



Matt Kasman's study, *School Selection, Student Assignment, and Enrollment in a School District with Open Enrollment and Mandatory Choice Policies*¹ examines the open enrollment policies of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). Open enrollment programs aim to increase racial integration in schools by allowing parents to choose their children's schools as opposed to automatic assignment to a neighborhood school. This study, a series of three papers, explores how parent choice, school assignment, and school enrollment policies hinder or facilitate school desegregation. These studies use SFUSD administrative data on students, school programs, and school applications.² The parent choice data also includes parents' responses to optional survey questions, included in the application, about factors considered in their school choice.

FINDINGS

PARENT CHOICES

- Parents are more likely to choose schools with short distances between home and school and more likely to select schools in their neighborhood (defined by school attendance zones). This can counter desegregation efforts when urban neighborhoods are themselves segregated.
- Parents are more likely to select schools with larger proportions of students of the same race as their children and less likely to select schools with large proportions of children eligible for the free and reduced lunch program. This selection, based on race, could also hinder desegregation efforts.
- Families of different races make different *trade-offs* in their school choice. Families make decisions between selecting a school close to home and features such as high-achieving schools, racial composition, and special programs. For example, Black families, generally living furthest away from high-achieving schools, are the most likely to select schools further from home. White families, living near high-achieving schools, are the most likely to select a school program in their attendance zone.
- Families living in low test-score zones are the most likely to select schools out of their attendance areas.
- A substantially smaller proportion of White survey respondents than non-White respondents indicated that proximity to work, proximity to childcare, the availability of bus transportation, or school diversity played an important role in their decisions.

SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT AND ENROLLMENT

- Kasman asserts that *given the school choices that families make, school assignment fosters diversity within schools and equalizes access to high achieving schools (i.e. by strategically selecting schools' attendance zones and giving priority to students who live in "low test score areas")* (p. 80). However, more affluent parents have a larger range of enrollment options (i.e. greater ability to leave the district or effectively engage in the reassignment process), reducing the impact of these policies.
- Overall, the following patterns are observed in families' enrollment decisions:
 - Families assigned to their first-choice school are the most likely to attend their assigned school.
 - Families are more likely to enroll in their assigned schools when those schools are higher achieving, serve lower proportions of non-White or disadvantaged students, or higher proportions of students of the same

¹ Kasman, Matthew, E. (2014). *School Selection, Student Assignment, and Enrollment in a School District with Open Enrollment and Mandatory Choice Policies* (Doctoral dissertation). Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

² Analyses omit applications to schools attended by children's siblings; this is done because these applications likely result from a fundamentally different selection process.



race. Families are also more likely to enroll in the assigned school if its characteristics are similar to their first-choice school.

- White families are the most likely to be reassigned or exit the school district if their assigned school is unacceptable due to distance or low achievement. This is likely the result of greater flexibility (e.g., ability to gain admission to and afford private school options) and familiarity with and ability to effectively engage in the reassignment process.

SCHOOL CHOICE SIMULATIONS

- Increasing family participation in school choice programs increases racial diversity in schools across the district. Without parental choice, children are often assigned to schools in their attendance area or to a school as geographically close to their home as possible. Because of residential segregation, placement of non-participants into geographically proximate schools perpetuates racial segregation in schools, and thus increasing participation results in greater diversity.
- When families consider school value-added measures (as opposed to simple school achievement levels) there is a reduction in the achievement gap in schools attended by White and Asian students compared to Black and Hispanic students. Value-added measures include *students' between-year gains in math and ELA exam scores, students' races, grade levels, and school years in which exams were taken* (p.113). This is largely the result of White families' sensitivity to available measures of school quality in making school choice and enrollment decisions.
- Low test-score zone priority in the assignment process accomplishes its intended goal of assigning children who live in low-income areas to high-achieving schools. Eliminating this priority decreases racial diversity and increases the achievement gap between schools attended by White and Asian students compared to Black and Hispanic students.

WHAT CAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS DO WITH THESE FINDINGS?

When thinking about resource allocation and determining the most promising strategies for supporting school-choice programs, Kasman asserts that school districts should consider:

- Ensuring high-quality schools in every attendance area to accommodate parents' preference to send children to schools close to home.
- Continuing and expanding the assignment preference for lower-income areas to ensure children in these neighborhoods are assigned to high-achieving schools.
- Implementing strategies that increase participation in the school choice program through multiple modes of communication and information dissemination to families.
- Implementing strategies that ensure parents receive information about, and understand indicators of, school quality beyond school achievement. This includes information on *value added* measures that are based on factors that include *students' between-year gains in math and ELA exam scores, students' races, grade levels, and school years in which exams were taken*. (p.113).

Kasman's study offers a method for the SFUSD to simulate the impact of various features of a school-choice program. This provides school district administrators and parents with evidence to make informed and rational decisions about the effective policies of their school-choice program. This Summer/Fall 2018, the SFUSD Research, Planning and Accountability Department and Policy & Operations Department are partnering with Stanford Professor Sean Reardon and colleague Joe Townsend to provide an updated version of this analysis.

This Research Brief was prepared by Matt Kasman and Fran Kipnis, October 2018.