reaction from their students, whereas 40% of the suburban, and 26% of the Catholic school students would give a cautious, mixed, or neutral response to the Choice students. The respondents across all three groups did not feel that their students would be negative (7%, 6%, 0%) toward Choice students (Table 5), with the Catholic school students being the most "open" towards Choice students.

Parent and Community Reactions to School Choice

Parents in suburban public districts receiving Choice students would not be as positive as the parents in the private or Catholic schools as perceived by the respondents (28%, 36%, 73%, respectively). Parents in the suburban schools would not be even as positive as their children in terms of receiving Choice students (28% vs. 50%), whereas the parents in the private and Catholic schools were perceived by the respondents as being almost as positive as their children in receiving Choice students (36% vs. 34% private, 73% vs. 64% Catholic). In terms of cautious, mixed, or neutral receptions, the responses were as follows: 32% of the parents in the suburban districts, 46.8% in the privates, and 21.9 in the Catholic schools would give the Choice students a cautious, mixed, or neutral reception as indicated by the respondents. What is more pronounced, however, is that the respondents from the suburban districts felt that a significantly larger number of their parents would have negative views about Choice students (40%) as opposed to the privates (8.5%), and the Catholic parents (2.4%). Only the suburban districts were asked to assess how their community at large would respond to Choice students. Forty-three percent of the respondents felt that the community would give a negative reception to the Choice students, 39% felt that the community would give the Choice students a positive reception, and 17% felt the Choice students would receive a cautious, mixed, or neutral reception from the community at large.

It is clear from the above data that the students and parents in the private and Catholic schools would generally respond similarly to Choice students in their midst, whereas the respondents felt that the parents and students in the suburban public districts would respond differently. Only the majority of the respondents from Catholic schools thought that students and parents would give Choice students a positive reception. This is not true in the other two studies. Aside from a rather large negative reception by parents in the suburban schools for Choice students, Choice students would not necessarily receive a negative reaction once entering the schools in all three study groups.

Parent Involvement in Choice Schools

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the parents of Choice students could become involved in the school/district (Table 6). With few exceptions, the parents of Choice students would be welcome to be active participants in the school that their child was attending. The one exception was voting in the school district election. For instance, parents not living in a school district would not, by law, be allowed to vote in the receiving school district's elections (at this point). Thus, interdistrict Choice programs would limit the voting in school district elections to the sending district for those parents living in the sending district. In addition, the Choice parents would not be able, by law, to be candidates for the school board in a public receiving suburban district. To be a candidate for a school board/trustee for a private school and/or Catholic school is quite different, however. Almost 80% (N = 43) of

Table 6
Choice Parental Involvement*

	Study		
	I	II	III
Participation in Parent/School Organization	31	52	36
Participation at the District Level	31	--	--
Site Based Management	29	6	12
Parent Volunteers	32	52	38
Parent Advising School Level	31	31	34
Parent Advising District Level	31	--	--
Voting in School District Election	2	--	--
Candidate for School Board	1	43	30
Home/School Nights	31	43	37
Parent/Teacher Conferences	30	51	37
Access to Parent Resource Centers	29	--	--

* multiple responses

the respondents in the private school study thought that the parents of Choice students could be a candidate for their school board/trustee and 68% (N = 30) of the respondents from the Catholic study felt that the parents of Choice students could be a candidate for their governing board.

The one major difference between the three studies dealt with school management. Here, 78% (N = 29) of the respondents from the suburban study felt that parents could belong to school-based management teams, whereas 11% (N = 6) of the private schools and 27% (N = 12) of the Catholic schools felt that the parents of Choice students could become members of site-based management teams. The differences between the three studies, however, could be a function of the fact that there may be more site-based management teams in the public than in the private and Catholic school domains.

Postscript

If the capacity rates found in the three studies were used to calculate 100% capacity for all schools (urban, suburban, rural) throughout the country (i.e., 91.9% for all public, 92.3% for private non-Catholic, 81% for Catholic), the total capacity based on 1993-94 data (U.S. Department of Education, 1995) would be 51,055,776. Given the total of 1993-94 enrollment of 46,592,306, there would be an increase in potential seating capacity of 4,463,470; thus the actual potential for movement (based solely on capacity) was only 9.6% for all the students attending all schools.

