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School Choice Considerations of Black Parents of Students with Dis/abilities

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SCHOOL CHOICE CONSIDERATIONS OF BLACK PARENTS OF

STUDENTS WITH DIS/ABILITIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Jaleah N. Robinson

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DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
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Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Presented by:

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2021

SCHOOL CHOICE CONSIDERATIONS OF BLACK PARENTS OF

STUDENTS WITH DIS/ABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL CHOICE CONSIDERATIONS OF BLACK PARENTS OF

STUDENTS WITH DIS/ABILITIES

By

Jaleah N. Robinson

August 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Temple S. Lovelace

     Forty-four states and Washington, D.C. have passed legislation to expand school choice

options for students and families (Cardine, 2019). In addition to a student's assigned

neighborhood school, one may enact choice by way of tax credits, charter schools, vouchers,

relocation, and through other means, depending on where one lives. The act of choosing a school

has been simplified by some to economic principles of competition and consumer satisfaction.

What research has shown, however, is enacting school choice is much more complex and

commonly intertwined with concepts of race, class, and ability (Ellison & Aloe, 2019).

Academic quality (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016), school location (Andre-Bechley, 2007), and

the racial composition of schools (Weiher & Tedin, 2002) have been identified as key

considerations of parents. The school choice considerations of Black parents and parents of

students with dis/abilities specifically are largely absent from the literature (Mawene & Bal,

2018). This study was conducted with the aim of elevating their perspectives. Twenty Black

parents of students with dis/abilities rank-ordered a selection of 40 statements about various

aspects of schools using the web-based data collection and analysis tool called Q-Assessor. Four

themes in perspective were identified and referred to as Race Forward, Challenge, Represent,

and Serve and Support. The findings reveal racial diversity, academic achievement,

representation of multiple identities in curriculum, and special education services are top

considerations in the school choice sets of these individuals.

DEDICATION

To my mother, for her love, sacrifice, and faith.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Civil Rights Act (1964) intended to ban segregation in public places and prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of race, skin color, religion, national origin, and sex. The act also called for a comprehensive look at the experiences of Black students in public schools in the United States. Twelve years after the Supreme Court ruled separate schools for Black and White children were unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), a federal report entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* concluded the "American public education remains largely unequal in most regions of the country, including all those where Negroes form any significant proportion of the population" (Coleman, 1966, p. 3).

This report also included findings from a survey of various school-related categories including school facilities, teacher attitudes, and extracurricular activities. Disparities between students of color and their White peers were prevalent. In regard to academic achievement specifically, significant gaps in performance between White students and students of color were evident for all groups except Asian Americans as early as grade one, and they grew worse as students progressed through high school (Coleman, 1966). These gaps persist in the U.S. public school system today and can be observed not only between races but also between students with and without dis/abilities[1] (Reardon et. al, 2019; Watson & Gable, 2013).

For example, Black and Latinx students have consistently scored lower than White students on national reading and mathematics assessments as have students with dis/abilities scored lower than students without dis/abilities (National Assessment of Educational Progress,

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[1] "Dis/ability" is used deliberately to honor those who claim dis/ability as part of their identity and call attention to the ways in which environments and society disable people (Annamma, 2017).

2019). With the acknowledgement that graduation rates vary within dis/ability categories, there is a long-standing difference in high school graduation rates between students with and without dis/abilities (McFarland et al., 2018; Schifter, 2011; Smith et al., 2012). Students of color are also more likely to drop out of high school than their White classmates (McFarland et al., 2018), and school discipline data have indicated the disproportionate suspension of minoritized students since 1975 (Krezmien et al., 2006). These "achievement gaps," a phrase that tends to apply a deficit-based model to students themselves rather than to systems or institutions, have been reconceptualized by Ladson-Billings' (2006) and Akiba et al. (2007) as educational debt and the opportunity gap respectively. Both of these approaches call attention not only to the problem at hand but also to structures that have worked to disenfranchise groups of students over time.

The Civil Rights (1964) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Acts (2004) acknowledged inequity and called for structural changes in the public sector, but integration and inclusion have not yet led to equitable educational outcomes for students (Thorius & Tan, 2016). School choice is presented by some as a means to reform the public education system in service of this aim (Sattin-Bajaj, 2016).

Significance of the Study

Proponents argue the introduction of market principles into the school choice landscape strengthens the overall quality of schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Frankenberg et al., 2011). Through competition, students have increased access to effective schools more accurately matched to their preferences, and underperforming schools will be pushed to improve or risk dwindling enrollment or closure (Freidman, 1980; Hoxby, 2003). Those in opposition assert school choice is a misuse of public funds, a dangerous step towards the privatization of education

(Scott, 2013), a contributor to racial segregation (Archbald et al., 2017; Roda & Wells, 2013), and ultimately does little to disrupt educational inequity (Chapman & Donnor, 2015).

Despite the controversy, forty-four states and Washington, D.C. have passed legislation to expand school choice options for students and families (Cardine, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019a). Depending on where one lives, one may now enact choice by way of tax credits, charter schools, vouchers, virtual schools, relocation, or through other methods. For parents in search of a school to effectively respond to the needs and strengths of their children, school choice reform may be a welcomed change.

Efforts to understand parent perspectives regarding the choice-making process can be valuable to the overall body of literature, but also to school practitioners, organizers, and legislators. As the collective student body becomes more diverse and options increase (NCES, 2019b; National Center for Education Evaluation, 2019), the need for understanding is arguably even more pressing for members of communities who have been systematically and historically disenfranchised by schools, namely students with dis/abilities and families of color.

Theoretical Lens

The primary variables to be explored in this study are race and dis/ability within the context of school choice — defined in this study as a parent or guardian's opportunity to choose the school their child attends. Specifically, the study will elevate the intersections of race and dis/ability which are only minimally present in current research as it relates to parents' enactment of school choice and the factors influencing their choice-making process.

The United States public school system was not originally designed to educate students of color or students with dis/abilities as evidenced by the exclusion of both groups from formal education opportunities for significant lengths of time in our nation's history (Dudley-Marling &

Burns, 2014; George, 2019). Integration and inclusion legally allow for Black and White students to attend the same schools and students with and without dis/abilities to learn together, but schools tend to favor a White normative and ableist culture (Kearl, 2019). Subsequently, Black parents of students with dis/abilities are tasked with navigating a complex system that was not created with them or their children in mind.

In recognition of the interconnectedness of race and dis/ability in this study, Dis/ability Critical Race Theory, or DisCrit, will serve as the primary lens by which to examine how this intersection impacts school choice. DisCrit allows for simultaneous engagement with Dis/ability Studies (DS) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Rational Choice Theory as it relates to parents' school satisfaction will also be employed.

Application of DisCrit

According to Annamma et al. (2013), there are seven tenets of DisCrit. First, DisCrit focuses on ways racism and ableism are used to perpetuate the idea of normalcy. Second, DisCrit celebrates the intersectionality of identity. Third, DisCrit emphasizes the social construction of race and dis/ability and acknowledges the impact of said constructions on people. Fourth, DisCrit lifts up the voices of those traditionally left out of research. Fifth, DisCrit considers how the historical and legal facets of race and dis/ability have been used to disenfranchise citizens. Sixth, DisCrit names whiteness and ability as property and recognizes that progress for people with dis/abilities is often the result of "interest convergence of White, middle-class citizens" (Annamma et al., 2013, p.11). Finally, they write DisCrit "requires activism and supports all forms of resistance" (p.11). The tenets of DisCrit have been or will be used to guide this study's conception, design, and analysis of findings.

Black parents and parents of students with dis/abilities are rarely the focus of school choice research. Individuals who identify as both are even further underrepresented (Mawene & Bal, 2018). This serves, in part, as impetus for this study, and central to it are the experiences, ideas, and opinions of participants. While race and dis/ability are accepted as social constructs, that is not to minimize the contributions they may make to an individual's identity. Dis/ability, for instance, is said to transcend its physiological presentation to become part of one's cultural identity (Connor et al., 2013). The researcher's intent is to operationalize both race and dis/ability using DisCrit as a framework to explore the ways in which "race, racism, dis/ability, and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education" as they relate to school choice (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 14).

School Satisfaction

Parents' school satisfaction and Rational Choice Theory are also relevant. Rational Choice Theory, based on principles of behavioral psychology, is described as "the process of determining what options are available and choosing the most preferred one according to some consistent criterion" (Levin & Milgrom, 2004, p. 1). School choice policy and empirical research on the subject have been influenced by the theory that parents will act as rational consumers when it comes to selecting a school for their child, just as they would when purchasing other goods (Wilson, 2016).

Rational Choice Theory is predicated on the presumption that parents have preferences about schools. Keeping those preferences in mind, parents will then take the necessary steps to gather all pertinent information and weigh those preferences against existing limitations. Lastly, parents will choose a school that maximizes preferences and increases their overall level of school satisfaction (Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Wilson, 2016).

Safety, school budget, teacher effectiveness, and school climate are factors that can affect parents' school satisfaction, but one's perceived level of involvement was found to be most important (Friedman et al., 2006; Friedman et al., 2007; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Tuck, 1995). School dissatisfaction is a primary reason parents cite for the withdrawal and re-enrollment of their children in a different school (Finn et al., 2006; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Wilson (2016) writes, "on a basic level, it is simpler to understand choice as the action of a single individual, rather than through lenses that emphasize the culturally and socially saturated nature of human action" (p. 151). While Rational Choice Theory informs an understanding of parents' school choice decision-making process from an economic standpoint, it is not enough to fully explain their choices (Ellison & Aloe, 2019; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016; Waitoller & Super, 2017). DisCrit, along with Rational Choice Theory, form a theoretical framework to facilitate an exploration of the impacts of both economics and identity. Additionally, Q methodology is selected in part to provide participants with an opportunity to not only grapple with their individual preferences about schools but also to allow room for potential cultural, social, and environmental factors to be considered.

Synthesis of School Choice Literature

There has been an increase in the number of students attending schools other than the one they are assigned by their public school district (i.e., neighborhood school) over the last fifteen to twenty years. In 2016, over 10 million K-12 students were attending private schools, charter schools, or were being homeschooled. While private school enrollment has slightly declined, the percentage of students enrolled in chosen public schools like charter schools and magnets rose by five percent between 1999 and 2016 (Wang et al., 2019).

Among the most commonly stated school choice considerations of parents are academic quality (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016), location (Andre-Bechley, 2007), recommendations of one's social network (Altenhofen et al., 2016), and schools' racial composition (Weiher & Tedin, 2002). However, there is a paucity of studies exploring school choice as it relates to parents of children with dis/abilities (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011; Mawene & Bal, 2018). One of the few identified studies to use this lens, Waitoller and Super (2017), examined the choice considerations of Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities. They found many experienced difficulties in finding a school that would appropriately meet the needs of their children. These negative experiences, including with special education services, often led parents to make choices not from a position of empowerment but out of desperation.

Dissatisfied and concerned with supporting the academic and social development of their children, Villavicencio (2013) similarly found a main reason parents chose one of four New York charter schools was because they felt it was their only option. Smaller class sizes (Altenhofen et al., 2016; Byrne, 2013), perceived high quality of academics, teacher responsiveness (Finn et al., 2006), and a tendency to be more inclusive were other positive factors associated with charter schools (Jessen, 2012). When parents withdrew their children from a charter school, though, they cited high teacher turnover, poor classroom management, and a perceived decline in program once White, affluent families left (Villavicencio, 2013).

Although narrowly focused on one choice option, participant groups reported an engagement with the school choice process not necessarily because they had evidence indicating the choices available to them would in fact be better for their children, but because they had lost confidence in their current school. Furthermore, parents with lower educational attainment, parents of color, and parents of students with dis/abilities were more likely to report difficulty

navigating the school choice landscape (Jochim et al., 2014). The questions that follow are what qualifies or disqualifies a school as a good fit for students with dis/abilities, and how do parents use those factors to select a school?

