Equity, Quality, and Access:

How Do We Create Schools Worth Choosing for All?

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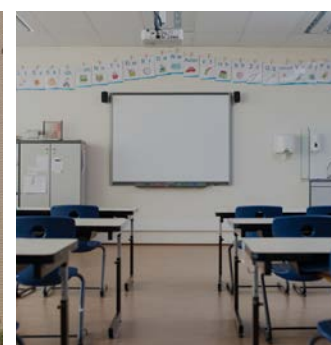
A Rich Tapestry of Choices

Choice is widespread

- 18.7 million families have access to public school choice.

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A Rich Tapestry of Choices

Most choice options are managed by traditional school districts

- Themed schools, magnets, etc.
- For example, about as many students are in magnets (2.6 million) as in charters (2.7 million)

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Under what conditions can choice provide:

- Higher quality public schools?

- More equitable access for all families to high-quality options?

- Greater social, racial, and economic integration?

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Open Enrollment Plans

Intradistrict Choice Plans, e.g.

- New York City (small schools)
- Cambridge, MA (controlled choice)

Interdistrict Transfers, e.g.

- Hartford, Boston (desegregation initiatives)
- Minnesota (widespread open enrollment)

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Magnets and New Models

Magnet Schools

- Themed schools within and across districts, typically with desegregation goals
- Positive impacts on achievement, motivation, grad rates, parent satisfaction
- But wide variation within and across districts

New Model Schools

- Networks of schools with distinctive approaches
- A number of successful examples (Success for All, EL, NYC small schools)

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Charter Schools

- **Fastest growing sector**

- **Different rules across states**

- **Various management structures**

- **Different management approaches within districts**

- **Outcomes highly variable**

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Choice is a means, not an end

- Choice can result in greater or less access for families.

- Depending on rules, choice can foster integration or segregation.

- Choice alone is not enough to produce good options. District efforts to manage choice and improve instruction are key.

- Achievement gains are associated with personalized designs, quality curriculum, and professional staffing and development.

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Focus on students, not governance

- Gather data on learning opportunities across subgroups and neighborhoods

- Respond to data and community needs

- Create high-quality learning environments for all

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Ensure Equity and Access

- "Control" choice

- Standardize enrollment processes

- Backfill for students who leave

- Establish common disciplinary systems

- Support and incentivize schools to serve the neediest students

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Ensure transparency at every stage

- **Expand and customize communication to parents**

- **Gather common input and outcome data on all schools, regardless of governance**

- **Ensure financial transparency**

- **Create transparent process for student school assignment**

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Build a system of schools for all

- Leave no school behind

- Provide common professional development

- Establish common school quality reviews

- Consider wraparound services based on students' needs, not school type

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Learning Policy Institute Resources

The Tapestry of American
Public Education

How Can We Create a System of Schools
Worth Choosing for All?

Peter W. Cookson, Jr., Linda Darling-Hammond,
Robert Rothman, and Patrick M. Shields

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