In September of 1996, there were approximately 51.7 million children in American schools. This number exceeds the grand total of 46,592,306 or the 51,000,000, based on 100% capacity of students attending all American schools in 1993-94. Assuming no mass building of facilities occurred since these studies were completed, one can assume that the differential between actual enrollment and capacity potential has now been met.

Projected enrollments for Fall, 2000, for all levels of public and private schools, is 54,402,000. Without massive renovations and building at all levels, the capacity, if not already met, will be met. Thus, the number of options available to urban children going either to adjacent suburban schools, private schools, or

Catholic schools will be zero. The researchers conclude that, without massive building, increases in the infrastructure of suburban, private, and non-religious and Catholic schools, tuition reimbursement equal to the cost of educating a student in a receiving school, and changes in the selection processes, School Choice will only be a possibility for very few urban children and almost an impossibility for special needs children.

Even though there may be a few more options for urban children to attend Catholic schools in urban communities (as opposed to public suburban schools or private schools), the reality of School Choice may be that, indeed, it is education's trickle-down theory. Notwithstanding the philosophical, educational, or political arguments for or against School Choice in terms of inter-district selection, private schools, or Catholic schools—the authors believe that School Choice is, indeed, not a viable option based on issues of capacity, funding, and selection of students. We also believe that the primary beneficiaries of School Choice legislation would be the parents who are already sending their children to private or religious schools and that Choice plans would not markedly benefit urban children already in the urban public schools. Thus, the concept that School Choice would benefit all through the free market approach could not be tested, given that so few students would be able to participate in a Choice Program.

Table 1									
Demographic Data									
Size of School Population	Study I			Study II			Study III		
	f	Total per Level	Mean	f	Total per Level	Mean	f	Total per Level	Mean
Pre-School/Elementary	34	160,348	4,716.11	40	9,667	241.68	32	217,978	6,811.81
Middle School/Junior High	31	67,579	2,179.96	43	6,749	156.95	11	12,843	1,167.55
Senior High School	32	84,000	2,625.00	41	8,322	202.98	29	70,295	2,423.96
Total	34*	311,858	9,172.29	46*	27,680	643.72	28*	302,775	10,813.39

* Some districts didn't respond

Percentage of Classroom Capacity	Study I			Study II			Study III		
	f	Mean		f	Mean		f	Mean	
Pre-School/Elementary	28	94.48		45	94.5		27	84.67	
Middle School/Junior High	26	91.37		42	91.1		14	81.57	
Senior High School	24	87.42		34	86.5		26	82.50	
Total	28	91.99		38	92.3		25	81.24	

Student Population Expansion	Study I			Study II			Study III		
Yes		32			33			34	

No		3			14*			10*	
Total					(decreasing - 5)			(decreasing - 6)	

* Some districts/schools, depending on level, are experiencing both increases and decreases.

(Table continues)

Table 1									
(Continued)									
Student Population Expansion (Con't.) <i>Next Five Years</i>		Study I			Study II		Study III		
Pre-School/Elementary		27			17			29	
Middle School/Junior High		24			19			20	
Senior High School		25			21			24	

Expand Classrooms

-

Yes		26			30			33	
No		39			23			8	

How accommodate expansion

-

Build new facilities		12			22			23	
Use present facilities		22			22			27	

-

Table 2									
Participation of Choice Students									
Will your district/school participate in School Choice?					Can your district/school accommodate choice students?				
	Yes	No	Not Sure		Yes	No	Not Sure		
Study I	10	14	11		15	19		0	

Study II	10	4	38		28	22	4
Study III	31	0	11		29	7	0

Level and average number of choice students that can be accommodated

	Study I	Study II	Study III
Pre-School/Elementary	321	20	359
Middle School/Junior High	147	21	152
Senior High School	129	33	278
Overall Mean	191	25	203

Areas that will be affected by choice students attending

	Study				Study				Study		
	I	II	III		I	II	III		I	II	III
Physical	22	30	31	# Instructional Staff	20	32	27	Security Personnel	10	2	3
Co-Curricular	14	17	18	# of Administrators	13	9	11	Library	14	13	20
Counseling/Child Study Teams	18	16	19	# of teacher Aides	14	13	18	Transportation	14	17	19
Class size	19	13	29	In-Service Training	14	9	22	Supplies	19	11	25