Problem Statement

School choice may or may not bring about the necessary reforms for parents of color who have children with dis/abilities, but policies and structures enabling choice have been established in nearly every state in the United States (Cardine, 2019). That said, very few studies have been conducted in attempt to understand why parents of children with dis/abilities choose the schools they do.

The purpose of this study is to explore school choice considerations of Black parents of students with dis/abilities. Participants may have children enrolled in a variety of school choice options, including but not limited to, their assigned public school, charter schools, magnet schools, and private schools. The primary research question is as follows: (Q1) What factors are important to Black parents of students with dis/abilities when choosing a school for their student? Hypotheses are not able to be statistically confirmed or rejected with the selected methodology, Q methodology, however factor analysis will be used to identify points of agreement and difference in participants' thinking (Ward, 2009).

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

On Public Education in America

The common school was popularized in the 1830s and with it came the rise of public education. Prior to this point, schools were most often private and religiously affiliated. Students' access to education varied widely according to factors such as gender, location, age, and class (Osgood, 2008). If students with dis/abilities and Black or Indigenous students attended school at all, they typically attended schools separate from their White and non-disabled peers (O'Brien & Woodrum, 2004; Osgood, 2008).

Common schools were publicly funded institutions set up to educate children from diverse classes and backgrounds. In addition to traditional academic content, a common school education was meant to prepare individuals for citizenship, establish shared values, and foster equality in society (Marshall, 2012). Some leaders in the common school movement like Horace Mann and Samuel Lewis rooted their advocacy in the idea that the health of a nation depended on the education of its people, but competing viewpoints emerged as to how that should be accomplished (O'Brien & Woodrum, 2004). Religion, money, and race were points of debate. For example, there were those who wanted to maintain local control over private schools and those who desired a state-funded system of public schools prohibiting religious sects from exclusive rights to common school monies. Additionally, there were proponents of common schools who believed the right to education should truly be universal, and there were proponents of common schools who were comfortable with some forms of integration but not others (O'Brien & Woodrum, 2004).

In her book *Schooling Citizens*, Moss (2009) explores the relationship between citizenship, race, and educational access, writing

common school reform gave White children from all classes and ethnicities the opportunity to become citizens or, at the very least, to feel a part of the larger society; yet, at the same time, it also reinforced a conception of citizenship becoming increasingly synonymous with whiteness, in which Black Americans, enslaved or free, could not participate. (p. 9)

The common school movement's aims of building a national identity and knowledgeable citizenry required individuals and the courts to grapple with the question of who was and was not an American citizen and subsequently, who had rights to a free and public education.

Barriers to Education Access

Demands for education access from members of the Black community have historically been met with outright denial or resistance, especially when Black education was perceived as a threat to the established social order or the political and economic control of Whites (Cobb Jr., 2011; Moss, 2009). By the 1860s, public education was more readily available to Black school-aged children in northern parts of the country, although reports of school destruction and the threatening of teachers and students were not uncommon (Anderson, 1988; Moss 2009). In the antebellum South, Black education was largely prohibited.

Some slaveholding states, like Virginia, passed laws making it illegal to teach a Black person how to read and write and forbidding Black people from acquiring these skills on their own.

All meetings or assemblages of slaves, or free negroes or mulattoes mixing and associating with such slaves at any meeting-house or houses, in the night; or at any

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school or schools for teaching them reading or writing, either in the day or night, under

whatsoever pretext, shall be deemed and considered an unlawful assembly (General

Assembly, 1831, para. 4).

The law goes on to authorize entry into private homes and meeting places to break up

such an assembly and corporal punishment up to twenty lashes. Even in the face of such

opposition, members and allies of the Black community pursued and shared knowledge.

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that separate but

equal railcars for Blacks and Whites did not in fact violate the United States Constitution. This

provided the legal justification for racial segregation to occur in public facilities like schools.

There was no state-financed school system for Black children in the post-Civil War South, so

communities organized their own schools in response to ineffective or unjust provisions by the

government (Forman, 2005).

Parents of children with dis/abilities were generally left to take on the full responsibility

of educating their children as well. Some specialized schools and residential facilities, primarily

for teenaged students and older, were open to those who were deaf, blind, or intellectually

disabled. Despite the passing of compulsory attendance laws in many states starting in the latter

half of the 19th century, the inclusion of students with dis/abilities in the regular education setting

was not the norm (Martin et al., 1996; Wright & Wright, 2007).

Whether it be by state legislation or by court ruling, schools in some states were afforded

the power to deny educational access to students with dis/abilities they deemed uneducable

(Beekman, 2011). In 1893, the Massachusetts Supreme court upheld a decision to expel a child

with an intellectual dis/ability from the public school system on the grounds that he was unable

to benefit from instruction. In 1919, a child with cerebral palsy was pushed out of the Wisconsin

public school system in part because school officials claimed his condition made others feel uncomfortable or sick (Crossley, 2000; Yell et al., 1998).

By the 1930s when compulsory education laws were more consistently enforced, student enrollment markedly increased as did the need for public schools to provide some form of special education. Although, there was still no legal requirement to do so (Noltemeyer et al., 2012). A lack of appropriate training and resources, along with a growing national fear of dis/ability, continued to result in isolation. Special education programming for students with milder dis/abilities most often took the form of separate classrooms and schools while students with more severe dis/abilities were exempted from attendance expectations all together (Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Osgood, 2008; Sealander, 2003). Contextually, it is important to note these developments in special education were taking place in the backdrop of racial segregation along with the stigmatization, institutionalization, and in some cases, forced sterilization of adults with moderate to severe dis/abilities (Sealander, 2003).

At about this time, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began focusing its efforts on the racial desegregation of schools. Black students across the country were attending schools with disparate resources as compared to schools serving White students, including inadequate facilities, a lack of supplies, crowded classrooms, and unequal funding (NAACP History, 2020; School Segregation and Integration, n.d). The NAACP argued on behalf of plaintiffs that separate schools for Black and White children, even if purportedly equal, were unconstitutional (NAACP, 2020b).

A landmark court victory was achieved in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), but avoidance and refusal to integrate was not uncommon. Southern lawmakers signed a document rejecting the ruling. Black students attempting to attend White schools were met with

angry protestors, violence, and other acts of intimidation. It took years for integration to be completed in many schools (Resistance to School Desegregation, 2014), and although no longer legally sanctioned, racial segregation in schools continues even in the present day (Whitehurst, 2017).

Social Movements of the 1960 and 70s

After World War II and through the 1950s and 60s, the U.S. experienced an economic boom. Manufacturing and industry were strong, job creation and wages increased, and the country became an economic superpower (Dickson, 2007; Palley, 1996). Culturally, this time period was marked by loud calls for social and political reform including the women's liberation movement, Vietnam War protests, the civil rights movement and Mississippi freedom schools, and the dis/ability rights movement.

Freedom Schools

The freedom school concept was proposed in response to what Howard University student Charles Cobb then described as a "grossly inadequate" education provided by Mississippi public schools "geared to squash intellectual curiosity and different thinking" (Bowie, 1964, p. 1). Envisioned instead was a curriculum relevant to everyday life. It was to consist of leadership development with a focus on social activism and community engagement. Instruction would be provided in traditional academic subject areas and allow for analysis of national issues, time for networking, socialization, and creative expression.

Freedom schools were originally intended for high school students, but younger children and adults attended as well (Howe, 1965). They operated in the summer months of 1964, or Freedom Summer, a time dually focused on the tenets of education and political activism. The Council of Federated Organizations and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee arranged

for Northern volunteers, many of them White, to assist with Mississippi voter registration and serve as instructors in forty-one freedom schools (Perlstein, 1990). A conference was held in March of 1964 to design the curriculum (Chilcoat & Ligon, 1994).

Subjects of study included race relations, voter literacy, foreign language, chemistry, and like the common schools a hundred years before, citizenship (Hale, 2011). However, in this case, citizenship coursework was not purposed as a means to bring about conformity, but it was a tool to provide students with more complete and accurate information, including Black history, and to give them an opportunity to understand and grow in their own identities (Howe, 1965).

Teaching methods were also recommended at the conference. It was suggested that volunteer instructors utilize a student-centered, discussion-based approach and encourage students to express themselves, to ask questions, and to take direct action in support of social change. More than 2,000 individuals attended the 6 to 8-week program, and the freedom school experience culminated in a three-day student led convention (Chilcoat & Ligon, 1994). The actions of those involved in the civil rights movement generally, and the freedom school participants specifically, helped provide others with the context needed to bring alternative forms of education to life.

Free Schools

Free schools are considered precursors to charter schools (Noguera et al., 2015). These small, independent private schools were characterized by a prioritization of student voice and choice and a direct rejection of bureaucracy and mainstream culture. Learning was self-directed, and curricula varied according to the population of students attending (Biancolli, 2015). Middle-class families were the predominant group associated with free schools (Cooper, 1971).

The educators, students, and families who were a part of these learning communities did not buy into many of the structures found in traditional school settings like grades, textbooks, and tests. Free schoolers believed education should be responsive to the learner and to issues of the day, a similar line of thinking as was employed in freedom schools just a few years earlier (Miller, 2002). They believed a meaningful education was one that did not push a single agenda but one that made space for the needs of individuals to be met.

Free schools and freedom schools were alike in their overall pedagogical approach, but the underlying value behind the approach seemed to differ. Free schools were concerned with the freedom and autonomy of the individual while freedom schools took on much more of a collectivist nature (Cooper, 1971). That is, when individuals are empowered and equipped with the right skills, the community is believed to be stronger. While freedom schools and free schools are not entirely representative of school choice as it is conceptualized today, including such institutions as part of the historical record contributes to the framing of the overall topic of study as it documents the dissatisfaction of some with public schooling and their attempts to make change.

Dis/ability Rights Movement

Referred to as the "last civil rights movement," the dis/ability rights movement gained momentum in the late 1960s and 70s (Patterson, 2018, p. 439). Winter (2003) describes a phased development of the movement starting with the problem defined, moving on to solution identification, and lastly to dealing with any lingering problems or potential consequences of those solutions. He goes on to say the central problem in this case is the marginalization and oppression of individuals with dis/abilities; the problem does not lie with the individuals

themselves. Rather, the movement asserted dis/ability is the result of exclusionary practices, attitudes, and prejudices of the dominant ableist culture.

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act which would later be revised and reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, was passed making public schools responsible for providing equal educational access to students with dis/abilities and a formal means for families to dispute educational decisions. A requirement for students' placement in the least restrictive environment was also included (Wright, 2020).

The Introduction of School Vouchers

Economists Milton and Rose Freidman (1980) discussed the relationship between personal and economic freedom as well as the problem of public education in a ten-part television series and book entitled *Free to Choose.* In their opinion, far too many school-aged students were subject to an inadequate education, and parents most often had little to no say in where or how their child was educated. In short, schools were operating outside market principles, ultimately leading to a lack of competition, loss of innovation, and decrease in product quality. Milton Friedman's solution was a voucher system enabling parents to choose the right school for their child, even if it was located outside the bounds of their assigned school district. Public funds could be used to cover any tuition costs.

Freidman's work, along with the work of Massachusetts academic and originator of the charter school concept Ray Budde (Cardine, 2019), did not gain much traction until a report from President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education was released. "A Nation at Risk" (Gardner, 1983) positioned the American educational system as mediocre at best. Without significant reform, the authors asserted the country would no longer be able to compete on the world stage.

Presently, traditional school voucher programs are associated with private school attendance; this can and often does include religiously affiliated schools. In the U.S, where K-12 education is decentralized and predominantly state-run, voucher programs can differ in how they are funded, which students have access, and the ways in which schools participate. In addition, there can be multiple types of voucher programs operating in the same state (Epple et al., 2015; School Choice Fast Facts and Statistics, 2019). Studies focused on schools who participate in voucher programs are limited, but in conducting an analysis in two states and the District of Columbia, Sude et al. (2018) found participating schools tend to be small with lower tuition costs, located in areas with higher population densities of students of color, and often religiously affiliated.

School Choice Options Today

In the United States, the term "school choice" describes an opportunity for parents to decide which school their child will attend (Abdulkadiroğlu & Ehlers, 2007; Finn et al., 2006). In 2016, just under 70 percent of all K-12 students were enrolled in their assigned public schools. About 20 percent were enrolled in public schools of choice, 9 percent in private schools, and roughly 3 percent were homeschooled (NCES, 2019a). School choice options vary by state, but in addition to assigned public schools, private schools, and homeschooling, families may choose to send their children to another school within the assigned district, a school in a different district, a charter school, virtual school, or magnet school. They could also take advantage of financial incentives like tuition tax credits, vouchers, and education savings accounts (Berends, 2015).

The No Child Left Behind Act attempted to place greater accountability on schools for providing all students with an opportunity to receive a high-quality education. No Child Left

Behind required yearly standardized testing in the content areas of reading and math for students in grades 3-8 and disaggregated reporting of data according to ethnicity, race, special education status, free and reduced lunch status, and English language proficiency. It also required schools who failed to make adequate yearly progress to provide students with the opportunity to attend a different public school and direct a portion of district Title I funds towards transportation costs. In the most serious cases of school failure, families have the right to use Title I funds to attend a better public or private option (Congressional Research Service, 2001). The Every Student Succeeds Act includes a similar provision and allows students to attend another public school, including a charter, when one's current school is identified as in need of "comprehensive support and improvement" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 7).

Private Schools

Private schools are schools funded primarily with non-public funds. They served approximately 5 million K-12 students in the 2015-2016 school year, nearly 70% of them White non-Hispanic. The majority of U.S. private schools have a religious affiliation (Broughman et al., 2017). A portion of private school students use vouchers, education savings accounts, or tax credit scholarships, all public monies that can be put towards private school tuition costs (DeAngelis & Erickson, 2018; Wolf et al., 2018).

Nearly 200,000 students used a school voucher in the 2018-2019 school year, and approximately 340,000 more used tax credit scholarships and education savings accounts to attend a private school (School Choice Fast Facts and Statistics, 2019). According to EdChoice, a nonprofit group and school choice supporter, sixteen states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico have traditional school voucher programs. Pennsylvania, where the majority of study participants reside, does not, however it does offer a tax credit scholarship. Under the Opportunity

Scholarship Tax Program, students whose assigned neighborhood school ranks in the lowest performing 15% of all Pennsylvania public schools on the most recent state standardized assessment are eligible to apply for money to attend another public or private school. Charter schools are not approved alternatives for this scholarship (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.).

A critique of private schools is that they are uniquely positioned to garner a student body made up of the highest income and/or highest performing students. They can do so by offering the largest scholarships to the highest performing applicants and accepting lower performing applicants whose families are able to pay greater tuition costs (Epple et al., 2015). Generally, White students from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds and with well-educated parents are more likely to attend a private school (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

Students enrolled in a private school at the choice of a guardian are not afforded the same rights to special education services as students attending public schools. However, minimum requirements call for a special education evaluation at no cost to the family if requested (IEPs and 504 Agreements, n.d.). While students must be granted admission into a private school in order to attend, if a private school receives any federal funds, qualified students with dis/abilities cannot be denied access on the basis of their dis/ability status if an appropriate education can be provided with minor adjustments to the program (Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Handicap in Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance, 1980). This section of the law goes on to say students must be educated in the least restrictive environment (34 CFR § 104.34).

Magnet Schools

Different from the previously mentioned school choice options, magnet schools were originally designed with racial diversity as a core aim. The first magnet schools opened in the

1970s as alternatives to mandatory forced busing. The operating assumption was that families, regardless of race, would voluntarily send their students to an innovative and specialized school, naturally resulting in an integrated student body (Rossell, 2005). Magnet schools, a type of within-district school choice, serve the most students of all the school choice options in the U.S. (Frankenberg et al., 2011). They are free to attend and typically have a specified focus like engineering or the performing arts. Magnet schools do not draw students from a specified residential area (Archbald, 2004; Vopat, 2011). These schools are more likely to be present in large urban districts than suburban or rural ones, and applicants often exceed the number of seats available (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000).

Magnets are commonly structured in one of three ways. There are perfect magnets in which seats are filled through an application process and all students enrolled in the school are therefore part of the program. Partial magnet programs run within a neighborhood school. That is, students who have chosen or have otherwise been accepted into the magnet participate in its instructional program, but other students will go to school in the same building who are not in the magnet program. There are also magnet schools that are students' assigned neighborhood schools. In this case, all students enrolled in the school are also enrolled in the magnet program (Rossell, 2005).

A magnet school may be eligible to receive federal grant money through the Magnet Schools Assistance Program if it is implementing an approved desegregation plan or is choosing to actively promote racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity during the three year grant cycle. Considerations of project proposal reviewers include how funds will be used to improve student learning outcomes, encourage parental involvement, or deliver a high-quality instructional program (Magnet Schools Assistance Program, 2016).

Charter Schools

The School Structure Committee of the Minnesota based Citizens League (1988) and legislators defined charter schools in the following manner:

> A chartered school is one granted a "charter" by either a school or district or the state to be different in the way it delivers education, and within broad guidelines, to be autonomous. It need not be a school building. It may result in several schools in one building. It is the process of schooling and not the building itself that will differentiate a chartered school from a conventional one. The chartered school concept recognizes that different children learn in different ways and at different speeds, and teachers and schools should adapt to children's needs rather than requiring children to adapt to the standard system. (p. ii)

Minnesota was the first state to pass a charter school law in 1991. In 1992, City Academy, the first privately ran, publicly funded charter school opened in St. Paul. Since then, 43 additional states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation allowing charter school operation. Montana, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia do not offer this school choice option (NCES, 2019).

Charter school laws vary by state, but generally, charters operate outside many of the rules and regulations traditional public schools are bound to. They typically have the autonomy to establish their own schedules, curriculum, teacher certification expectations, mission statements, and board of trustees, but are held accountable to their authorizing body (Berends et al., 2020). With that said, charter schools must still adhere to federal and state special education, civil rights, and health and safety requirements, in addition to any other statutes stipulated in the charter and as agreed upon by the authorizer.

In the state of Pennsylvania, the law states charter schools must be non-profit institutions and can be established by an individual, teachers who will work at the proposed school, parents whose children will attend the proposed school, secular colleges or universities, corporations, museums, or some combination of these entities (Charter School Law Act, 1997). Once approved, charters are in effect for three to five years and can be renewed in five year increments if the authorizer determines the school has met the requirements of its charter (Charter School Law Act, 1997).

Pennsylvania charter schools operate with public funding and participate in the annual Pennsylvania Statewide Standardized Assessment. All students living in the Commonwealth can apply for admission, but preference must be given to those residing in the authorizing district and can be given to children of parents instrumental to the development of the school and siblings of students already attending (Charter School Law Act, 1997). The law makes clear charters may not discriminate on the basis of intellectual ability, English language proficiency, dis/ability status, or any other basis that would be illegal if done by a traditional public school district.

Additional School Choice Options

Moving into one's preferred school district has and continues to be a common way to enact school choice for those with the financial means to do so. According to a national survey, 30 percent of respondents with the highest educational attainment whose children attended an assigned public school reported moving to a particular neighborhood for the school. A quarter of respondents with a bachelor's degree reported doing the same. Of those with less than a high school diploma, fifteen percent moved to a locale for the assigned public school (NCES, 2019c).

Nearly all K-12 students are educated in traditional public or private settings, but some parents have chosen to educate their children at home. The number of students being

homeschooled has risen substantially over the last twenty years, notably so amongst Black families (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013; Ray, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The desire for a tailored academic program, safe social environment, strong family relationships, avoiding a culture of low expectations, and the ability to impart religious beliefs and values are among the reasons cited by parents to homeschool (Ray, 2015; Spiegler, 2017).

Relevant Theory

School choice policies are purportedly intended to mitigate the effects of disenfranchisement of marginalized students and their families, but research findings have been inconsistent about whether or not that is actually occurring. There is evidence pointing to school choice working as a mechanism by which schools are becoming more racially segregated (Archbald et al., 2017; Roda & Wells, 2013). Some say school choice as educational reform has not clearly served to improve the state of learning or allowed for true enactment of the normative ideals of democracy, agency, and freedom (Drame, 2010; Scott et al., 2015; Stevenson et al., 2012; Waitoller & Super, 2017).

The act of choosing a school has been simplified to the premise that parents will act as rational consumers, evaluating pros and cons, and selecting the school that best meets the needs of their child (Chapman & Donnor, 2015). If that premise is true, school choice should be relatively straightforward and lead to improved educational outcomes and increased social mobility for a student or family. What research has shown, however, is enacting school choice is much more complex and commonly intertwined with concepts of race, class, and ability (Ellison & Aloe, 2019; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016; Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

DisCrit

  In an attempt to understand the variable of school choice contextualized through the lenses of race and dis/ability from all sides, Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit, will stand as a guiding framework for the study. The creators of DisCrit, Annamma et al. (2013), argue identity is multi-faceted. Students of color with dis/abilities are both raced and dis/abled at once by the dominant culture, so both must be intentionally examined within and through the work of research. DisCrit is rooted in CRT and DS. CRT originated as a point of legal scholarship in response to the belabored progress of racial reform in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement called attention to explicit, large-scale forms of discrimination; however, CRT theorists identified a need to also address persistent, often less visible, racist ideologies (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

  Developing a CRT analytical lens is predicated on one's ability to draw upon experiences of oppression to analyze the social construct of race and the ways in which white supremacist ideals were established and are maintained. CRT rests on the tenet that racism is so engrained in our country's past that it is normal in our present society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Subsequently, its pervasiveness makes it difficult to disrupt. Second, those who benefit from racism, namely upper and working class Whites, are not motivated to do away with it. CRT theorists argue progress towards eradicating racism will occur only when the interests of Whites and people of color come together. Third, race is a social construct without biological explanation that is applied and manipulated to maintain structures of power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT values storytelling on the part of people of color as a means of communicating insight to White dominant society, and lastly, a fifth tenet explains personal identities are not singular, rather they

are made up of complex intersections (Cabrera, 2018). The creators of CRT argue gender and class, for example, are not enough to fully account for the disproportionalities in schools in areas like discipline, dropout, special education, and achievement. Thus, the construct of race must be operationalized. It is the potential influence of identity on the choice-making process that is of particular interest to the researcher.

DS theory calls attention to the discrimination and stereotyping of people with dis/abilities. It rejects the medical model of dis/ability which frames it as a deficit on the part of the individual or a problem to be fixed. Instead, members of the DS community name oppressive systems, prejudice, and closemindedness as primary problems and causes of dis/ability (Wendell, 2016, p.161). DS theorists are proponents of full societal inclusion (Connor et al., 2013). The field of Disability Studies has been criticized for its tendency to ignore the cross sections of dis/ability with other facets of identity like race and ethnicity. Bell's (2006) essay suggests the field would be more aptly named "White Disability Studies." In it, he draws attention to the positioning of whiteness as the norm in DS and a shortage of scholarship written by or about individuals with dis/abilities who are people of color.

DisCrit seeks to bring the two fields of DS and CRT together to address racism and ableism. Those in the minority are often considered by the dominant culture to be inferior, and personal and systemic biases contribute to educational inequities like the overrepresentation of Black and Brown students in special education, their underrepresentation in gifted programs (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2008), disproportionate dropout and suspension rates, and unnecessarily restrictive school placements (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Gold & Richards 2012). In the event one feels their child is unduly affected by such biases or is attending a school one considers to be ineffective, engaging in the school choice process may be a consideration.