Table 3							
Costs for Choice Students							
Mean Costs Per Student				Who Should Pay if Choice Funding is Less than Cost?			
	Study I	Study II	Study III		Study I	Study II	Study III
Pre-School/Elementary	6,365	6,365	1,743	Parent	12	45	38
Middle School/Junior High	7,144	8,091	1,999	Home District	17	10	7
Senior High School	7,874	9,150	3,335	Receiving District	4	20	10
				The State	28	3	10
				Federal Government	10	0	6
				Parish	--	--	6
				Private	--	--	1

Table 4							
Selection/Exclusion of Choice Students							
Selection of Choice Students*				Excluding Choice Students			
	Study I	Study II	Study III		Study I	Study II	Study III
District/School Criteria	20	47	37	Would Not Exclude Students	10	6	8
State Regulations	20	2	11				
District Exam	3	34	12	Special Needs Students	3	4	13
Lottery Only for Available Seats	15	2	5	Behavior/Discipline Problems	3	22	12
Lottery for All Seats	1	1	0	Drug	1	1	2
First Come/First Served After <i>in-district</i> are enrolled	7	18	20	Weak Academic Record	2	24	5
First Come, First Served for <i>all</i> students	2	2	2	Poor Attendance	4	--	--

Based on Establishing or Retaining a Diverse Population	9	26	6	Program not Available	1	5	3
Other	0	0	--	Other	0	8	8
Take only Catholic Students	--	--	3				
Take non-Catholic Students	--	--	26				

*Multiple selections possible

Table 5

Climate and Parental Involvement

		Study I		%			Study II		%			Study III		%	
Choice student will enhance school culture	Yes	7	21	13	26.5	16	38.1								
	No	4	12	4	8.2	3	7.1								
	Don't Know	22	67	32	65.3	23	54.8								
Choice students will disrupt school	Yes	4	13.3	2	3.8	0	0.0								
	No	10	33.3	21	40.4	11	28.2								
	Don't Know	16	53.3	29	55.8	28	71.8								
		Study I					Study II					Study III			
		Students		Parents		Community at Large		Students		Parents		Students		Parents	
Reaction to Choice Students:		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Positive	15	50	7	28	9	39.1	17	34	17	34.0	27	64	30	73.2	
Cautious/Mixed/Neutral	12	40	8	32	4	17.3	26	53	22	46.8	11	26	9	21.9	
Negative	2	7	10	40	10	43.5	3	6	4	8.5	0	0	1	2.4	
Don't Know	1	3	0	0	0	00.0	3	6	4	8.5	4	9	1	2.4	

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Appendix of Suggested Readings

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National School Choice Week, an annual event designed to promote educational options for K-12 students and parents, is underway. The organizers of School Choice Week promote all forms of educational reform that give students and parents more options. So that means they don't support, say, voucher plans over charter schools, homeschooling, tuition tax credits, or private scholarship funds. Bring it all on, they argue. Which leads to a basic question: Does increasing choice yield better results from an educational perspective? Here's some evidence about choice programs that get students into private schools from *A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice*, by Greg Forster (Fourth Edition, 2016) Since students were assigned to a particular school, public education worked to assure that all schools had uniform programs. The concept of alternative schooling, which first emerged as a radical idea on the fringe of public education, evolved to a mainstream approach found in almost every community in the United States and increasingly throughout the world. National statistics regarding school choice often do not include the number of parents choosing non-public options (those choosing private schools, home schooling, participating in for-pay, online learning) or who are influenced in selecting their home residence by where their children will go to school. Since the first alternative public schools were identified and studied in the late 1960s, the underlying... A National Study On The Viability Of School Choice: An Option For All Students. The primary purpose of this article is to report on three national studies conducted from 1994 to 1996 by the authors who were directly concerned with School Choice. The first study dealt with inter-district School Choice—that is, urban students attending public suburban schools under a School Choice Plan. This study was reported in the NATIONAL FORUM OF APPLIED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL [Show full abstract] (1995-96). The second study titled, "School Choice: Education's Trickle Down Theory for Urban Students Attending Private Schools," Study II (1996) dealt with urban students attending private schools in their city. programs that support students' different needs (National Association of Secondary School Principals 2004). Studies of at-risk youth also emphasize the need for connectedness or a sense of belonging (Dynarski 2000; Levine 2002; Meier 2002). This article focuses on some additional research on small schools—particularly small high schools—in Maine. Small school strengths. The school is an important part of a community's identity, cohesion, and viability, particularly for rural communities (Peshkin 1978). School buildings serve as community centers when no other facilities might be available (Vermont State Department of Education 1998). There also has been an increased focus on the need to improve high school student achievement.