Parents' School Satisfaction

An early study by Tuck (1995) defined parents' school satisfaction as the level of belief that certain practices of school management and teaching effectiveness are occurring at their child's school (p. 1). Other studies and reports on the topic fail to operationalize the term but parents' school satisfaction is relatively well-researched (Bitterman et al., 2008; Erickson, 1996: Kirk & Kafer, 2002; McCully et al., 2003). It has been shown that satisfied customers are more likely to communicate positive word-of-mouth messages that generate new referrals. Furthermore, "word-of-mouth has been found to decrease customers' perception of risk and increase their intention to buy the service" (File et al., 1992, p. 6). Similarly, it has been found parents' social networks are critical for information gathering and decision-making during the school choice process. Whether parents are satisfied or dissatisfied with their child's school experience, they tend to share this information with others (Altenhofen et al., 2016; Bell, 2007; Cooper & Letts, 2002; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016).

Parents who choose a school report higher levels of school satisfaction than those whose children attend the one assigned, although it is difficult to say whether it is the act of choosing itself, the actual implementation of a more effective educational program, or some combination of factors that accounts for the change (Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Kirk & Kafer, 2002; McCully & Malin, 2003). Parent satisfaction ratings for charter schools are often positive (Fiore et al., 2000; Finn et al., 2006; Lange & Lehr, 2000). Parents with children enrolled in charter schools are more likely than parents with children enrolled in traditional public schools to say they are very satisfied with their child's experience but less likely than private school parents to say so (Cheng & Peterson, 2017).

Freidman et al. (2006) examined similarities and differences in parents' school satisfaction by race and ethnicity using a questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed 13 core indicators derived from relevant literature at the time, and indicators included items like school communication, technology, facilities, school budget, and the principal. The participant group numbered over 27,000 people and was ~70% White, ~15% Hispanic, 11.5% Black, and ~4% Asian. Asian and White participants reported higher levels of education than Black and Hispanic participants. Regression analyses were conducted for each group.

Black parents were the least satisfied with their children's schools, Hispanic and White parents followed with results that were not significantly different from one another, and the highest school satisfaction ratings were reported by Asian parents. This is in contrast with Erickson (1996) who found no differences in satisfaction between ethnicities and Beck et al. (2014) who found no significant differences in parent satisfaction related to race or special education status at a cyber charter school. Freidman et al. (2006) found school safety ratings to be the most predictive factor of school satisfaction for all groups and noted Black parents were least likely to feel their child's school was safe and therefore least likely to feel satisfied with the school overall. Regardless of whether their child is attending a school they have chosen or one assigned to them, Black families more than any other racial group perceive their experience to be lacking (Cheng & Peterson, 2017). When individuals are members of doubly marginalized groups, like students of color with dis/abilities, this result may be even more pronounced.

Parents' Considerations in the School Choice Process

Parents of all races are most likely to name academic quality as the number one reason for choosing a school (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016), however parents' stated preferences and their resultant choices are not always aligned. Research by Bell (2007) showed only about half of

middle-class parents and just over a third of poor or working-class parents ended up choosing a non-failing school for their child. Stein et al. (2010) showed similar results in an analysis of parents' school choices in Indianapolis. Asian and White families are more likely to utilize choice to access higher performing schools than Latinx and Black families (Stevens et al., 2011). This could be due to inconsistent definitions of academic quality across groups. In the African American community, standardized test scores can be considered a tool of exclusion more so than an indicator of school quality, for example (Pattilo, 2015). It is also the case that some families experience barriers to activating control and agency in the school choice process.

Location

Location relative to one's home is a primary consideration of parents when choosing a school for their child (Andre-Bechley, 2007; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Glenn-Applegate et al., 2010; Ysseldyke, et al., 1992). Attending an academically high performing school may the ideal, but in reality, access to such schools can be limited by factors like safety, logistics, cost, and time. School choice advocates present it as a tool to provide all students with effective schooling but capitalizing on opportunities can be burdensome when effective schools are not close by. Research indicates poor students from violent neighborhoods must travel farther to take advantage of quality school choice options than their socioeconomically privileged peers who more often attend homogeneous schools with a greater proportion of their neighbors (Burdick-Will, 2017). In this case, those with the fewest resources incur the greatest cost. Subsequently, transportation to and from school impacts the school choice processes of economically disadvantaged families and may lead them to choose lower performing schools in close proximity to home (Kleitz et al., 2000; Pattilo, 2015).

Social Networks

As previously mentioned, parents' social networks play an important role in information gathering and the overall decision-making process for members of all demographic groups. With that said, there are some variations in how these networks function. A qualitative study by Lareau (2014) found individuals' networks were quite insular in the way they gathered and actualized information. People exchanged information with other people who were in a similar socioeconomic class, and they demonstrated little knowledge about schools in different neighborhoods. This was particularly true for middle and upper class families. They purchased homes and sent their children to schools not necessarily because they sufficiently researched all available options but because people in their network deemed select neighborhoods and schools acceptable. The resources and connections of affluent parents' social networks can be useful in the choice-making process, but they can also be a source of stress. At times, this results in privileged parents making choices that conflict with their personal values and desire for their children to attend racially diverse schools (Roda & Wells, 2013).

Middle class families of color rely on social networks as well, but some research has shown information gathered in this way is weighed along with information collected through one's personal research before a decision is made. In a study involving Black parents, they reported making lists of all schools in the area, reading school websites, going on school tours, and meeting with administrators. In addition to academic performance, Black parents were concerned with having a welcoming environment and feeling like partners with the school (Welcher, 2013).

In a study of Latinx families and their choice to enroll their children in magnet schools, they tended to demonstrate similar behaviors as Black middle class families but with a

noteworthy difference. Reliance on social networks was influenced by the number of first or second generation parents in the home. If neither parent was second generation, a rather small percentage, 20%, of participants reported learning about magnet schools from friends and family. There was a marked increase in the use of social capital when one parent was second generation and when both were, 67% and 100% respectively (Haynes et al., 2010). Even so, social networks were a single source of information. Participants still worked to collect additional information about schools outside of their assigned neighborhood public school using various tools.

Racial Composition of Schools

Studies suggest White, Black, and Latinx parents all tend to gravitate toward school populations in which their own race is the majority (Henig, 1990, 1996; Weiher & Tedin, 2002), however racial demographics appear to be of greatest concern to White parents (Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). Some go as far as eliminating predominantly Black schools as a first step in their decision-making process even when these schools have affluent and academically proficient students and when the alternative is a predominantly White school with lower performance (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). This phenomenon runs counter to what is expected according to market theory. White Americans tend to associate Blackness with a decrease in school quality (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010) and exercise their school choice opportunity by moving away from schools with higher percentages of Black students (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Dougherty et al., 2009; Sikkink et al., 2008). This trend juxtaposed with Ellison and Aloe's (2019) hypothesis that the country is on the precipice of a White flight reversal potentially complicates school choice decision-making processes even further.

Ellison and Aloe (2019) suggest members of the White liberal middle-class will move away from suburbs and back to city centers in search of green space, walkable neighborhoods,

and diversity. They found members of this group often wrestled with who they believed themselves to be and how this conflicted with what they thought would be best for their children. White parents who chose or considered choosing an urban public school perceived a certain level of risk involved with that decision. Participants worried about the poor quality of instruction, safety, and their children being part of a clear minority (Cucchiara, 2013). There was an incongruence between their reported values and what they chose. Further research is needed on the decision-making processes of White and/or privileged parents who are able to align belief systems and actions despite the perceived risks associated with urban schools (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Roda, 2018).

School Choice Considerations of Parents of Children with Dis/abilities

The topic of school choice is prevalent in the literature as is research on the decision-making processes of particular subsets of people, namely privileged Whites and low-income minority parents. Gaps in school choice literature exist regarding middle and upper class minorities, parents of children with dis/abilities (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011), and culturally and linguistically diverse parents of children with dis/abilities specifically (Mawene & Bal, 2018). Waitoller and Lubienski (2019) offer five factors that can influence the choice sets of parents of children with dis/abilities: (1) educational placement decisions, (2) quality and implementation of special education services, (3) school and neighborhood safety, (4) steering away practices of charter school staff, and (5) geographical location.

Educational placements are determined by a student's IEP team of which parents or guardians are a part. IDEA (2004) outlines students' rights to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. In the event that parents and schools disagree about what placement will allow both of those requirements to be met, parents in the state of Pennsylvania

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may choose to request facilitation, mediation, file a due process complaint (Procedural Safeguards Notice, 2018), or they may choose to withdraw their child from the school altogether and choose a different one. Students' specific needs can play a role in what schools parents can or will consider.

Expectedly, the quality and availability of special education services is a priority of parents of children with dis/abilities in the school choice process (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011; Glenn-Applegate et al., 2016; Waitoller & Super, 2017) as are school staff characteristics (Finn et al., 2006; Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). Whereas teacher effectiveness was of high concern for parents of students without dis/abilities, the research, although limited, points to the finding that parents of students with dis/abilities are equally concerned with the ways staff interact with their children. Parents who participated in the aforementioned studies were in search of teachers who were flexible, inclusive, responsive, and effective communicators.

Finding a school with quality special education programming and a responsive staff can be challenging. In the studies reviewed, many of the parents who engaged in the school choice process did so because they were dissatisfied with their previous school experience (Finn et al., 2006; Freeman et al., 1999; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Waitoller & Super, 2017; Ysseldyke et al., 1994). This is supported by the finding that parents of children with dis/abilities report lower school satisfaction than parents of children without dis/abilities (Arciuli et al., 2019; Zablotsky et al., 2012).

A third factor is safety. Safety is a top consideration of most parent groups when selecting a school (Altenhofen et al., 2016; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016), but school and neighborhood safety might be uniquely important to parents of children with dis/abilities. Waitoller and Lubienski (2019) highlight parents' perceptions of neighborhood safety for

students who demonstrate difficulty navigating social situations as well as bullying concerns in school. The latter concern is well-researched, and students with dis/abilities consistently report being bullied more often than their non-dis/abled peers (Carter & Spencer, 2006; Rose et al., 2015). Bullying can affect things like school attendance, academic engagement, and social and emotional adjustment (Hernandez et al., 2017). Charter schools are perceived by some parents of children with dis/abilities to have safer environments (Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Charter schools enroll a smaller proportion of students with dis/abilities than do traditional public schools, although there is a lot of variance between states. In Pennsylvania, the difference is quite small (Rhim & Kothari, 2018). Some attribute differences in enrollment to a practice of discouraging students with dis/abilities from attending. This "steering away" involves telling parents what the school can or cannot provide as opposed to discussing what students are entitled to under IDEA (Jessen, 2013; Waitoller & Super, 2017) or suggesting that larger public districts have the resources to offer more opportunities (Welner, 2013). If parents accept this information as fact, then choice sets become smaller.

A final factor for consideration is location, not necessarily in terms of proximity to one's home but in the types of schools locally available. School closings in neighborhoods primarily populated by people of color and the reopening of charter schools with limited special programming for students with moderate to severe dis/abilities is problematic (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019). Not only is access to necessary special education services limited but so then are school choice options.

Overview of Methodology

This study will implement Q methodology. Invented by psychologist and physicist William Stephenson in 1935, Q methodology interweaves the qualitative and quantitative in a

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continuous manner and has more recently been accepted as an MMR approach. Qualitative methods are most prominent in its design, and the application of quantitative methods is aimed at determining theoretical rather than statistical significance (Ramlo, 2016).

Q is described as a "powerful tool for understanding values, attitudes, and perspectives of marginalized communities while also maintaining close proximity to participant subjectivity" (Militello et al., 2016, p. 91). Its focus is on associations between participants and their relationship to a phenomenon or set of phenomena. This allows for an understanding of diverse perspectives (Brown, 1980; Burt & Stephenson, 1939). The variables in a Q study are the participants themselves, not tests or interventions as commonly seen in other methodologies. The measurable materials serve as the sample (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

In general, the Q technique is used to uncover different patterns of thought. It allows one to determine the types of people involved in a study, what people belong to each type, and what factors can be used to draw distinctions or parallels between and amongst participants (Damio, 2018). Key Q methodology vocabulary and definitions are provided in Appendix A. To follow is a description of the main steps of Q Methodology including concourse development, finalizing the Q set, data collection by way of Q sorts, and the analysis of data through inter-correlation and by-person factor analysis.

Implementing Q Methodology

Concourse Development. Q studies begin with the development of the concourse, or a collection of self-referable statements on a topic (Brown, 1993; Stephenson, 1993, 1994). Concourse theory allows for statements to be retrieved in formal and informal ways (Brown, 1993; Cross, 2004). Traditionally, concourses are developed from linguistic sources, but sources like photographs, music, and even scents have been used (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). In this

study, potential sources for concourse development will include academic literature on school choice, commentary found in local and national news, relevant and recurring themes encountered on social media outlets, websites, and published texts. The concourse is only to be made of opinions, not facts (Brown, 1993).

Concourse development is meant to be an inclusive process, soliciting the perspectives of a wide range of voices and working in support of the DisCrit tenets previously mentioned. Stakeholders in this study may include, but not be limited to, parents of students with and without dis/abilities, employees of education-focused non-profit organizations and intermediate units, outside service providers, teachers, school leaders, and school psychologists. Concourse development is intended to capture diverse opinions that can be used to structure the Q set for participants to sort in the next phase of the study.

Q Set. Broadly speaking, there are two ways to derive the Q set, a structured or unstructured approach. A structured technique is informed by Fisher's balanced block design (Brown, 1970, 1993; Stephenson 1993, 1994). Stephenson (1993, 1994) advises the researcher to first approach the concourse on a "prima facie" basis and to include only those statements which are subjective. The researcher then reviews all concourse statements with the assumption that there are themes that can tie all statements together. Once those themes are identified, applying a balanced block approach would call for each theme to have the same number of statements included in the final Q set with the goal being the reduction of bias and production of a sample as representative of the concourse as possible (Stephenson 1953, 1993, 1994). Challenges may arise, however, if themes do not accurately reflect the full breadth and depth of the concourse or if the concourse does not lend itself to the parameters imposed by the block design (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

An unstructured approach may still include the identification of themes, but it allows for more flexibility on the part of the researcher in how the Q set is constructed. It need not take the form of four blocks of ten statements, for example, but lengths must still be taken to ensure the Q set is complete. An unstructured approach is not as rigid and because of this, it calls for a researcher's thorough understanding of the subject and the literature in order to effectively prepare a balanced final Q set (Watts & Stenner, 2012). School choice can be rather controversial in some contexts, but in anticipation of more subtle nuances in response from parents that may not need to be encapsulated in defined categories, an unstructured approach will be employed in this study. The researcher will seek out volunteers from her personal network to undergo preliminary Q sorts and seek feedback on the quality and clarity of statements. Revisions and edits will take place as needed.

Several recommendations have been made by theorists about the number of Q statements to include in a Q set deck. Denzine (1998) advises at least 60 statements should be used for the purposes of statistical reliability and validity, Watts and Stenner (2012) suggest 40 to 60 statements, and Brown (1980) offers that most Q sets operate with 40 to 50 statements. Nearly all of the more recent Q studies reviewed in preparation for this study utilized between 45 and 70 statements depending on the nature of the issue being explored (examples are Cuppen et al., 2016; Fontein-Kuipers, 2016; Kirschbaum et al., 2019). In order to mitigate the potential for fatigue and in consideration of participants' time, this researcher intends to compile a statement set of 40 to 60 cards. If fewer than 40 distinct self-referable statements are identified, a -4 to +4 scale will be used instead (McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

P Set. A large P set, or participant group as it is referred to in Q, is not necessary as differences in factors can appear with a small number of Q sorts completed (Valenta & Wigger,

1997; Watts & Stenner, 2005). In contrast to R methodological studies where by-variable factor analysis is carried out and large numbers of participants are preferred, Q studies carry out by-person analysis in which the participants themselves are the variables (Brown, 1980). The primary concern of Q is not statistical significance as it relates to associations and differences between variables in a population but rather gleaning information about associations and differences in the perspectives of individuals (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Any generalizations that are made, therefore, are made regarding viewpoints on a given topic.

Selection of the P set should be purposeful and take into consideration the intended research question and subject matter as opposed to a random sampling of individuals. At the same time, efforts should be made to try to ensure members of the P set are representative of varying viewpoints and experiences (Stickl, 2018). Regarding the P Set, Brown (1980) writes:

> All that is required are enough subjects to establish the existence of a factor for purposes of comparing one factor with another. What proportion of the population belongs in one factor rather than another is a wholly different matter and one about which Q technique as such is not concerned (p. 192).

Watts and Stenner (2012), like Brown, acknowledge there is no need to have an especially large P set but suggest as a general rule of thumb to keep the number of participants less than the number of statements in the Q set. McKeown and Thomas (2013) offer 30-50 participants is typically adequate for uncovering a range of viewpoints.

Q Sort. The primary data collection technique of Q is a Q sort. Traditionally, Q sorting begins with the presentation of the Q set - often a selection of cards with individual Q set items printed on each one - along with conditions of instruction that participants should use to guide the sorting process. Participants are directed to familiarize themselves with the overall

presentation of opinion statements by reading each one. As they do so, they can begin sorting them into broad category piles like agree, disagree, and neutral. The operating assumption of this rank-ordering procedure is that most participants will feel strongly about a relatively small number of statements and average about the majority, ultimately resulting in a distribution of cards resembling a bell-curve (Brown, 1980, p. 195).

Using the three piles, participants then rank-order statements starting with the statements they feel most strongly in agreement or disagreement with, alternating back and forth, and moving towards the center using a template for distribution (see Figure 1). Participants must make decisions about the personal significance of individual statements or their level of agreement with said statements as they sort.

Figure 1.

Example Q Sort Fixed Distribution Matrix
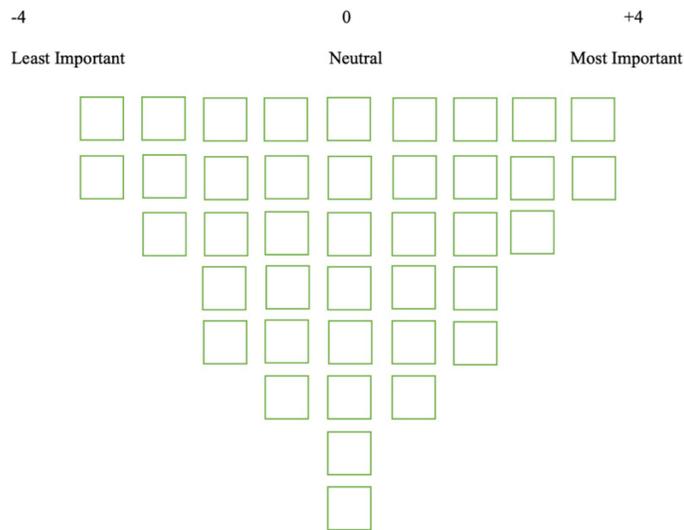
The reason for beginning with the poles of a continuum and working inward follows from the probability that sorters are more confident when judging the extremes, unlike those in the middle, where clarity and judgment are more problematic. The alternating process

helps consideration of the significance of each item in relation to the others (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.29)

When conducted in person with physical materials, the sort concludes with the recording of each statement and its position on a piece of paper displaying the fixed distribution matrix.

The Q method has been criticized by some for the potential influence of the researcher on participants when sorts are conducted in person as they historically have been. Critics say the researcher's presence can affect the reproducibility of findings. Several computer-based tools like Q-Assessor, Flash Q, Q-sorTouch, and others have been developed enabling participants to engage in an online or computer-based format. Differences have not been observed between sorts completed in a computer format versus in person, on paper (Nazariadli, 2019).

Post-Sort Interview. Data collection concludes with an interview between the researcher and participant. This is an opportunity to examine a particular point or factor more deeply. The overall aim is to explore significance and meaning in order to gain a thorough understanding of the individual's perspective. Possible questions could involve statements placed in the most extreme positions at the two poles or may seek elaboration on statements that seem to be unusually placed (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Data Analysis

Analysis of Q data involves both quantitative and qualitative processes. Quantitative analysis will be carried out within the web-based program Q-Assessor beginning with the production of a correlation matrix which allows the researcher to see preliminarily how Q sorts are related to one another. A correlational value of +.80 would represent a strong positive linear relationship while a value of -.80 would be indicative of a strong negative linear relationship. Factors are then extracted via centroid factor analysis. Both centroid factor analysis and principal

component analysis are available in Q-Assessor, however centroid factor analysis is the default method. Principal component analysis provides a straightforward quantitative solution, but the centroid method's openness and indeterminacy in this regard is considered more conducive to perspective taking and theoretical exploration. It is generally the preferred method of Q methodologists (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2005, 2012).

At this stage, the researcher must make determinations about which factors to retain and further analyze. Factor loadings, explained variance, and eigenvalues will be used to help make this determination (Brown, 1980; Mertler & Reinhart, 2016; Watts & Stenner, 2012). This is followed by by-person factor analysis and varimax rotation to obtain groups of arrays that are clustered together (Zabala, 2014). Participants whose Q sorts demonstrate statistical significance with one of the rotated school choice factors will then be associated with a factor (Gallagher & Porock, 2010). In Q, the factors are groups of people who have expressed similar opinions by way of the Q sort (Valenta & Wigger, 1997). Factor loadings can range from -1.00 to +1.00, and the closer a loading is to either extreme, the more highly correlated an individual's Q sort array is with a particular factor.

The final step of analysis is factor interpretation. The aim is identifying both distinct perspectives and points of consensus on a topic (Militello et al., 2016). Statements placed in the most extreme positions, (+4) versus (-4), can illuminate what may be the clearest distinctions in perspective between individuals and groups, however attention paid to nuances of opinion in the more central regions is necessary if a holistic interpretation is desired (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Analysis of participants' interview responses to open-ended questions will also inform the final interpretation.

Conclusion

Chapter II presents a review of school choice literature. Discussed in research are parents of color and students with dis/abilities, but almost never were the intersections of race and dis/ability explicitly addressed. A goal of this study is to acknowledge the complexity and multiplicity of identity and to elevate the experiences of those who are overwhelmingly left out of the research narrative. An overview of Q Methodology was also provided.

Chapter III

METHOD

Chapter III details the methodologies used in this mixed methods research study. The study intends to provide information about factors relevant to the process that Black parents of students with dis/abilities consider when selecting a school. This chapter includes a description of research design and details of participants and settings, key measures, procedures, statistical analysis, and ethical considerations of the researcher. Again, this study was designed to answer the question: (1) What factors are important to Black parents of students with dis/abilities when choosing a school for their child?

Research Design

Multiple definitions of mixed methods research (MMR) have been proposed (Johnson et al., 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe MMR as the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data and the application of designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theory. A mixed methods approach employs quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study in order to gain a more complete understanding of a phenomena than either one would on its own (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this reason, the researcher seeks to apply "multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important…" (Greene, 2008, p. 20) in order to gain insight into the decision-making processes of Black parents of students with dis/abilities.

The chosen methodology, Q Methodology, is used to study human subjectivity, a term referring to the things said, either aloud or to one's self, from one's own perspective, and excluding that which is objective (Brown, 2019). Its distinct set of procedures for data collection

and analysis are described in detail in Chapter II. To follow is a description of concourse and Q

set development, P set selection, and the relevant Q-Assessor configurations in this study.

Rationale for the Use of Q Methodology

Q Methodology allows an individual to "represent his or her vantage point for purposes

of holding it constant for inspection and comparison" (Coogan & Herrington, 2011, p. 24). It

allows researchers to qualitatively and quantitatively examine patterns in individual responses

and correlations between people. Meaning is not applied or suggested prior to the study being

carried out; participants actively determine what is and is not significant through the Q sorting

process (Ward, 2009).

Q emphasizes stakeholder engagement in the construction of understanding and works as

a tool to move control and power from the researcher to the participants themselves (Militello,

2016). Q can be used to (1) identify important internal and external consistencies, (2) define

participant viewpoints and perceptions, (3) provide sharper insight into preferred management

directions, (4) identify criteria important to clusters of individuals, (5) examine areas of friction,

consensus, and conflict, and (6) isolate gaps in shared understanding (Brown, 2004, as cited in

Damio, 2016).

Factor analysis from a strictly quantitative position is aimed at determining differences

and associations between groups. Group comparison is achievable with Q, and in fact,

association of individuals with emergent factors is used by researchers in the interpretation of

sorting data. However, Q methodology differs from approaches invested primarily in correlations

between variables in its strong focus on the individual. Watts and Stenner (2012) describe it as a

method with an "exploratory heritage" designed to facilitate the self-categorization of

participants and their expression of personal perspectives on a research topic (p. 53). They also

suggest research questions to be explored through Q methodology are ones that are narrowly focused, aimed at a specific group or demographic. Furthermore, a small participant group is not uncommon and even typical (McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

Finally, Q has been cited for its ability to engage members of communities who have been marginalized (Militello, 2016). A listening stance can be assumed by the researcher as participants demonstrate and share opinions in post-sort interviews, making space for the individuals to speak about their own experiences. Previte et al. (2007) also write that Q "opens up multiplicity, complexity, tension and inconsistency in subjectivities and between subjectivities" (p.14), hopefully allowing researchers to avoid the oversimplification of perspectives. For these reasons, Q was determined to be an appropriate methodology for this study.

Procedure for Q Sort Data Collection

Q Set Development

The following three steps were taken to create the Q set: (1) a concourse of opinion statements relevant to the topic of study was compiled, (2) all concourse statements were evaluated by members of an expert panel, and (3), Q set statements were selected using quantitative consensus criteria and research literature.

Concourse Development. A concourse of 72 opinion statements was compiled by the researcher after a comprehensive review of literature and other sources of commentary on the topic of school choice and dis/ability. Other concourse statement sources included online blogs, news articles, social media postings, organizational webpages, and parent video testimonials. Broad categories can be observed in the concourse as many statements are related to the academic aspects of schooling, safety and discipline, characteristics of school staff, facilities and

extracurriculars, public perception and social networks, family values and needs, and special education services.

Seventy-two concourse statements were presented to panel members in order to evaluate the concourse. This panel removed the items thought to be minimally important or unimportant to Black parents of children with dis/abilities in the school choice process and selected the 40 statements thought to be most important to consider. The entire concourse can be viewed in Appendix B. Example statements are: (a) a school's performance on state assessments, (b) class size, (c) the selectivity of a school, or how carefully a school selects its students, (d) the requirement of an exam or audition as part of the application process, and (e) a specialized curriculum focus (e.g. language, math, or entrepreneurship).

Panel Review. All concourse statements were reviewed and sorted by a six-person expert panel using a five-point scale ranging from 1 which was labeled as "not important at all" to 5, "very important," an approach inspired by Kirschbaum et al. (2019). The six person panel consisted of individuals with varying lenses and positions relevant to the research question (e.g., a special education director, two teachers, a grandparent of a child with a dis/ability, a former school administrator and education consultant, and an officer at an education-focused non-profit organization). Panel members completed their ratings individually using MURAL, an online whiteboard workspace (Suarez-Battan et al., 2011), by placing each of the 72 concourse statements under the numbered category with corresponding qualitative descriptions they deemed most appropriate (See Figure 2). Panel members were also able to suggest statements be added for consideration. Conditions for sorting provided to panel members can be viewed in Appendix C.

Figure 2.

Example MURAL sorting template

Not important at all	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important

Finalization of the Q Set. An unstructured approach was utilized to develop the Q set, meaning statements were chosen in a way presumed to provide comprehensive coverage of opinions without strict use of experimental design principles (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Panel member feedback and consensus criteria were used to guide the finalization of the Q Set and reduce researcher bias (see Table 1). Inclusion criteria considered the median and interquartile range of expert panel scores (Mengual-Andres et al., 2016).

Table 1

Consensus Criteria

Agreement	Median $\geq$ 4, IQR $\leq$ 1.5
	Median $\geq$ 4, IQR $\leq$ 2, frequency [4–5] $\geq$ 70 %
Disagreement	Median $\leq$ 3.5, IQR $\leq$ 1.5
	Median $\leq$ 3.5 IQR $\leq$ 2, frequency [1–3] $\geq$ 70 %
Neutral	Median $\geq$ 3.5, IQR $\leq$ 2

Panel members reached consensus on 35 of the 72 statements. All 35 were included in the final Q set. In addition, "the distance between our home and my child's school" and "the recommendations of friends, family, or other members of one's social network" were added due to their representation as recurring factors of parent consideration in the literature. The remaining three statements included in the Q set were suggested by panel members and are as follows: "the school's culture," "a school's outreach and enrollment process", "the school's deliberate

structures for student support (e.g. advisory, buddy program, orientation)." The final Q set included 40 statements; they are listed in Appendix D.

Q Sorting Software: Q-Assessor

All Q sorts in this study were completed using a web-based program called Q-Assessor. Q-Assessor is designed specifically for Q studies, enabling researchers to obtain participant consent, pose post-sort interview questions to participants, securely store and manage participant data, and analyze data as it is collected in a single platform. To configure the study, three emails were composed. The first was crafted to obtain consent and share unique Q sort links with participants. The second email was a reminder automatically sent by Q-Assessor after a period of inactivity on the part of the participant. Lastly, a thank you email was sent to participants upon submission of a completed sort (see Appendix E).

Q set statements were entered and sorting bins were configured to reflect the desired forced distribution grid. In this study, participants used a vertically grouped button interface to electronically sort 40 statements into a pre-determined grid like the one displayed in Figure 3. In Q-Assessor, participants are able to change the ranking positions of statements as they see fit prior to submission.

Figure 3.

Q Sort Grid

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

P Set Selection

The participant group included 20 individuals who were parents or guardians of children with dis/abilities and identified as Black or African American. Eighteen were female and two were male. The majority of participants attended college or post-secondary training programs, and all resided in the Northeastern region of the country. To be included in the study, each participant's child(ren) were presently or previously enrolled full time in a school (i.e., assigned school, charter, private, magnet, or homeschooled. All participants had to be fluent English readers and have reliable internet access.

Sampling

The research question is concerned with Black parents of children with dis/abilities specifically, therefore a non-random sampling approach was employed. Upon approval from the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, the researcher commenced with recruitment through word-of-mouth solicitation, social media postings (see Appendix F), and direct email

invitation. Snowball sampling was also attempted. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked in the post-sort interview if they knew of any other individuals who should be contacted by email with a study invitation. Participants were enrolled in the study by entering their email addresses. Upon enrollment, participants were sent a consent form, a unique Q sort link to complete the Q sort, and a link to a two-minute instructional video made by the researcher.

Setting

In regard for participants' safety due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, pilot concourse development and Q sorts were conducted remotely using web-based interfaces. All study participants were able to complete their Q sorts while having the researcher present with them on Zoom using video, audio, or both, however most participants preferred to complete the sort independently after viewing the instructional video.

Q Sorting Process

Participants completed the Q sorting process in the following steps:

1. Through Q-Assessor, prospective participants were sent an email in which they could indicate their consent to proceed by clicking the link "Yes, I want to participate in this study." Refusal could be indicated by clicking "No, I do not want to participate in this study."

2. If yes, participants' web browsers automatically opened to the study's start page. Participants clicked a button saying "Let's get started" before beginning the sorting process.

3. Participants completed an initial round of sorting in which they sorted all statements into three general categories of very important, neutral, and least important.

4. Participants rank-ordered all statements in the Q set.

The process is further illustrated with screenshots displayed in Appendix G.

Post-Sort Information Gathering

Once all statements were sorted, participants were asked to respond to four interview questions in Q-Assessor. This step is intended to provide the participant with an opportunity to explain their decisions or approach to sorting, and their responses may be used by the researcher to inform data interpretation.

Questions were presented to participants in the order they appear below:

1. Please explain why you've placed those particular statements in the "very important" and "not at all important positions."

2. Do you think any statements were missing from the cards? If so, what are they?

3. Were any statements confusing or unclear?

4. Were any statements especially hard to place?

There was also space for participants to share email addresses of others who may be interested in participating in the study. Follow-up interviews were conducted with seven participants.

Data Analysis

Q-Assessor analyzes data as it is collected and makes it available to the investigator in real-time. Initial output includes a correlation matrix and factor analysis of unrotated factors extracted using the centroid method. The investigator is given the choice to proceed with varimax rotation, manual rotation, or both. The researcher chose to use both. Once the investigator makes determinations about which factors to retain, Q-Assessor produces a variety of tables including rank statement totals for each factor, factor loadings, distinguishing and consensus statements for each factor, and normalized factor scores.

Validity and Reliability Measures in Q

Q is carried out in order for a researcher to understand what and how people believe. It is not meant to derive causation or to answer research questions posed in experimental research requiring larger sample sizes to avoid errors in measurement. Tests of validity for the Q sort are largely deemed unnecessary because there is no outside criterion by which to evaluate significance other than the participants' internal frames of reference (Brown, 2019; Ward, 2010).

Reliability of Q methodology has been demonstrated through test-retest procedures. When giving the same Q set to the same group of individuals at two different points in time, results were most often consistent across trials at a value of .80 or higher (Brown, 1980, 1993; Dennis, 1992). Findings were also maintained when administering the same Q set to different P sets (Valenta & Wigger, 1997).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher is employed at a school from which some research participants were recruited. The researcher did not foresee any concern for increased bias but has acknowledged its possibility. Safeguards to minimize this possibility included an emphasis on perspective gathering from a wide variety of stakeholders in support of a complete and balanced concourse, pilot testing of the Q set prior to study implementation, thorough review of the academic literature on school choice and its relationship to students with dis/abilities, and the use of statistical and data management software for part of the analysis of data.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the considerations of Black parents of children with dis/abilities. Specifically, it was designed to investigate the factors participants view as most and least important to consider when choosing a school for their child. This chapter presents the results and summary of analysis.

P Set

Data was obtained using the web-based software program Q-Assessor. Twenty Q sorts from participants identifying as Black or African American parents or guardians of children with dis/abilities were completed over a three month period. Requests to share study recruitment materials were sent to personnel in multiple school districts, churches, non-profit organizations, and on social media.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Factor Group	Number of Participants	Number of Children Represented	Grades of Child(ren) in 2020-2021 school year
A	3	3	3, 8, 9
B	3	3	2, 5, post-secondary
D	2	2	7, adult
F	6	9	K, 1, 2, 2, 5, 6, 6, 7, 11
Sorts not loading onto Factor A, B, D, or F	6	7	6, 6, 7, 9, 10, adult, adult

Q Set

The Q set was finalized with the feedback of six pilot panel members initially presented with a concourse of 72 statements. Using the consensus criteria outlined in Chapter 3, Table 1, 35 statements were identified. Panel members suggested the addition of three more statements.

The final two statements to complete the 40 item Q set were statements 31 and 32 (see Appendix D). Panel members did not achieve consensus on statements 31 and 32, however, school location and social network recommendations were both recurring themes indicated in research literature and therefore were included.

Study participants completed a first-order sorting of all Q set statements into three categories of importance: very important, neutral, and least important. Next, participants rank-ordered the same statements into a forced distribution matrix where (-4) was described as least or not at all important and (+4) as very important. The distribution of statements and corresponding rank are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Forced Distribution

Ranking Value	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
Number of Statements	2	3	5	6	8	6	5	3	2

Analysis of Data

Data from twenty Q sorts were analyzed by Q-Assessor. A correlation matrix was produced, allowing for initial observation of patterns of agreement and disagreement amongst sorts. Values greater than twice the standard error were considered significant (Brown, 1993). The standard error ($1/\sqrt{n}$ where n is the number of Q set items) was 0.16, therefore values $> \pm$ 0.32 are bolded in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix

Sorts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	-	26	-1	18	**38**	12	**39**	25	15	17	**32**	-5	18	15	4	27	16	8	31	-1
2		-	14	17	22	25	**32**	16	19	28	22	-5	7	**38**	8	14	9	**41**	11	19
3			-	-11	**32**	26	29	**42**	13	24	18	18	9	23	**35**	22	30	17	24	2
4				-	20	-4	**53**	13	15	13	3	1	2	21	-8	-4	4	16	**-4**	8
5					-	-13	**42**	29	10	25	-18	-19	1	-11	14	19	8	14	**39**	-24
6						-	8	18	**47**	29	**36**	27	16	**41**	26	1	**59**	19	2	26
7							-	4	1	24	21	-10	22	**41**	22	16	15	9	15	-11
8								-	35	16	24	4	-3	1	1	12	19	21	5	14
9									-	24	0	12	2	6	9	12	21	26	12	4
10										-	31	8	7	31	17	9	27	5	**35**	5
11											-	4	4	29	10	17	**38**	15	1	2
12												-	3	13	9	-1	18	18	-14	30
13													-	**40**	4	15	19	-5	-9	**38**
14														-	12	9	**33**	19	**5**	46
15															-	6	5	1	29	-16
16																-	9	18	**32**	14
17																	-	15	14	4
18																		-	-2	9
19																			-	-7
20																				-

Note. Significant correlations (> ± 0.32) are bolded. The correlations are formatted to omit the decimal point for space considerations.

Thus: a correlation of "20" is a value of "0.20".

Seven factors, labeled by Q-Assessor as factors A through G, were extracted by default using the centroid method. Together, the factors explained 41% of the total variance. Determinations about how many of the seven extracted factors to retain were made using two criteria. The first criterion was the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, which suggests the retention of factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. Factors A, B, D, and F satisfied this condition and were further evaluated. Factors C, E, and G were not given any other consideration.

The second criterion for retention was the presence of two or more significant factor loadings. A factor loading is significant at the 0.01 level if it meets or exceeds 2.58 times the standard error (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this study, significant factor loadings at the 0.01 level would be loadings greater than or equal to $\pm$ .41. Only factors A, B, and D satisfied this criterion. However, factor F, accounted for a slightly higher variance than factor D, had a higher eigenvalue, and the product of its two greatest loadings exceed the standard error (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Therefore, the decision was made to retain factor F for further analysis. Factor loadings for all unrotated factors are displayed in Table 5. Again, significant loadings are bolded.

Table 5

Original Unrotated Factors

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	h²
1	**0.45986**	-0.3549	0.09661	0.1246	0.01619	-0.2277	0.06626	0.4188
2	**0.50072**	-0.1497	0.01551	-0.2083	0.03638	-0.1023	0.06748	0.3331
3	**0.50597**	0.04924	0.00225	0.17427	0.03091	0.34203	-0.3208	0.5097
4	0.23238	-0.2941	0.06423	-0.2249	0.04301	-0.2057	0.19745	0.2783
5	0.30853	**-0.658**	**0.48644**	0.30918	0.10019	0.20818	-0.1338	0.9315
6	**0.56071**	**0.48965**	0.21423	-0.1104	0.00904	0.20587	0.31289	0.7527
7	**0.51386**	-0.1943	0.02683	0.18871	0.03615	-0.3639	0.16199	0.4982
8	**0.40585**	-0.1071	0.00756	-0.053	0.00161	0.19594	-0.1822	0.2507
9	0.38719	-0.0624	0.0023	-0.3079	0.08605	0.38864	0.13234	0.4245
10	**0.52089**	0.00857	0.00023	0.09645	0.01002	0.06346	0.2056	0.3271
11	0.39311	0.15078	0.0181	0.05578	0.00373	-0.0663	0.20898	0.2287
12	0.14511	0.3598	0.10638	-0.1824	0.02726	0.13551	-0.131	0.2315
13	0.25432	0.21739	0.03747	0.01992	0.00069	-0.3751	-0.1609	0.2804
14	**0.57587**	0.36326	0.10897	-0.0238	9.0E-05	**-0.4484**	0.03929	0.6786
15	0.25351	0.04393	0.00172	0.24957	0.06341	0.20356	0.07071	0.1789
16	0.33344	-0.1421	0.01378	0.15345	0.02413	-0.0404	-0.232	0.2111
17	**0.50159**	0.29297	0.06901	0.07294	0.00601	0.12055	0.05019	0.3645
18	0.36021	-0.1279	0.01101	**-0.4113**	0.1698	0.07994	-0.0306	0.3515
19	0.29531	-0.166	0.01915	**0.47579**	0.27913	0.12233	0.06547	0.4388
20	0.21702	0.26991	0.05818	**-0.4177**	0.1765	-0.2766	-0.3311	0.5152
Eigenvalues	3.2949	1.5194	0.3307	1.0888	0.1665	1.1532	0.6503	n/a
% Total Variance	16.4745	7.597	1.6535	5.444	0.8325	5.766	3.2515	41.019

Note. Factor loadings > ± .41 are in boldface. h² = communality

Composite reliability coefficients, a measure of internal consistency, are displayed in

Table 6. They are above the acceptable range of 0.6 to 0.7 (Hamid et al., 2017).

Table 6

Factor Characteristics

Characteristics	Factors			
	A	B	D	F
Number of Defining Variables	3	3	2	6
Composite Reliability	0.923	0.923	0.889	0.96
Standard Error of Factor Scores	0.277	0.277	0.333	0.2

Finally, Factors A, B, D, and F were subjected to varimax rotation. After varimax rotation, the four factor solutions accounted for 11 of the 20 total sorts. Two additional manual rotations were carried out in order to obtain the most interpretable factors. Factors A and B were rotated 5 degrees clockwise, then factors F and G were rotated 30 degrees counterclockwise. This resulted in the significant loading of three more sorts according to the Fuerntratt Criterion for a total of 14 (Table 7).

Table 7

Significant Factor Loadings by the Fuerntratt Criterion

Factor	Q Sort Numbers	Cumulative Total Sorts
A	1, 4, 7	3
B	13, 14, 20	6
D	9, 18	8
F	3, 6, 10, 11, 15, 17	14
Non-significant	2, 5, 8, 12	18
Non-retained	16, 19	20

Significance according to the Fuerntratt criterion is quite rigorous and takes into account the Q sort's communality, or value explained by all factors, in addition to the Q sort factor loading (Churruca et al., 2014; Watts & Stenner, 2012). All significant sorts loaded on only one factor. Four sorts did not significantly load onto any factors. Two sorts significantly loaded onto

the unretained factors E and G. Together, factors A, B, D, and F accounted for just over 32% of the total explained variance. This falls short of the target 35% or above (Kline, 1994, as cited in Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Table 8

Factor Loadings for Four Rotated Factors

	A	B	D	F	h²
1	**0.57761**	0.0891	0.07395	0.17425	0.4187
2	0.35936	0.1742	0.34761	0.22481	0.3330
3	-0.07493	0.03991	0.13406	**0.5406**	0.5096
4	**0.42337**	0.06528	0.27622	-0.06312	0.2784
5	0.40695	-0.24519	0.09913	0.14966	0.9316
6	-0.06597	0.13772	0.24204	**0.71164**	0.7527
7	**0.61549**	0.19631	-0.02544	0.2477	0.4982
8	0.07331	0.03262	0.26036	0.30339	0.2507
9	0.00279	-0.13942	**0.55348**	0.31359	0.4245
10	0.27804	-0.00741	0.14012	**0.46543**	0.3271
11	0.19789	0.11038	0.04657	**0.37143**	0.2289
12	-0.30108	0.2197	0.1453	0.24447	0.2314
13	0.12209	**0.47652**	-0.12024	0.14307	0.2805
14	0.27787	**0.60417**	-0.02765	0.43267	0.6786
15	0.03106	-0.12307	-0.01985	**0.34796**	0.1789
16	0.1933	0.13262	0.00922	0.20188	0.2113
17	0.00773	0.14832	0.8838	**0.57253**	0.3646
18	0.11066	0.14722	**0.55147**	0.09846	0.3515
19	0.22315	-0.14306	-0.08439	0.29146	0.4387
20	-0.11794	**0.64704**	0.2714	-0.00133	0.5152
Eigenvalues	1.6153	1.3505	1.1151	2.3641	n/a
% Total Variance	8.0765	6.7525	5.5755	11.8205	32.225

Note. Factor loadings significant by the Fuerntratt criterion are in boldface. *h2 = communality*

Factor Arrays

Model factor arrays are composite sorts. They display best estimates or what is a typical response for sorters associated with a specific factor (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The resultant rank values included in a group's factor array are not necessarily identical to the responses observed in the individual sorts of participants associated with that group. This is because individuals load onto factors in varying degrees. For example, one can see in Table 8 that an individual's sort loaded onto factor F at a value of 0.5406 where another factor F group member loaded at a value of 0.71164. Factor arrays for each factor are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9

Factor Array Values for Each Statement

	Statements	Factors			
		A	B	D	F
1	Teachers' level of experience working with students with needs similar to that of my child	3	2	-3	1
2	A school's philosophy on inclusion	-2	0	1	2
3	A school's approach to students with emotional and/or behavioral needs	2	3	1	3
4	How welcoming the school environment appears to be	-4	1	-1	-2
5	The willingness of school staff to form relationships with students and families	-3	0	1	-1
6	The amount of individualized attention students receive	-2	2	1	2
7	Whether students who attend the school do well in the next phase of their education or life (e.g. high school performance, college acceptance rates, job placement)	-3	2	0	-1
8	A school's approach to prevent and deal with bullying	-2	-4	0	1
9	General education teachers' attitudes about students with dis/abilities	-2	-1	3	2
10	The school's suspension and/or expulsion rates	-1	-3	-3	-4
11	The cleanliness of the school building and grounds	-2	0	-1	0
12	Staffs' approach to parent communication and informing parents of students' progress	1	2	1	0
13	Class size	0	0	-2	-1
14	Whether the school appears to have a nurturing learning environment	-3	0	0	2
15	The rate of academic growth students at the school make from one year to the next	0	4	2	0
16	The racial diversity of the student body	4	-1	-2	-2

17	Whether the school's curriculum includes the use of a hands-on or discovery approach to learning	2	-1	0	1
18	Protecting my child from the racist attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers	4	3	2	1
19	How a school is described or discussed by the students who attend it	-1	-2	-4	-2
20	If/how Black people are represented in the curriculum	1	-2	4	-3

Table 9 Continued

21	Whether the school uses a curriculum that will challenge my child	0	4	0	0
22	It's important to consider a school's foreign language program.	-1	-3	-4	-3
23	Whether the curriculum or program offerings align with my child's interests	1	1	-1	-2
24	A school's student-teacher ratio	-1	-1	1	1
25	The proportion of students of the same race as my child	0	-4	-2	-3
26	If/how individuals with dis/abilities are represented in the curriculum	-1	-3	2	3
27	The clarity and application of a school's discipline policy	0	-2	2	-1
28	The school's reputation	2	0	2	0
29	Whether the school uses an instructional approach that encourages my child's curiosity	0	0	0	0
30	Staff qualifications	1	3	0	2
31	The distance between our home and my child's school	-1	1	-2	-4
32	The recommendations of friends, family, or other members of one's social network	0	-1	3	-1
33	The racial diversity of the staff	2	1	-1	-1
34	The school's use of co-taught classrooms where a general education teacher and special education teacher teach together	3	-2	-1	4
35	A school's outreach and enrollment process	-4	-1	-2	-2
36	The school's culture	1	2	-1	0
37	The school's deliberate structures for student support (e.g. advisory, buddy program, orientation)	0	0	0	3
38	Students' access to personnel such as a school psychologist, speech therapist, counselor, and/or nurse	2	1	3	4
39	Whether the academic program includes the teaching of social emotional skills	1	1	-3	1
40	The willingness of the school principal to talk with parents	3	-2	4	0

Factor Interpretation

Statistical information regarding differences and consistencies between groups, the placement of individual statement cards in a group's factor array, and participants post-sort interview responses are all considered in an attempt to "distill the core meanings brought to light" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p. 6). Four components of the results were used in the interpretation of each factor: 1) model factor arrays, 2) extreme ranking statements, (3) distinguishing statements, and (4) participant comments.

Factor arrays are critically important for interpretation. Model arrays are created for each factor by placing the Q set statement numbers back onto a distribution grid template identical to the one used in the study. Model arrays for all four factors can be found in Appendix H. Statements ranked with z-scores greater than ±1 were considered to be extreme rankings. Distinguishing statements set factors apart from the others. In this study, distinguishing statements have a z-score that differs from its corresponding statement z-score in the other three factors by a value of one or greater. Statements and rankings from this point on will be denoted Statement #: statement rank. S1:0, for example, would indicate statement 1 was given a ranking of (0).

Factor A: Race Forward

Factor A accounts for 8% of the study variance. Three female participants are significantly associated with Factor A. One or more of their children is currently enrolled in a public charter school. Participants whose perspectives aligned most with Factor A strongly considered matters of race in their school choice process. The model array shows the ranking of S16 "the racial diversity of the student body" and S18 "protecting my child from the racist attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers" in the (+4) positions indicating high levels of importance.

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The ranking of these particular statements was also extreme when compared to the other three groups. The Factor A group ranked the racial diversity of staff (S33:2) higher than any of the other groups as well.

Except for statement 40, further consideration of the model array and extreme ranking statements (see Table 10) points to an overall deemphasis of items involving interpersonal aspects of school. Relationships, outreach, and environment were generally unimportant to this factor group. For example, S35 "a school's outreach and enrollment process" and S4 "how welcoming the school appeared to be," received rankings of (-4), indicating they were least important or not important to this group in the school choice process. "How nurturing the school environment is" (S14), and "staffs' willingness to form relationships with students and families" (S5) were both ranked in the (-3) positions.

Table 10

Extreme Ranking Statements for Factor A

#	Statement	Z-Score
16	The racial diversity of the student body	2.023
18	Protecting child from racist attitudes	1.889
34	Use of co-taught classrooms	1.555
40	Willingness of principal	1.421
1	Teachers' experience	1.361
28	School's reputation	1.27
33	Racial diversity of staff	1.02
2	Philosophy on inclusion	-1.06
5	Willingness to form relationships	-1.103
14	Nurturing learning environment	-1.114
7	Students do well in next phase	-1.27
4	Welcoming school environment	-1.889
35	Outreach and enrollment	-2.475

Note. Statements are shortened for space-saving purposes.

Table 11 lists four distinguishing statements for Factor A. Highlighted again is the influence and importance of racial identity. This table also introduces the aspect of a school's curriculum. Hands-on learning opportunities are most sought after by the Race Forward group (S17:2). It was ranked higher by Factor A than by the other three groups. In this regard, curriculum aligned with their child's interests (S23:1) and the inclusion of social emotional skills are both school choice considerations for these sorters as well (S39:1).

Table 11

Distinguishing Statements for Factor A (Significant at < 0.05)

#	Statements	Factors							
		A		B		D		F	
		Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank
16	The racial diversity of the student body	**2.023**	4	-0.264	-1	-0.905	0	-0.865	-2
20	If/how Black people are represented in the curriculum	0.269	1	-1.073	-2	1.507	-3	-1.123	-3
25	The proportion of students of the same race as my child	0.177	0	-1.93	-4	-0.907	-4	-1.595	-3
35	A school's outreach and enrollment process	-2.475	-4	-0.785	-1	-0.905	0	-1.02	-2

Note. Z score difference $\geq \pm 1$. The bolded value is significant at <0.01.

The emphasis on race is briefly discussed by the participant who loaded most strongly onto Factor A. She explained her perspective this way: "If teachers are racist, they display a negative attitude towards those who are not of their race. In this case the classroom environment will be negative. I feel children learn better when there's diversity."

While race is arguably the most salient consideration to come to the forefront, a final point to mention for the Factor A group is the importance of access to school personnel and information. This group's array suggests access to personnel does not necessarily require established relationships with staff. Statement 5, "the willingness of school staff to form relationships with students and families," was ranked (-3). However, it is important for their children to have access to teachers who are practiced in working with students who demonstrate similar needs as their own child (S1:3). Their (+3) ranking of statement 34 suggests co-teaching may be perceived as a means for that to occur. Access to related services personnel like a school psychologist or counselor are also factors to consider (S38:2). For the parents themselves, the Factor A group values access to school leaders who are open and communicative (S40:3). One participant says,

> A relationship with a school's principal is important but not necessarily a dealbreaker. I realize the principal is only one person, and I'll go to teachers first in order to follow the chain of command. But if teachers are unresponsive or I need more clarity, it's good to be able to go to the principal. I respect their position and decision.

Consistent with other groups, the Race Forward group expresses a desire to be informed about their child's progress (S12:1). "With my son having [an] IEP, he always needs that extra push," one mother shares. "I want to know the school is doing everything they can to keep me informed."

Factor B: Challenge

Factor B accounts for 6.8% of the study variance. This group is composed of two female participants and one male. One participant has a child currently enrolled in their assigned neighborhood elementary school. Another's child attends a state-approved private elementary

school. The third participant's child is a recent graduate of a STEM focused magnet school. The academic aspects of schools are most pressing in the school selection process for Factor B. This group ranked S21 and S15 in the (+4) positions, the use of a challenging curriculum and rates of academic growth respectively. Factor B's placement of both of these statements is extreme when compared to other groups. The academic focus is further indicated by the ranking of S7:2, "whether students who attend the school do well in the next phase of education or life."

In addition to academic aspects of schooling, the extreme ranking statements displayed in Table 12 indicate staff characteristics are also of notable importance to this group. Staff qualifications (S30:3), staffs' approach to communication (S12:2), and teachers' level of experience (S1:2) are all strong considerations in their school choice processes.

Table 12

Extreme Ranking Statements for Factor B

#	Statement	Z-Score
15	The rate of academic growth	1.742
21	Use of challenging curriculum	1.576
18	Protecting child from racist attitudes	1.400
3	Approach to emotional needs	1.391
30	Staff qualifications	1.148
12	Approach to parent communication	1.146
1	Teachers' experience	1.139
20	If/how Black people are represented	-1.073
40	Willingness of principal	-1.146
26	Representation of individuals with disabilities	-1.251
22	Foreign language program	-1.742
10	Suspension and/or expulsion	-1.782
8	Approach to bullying	-1.818
25	Proportion of the same race	-1.93

Note. Statements are shortened for space-saving purposes.

The two statements placed in the positions of least importance were S8, prevention and handling of bullying, and S25, the proportion of students the same race as one's child. Generally

speaking, statements about discipline, race, and special education or dis/ability were less important considerations for the Factor B group.

Four distinguishing statements statistically set Factor B apart (see Table 13). The resulting z-score for S40 "the willingness of the school principal to talk with parents," is significant even at the $p < 0.01$ level. Location and a welcoming environment stand out too as Factor B is the only group placing either statement on the positive side of the array.

Table 13

Distinguishing Statements For Factor B (Significant at < 0.05)

#	Statements	Factors							
		B		A		D		F	
		Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank
4	How welcoming the school environment appears to be	0.606	1	-1.889	-4	-0.600	-1	-0.908	-2
8	A school's approach to prevent and deal with bullying	-1.818	-4	-1.001	-2	0.002	0	0.373	1
31	The distance between our home and my child's school	0.467	1	-0.377	-1	0.608	-2	-1.694	-4
40	The willingness of the school principal to talk with parents	**-1.146**	-2	1.421	3	1.805	4	-0.176	0

Note. Z score difference $\geq \pm 1$. Bolded figure is significant at <0.01

The Factor B group looks for a school with a proven record of academic achievement for its students. Participants' comments provide further elaboration. "[Rates of academic growth] would make or break our decision to send our child to the school," one participant says. She also comments that at times in the school choice process, it is as if parents of students with dis/abilities have to ask themselves, "do you want [your child] to be socially and emotionally

sound and capable or do you want them to be smart, because you can't have both. But it's my right to have both, and it's appropriate."

Sorter 20 shares the following:

The curriculum has to be competitive, not just with other schools in the area but in the nation. Some schools don't offer [advanced placement] classes. That was important to me. Or some don't offer accelerated math and science courses. A challenging curriculum includes things that will expand their minds, not just the basics and getting them to the next grade.

She goes on to say, "I review the data to see how well the kids are testing. I compare the White kids versus the Black kids and the Black kids against other kids and see how they score against the state."

An extreme ranking statement for this group was statement 18, "protecting my child from the racist attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers." Sorter 20, who ranked this statement and statement 33, "the racial diversity of staff" with a (+3), was asked to elaborate on how she feels race has impacted her school choice decisions. She spoke at length about her experiences and interactions with school staff.

"We're surprised to see you," [teachers] would say. Why would you be? I'm a parent. I parent. That's what I do. I had to advocate for [my son] because they will box us in if they don't know how to deal with a child. Every class, every semester, every year is different. I had to tell them, just because you heard this or read that, that's not who he is in your class today. Our children have to be perfect in order for them to be considered productive or worth their time. If you don't advocate, then they'll do stuff like sending

your child to the office instead of just sending him to the activity room to run off some

energy. Their kids are just "a little active." Our children are criminals.

Factor B group ranked higher than the other three groups a school's culture (S36:2) and a

welcoming school environment (S3:1) and placed a relatively high value on the amount of

individualized attention students receive (S7:2).

Factor D: Represent

Factor D accounts for 5.6% of the study variance. Two participants were representative

of Factor D. One participant is a mother of a child currently enrolled in a public charter school.

The other is a father. He and his wife chose a private, religious school for their now adult son's

late elementary and middle school years before choosing a public high school. The most

important factors for consideration in the school choice process for this group were the

willingness of the school principal to talk with parents (S40:4) and if and/or how Black people

are represented in the school's curriculum (S20:4).

Overall, Factor D's model array suggests they are most concerned with who staff are as

people and how that may impact the ways in which they directly engage with students more so

than the professional characteristics or credentials of staff. For example, they ranked staff

qualifications neutrally (S30:0) and do not feel it is important to consider a teacher's level of

experience working with students of similar need as their own child (S1: -3). On the other hand,

the Factor D group takes the dispositions of general education teachers towards students with

dis/abilities seriously (S9:3) and wants to shelter their children from racism at school (S18:2).

They also value to some degree of importance the approach to students with emotional needs

(S3:1), the amount of individualized attention provided to students (S6:1), and the willingness of

staff to form relationships with students and families (S5:1).

This group ranked many aspects of curriculum or instruction neutrally or as slightly unimportant. The use of an approach that encourages their child's curiosity (S29:0), the use of a hands-on approach (S17:0), curriculum aligned with their child's interests (S23: -1), and co-teaching (S34:-1) are ranked as shown. However, the extreme ranking statements in Table 14 indicate two facets of curriculum are quite important - the representation of Black people (S20:4) and the representation of individuals with dis/abilities (S26:2). The extreme ranking statements also illuminate the type of information-gathering steps taken by this group prior to selecting a school including seeking out the opinions of trusted members of their social networks (S32:3), taking note of a school's reputation (S28:2), and looking into the rate of academic growth demonstrated by a school's students (S15:2).

Table 14

Extreme Ranking Statements for Factor D

#	Statement	Z-Score
40	Willingness of principal	1.805
20	If/how Black people are represented	1.507
9	Teachers' attitudes	1.507
38	Access to personnel	1.503
32	Recommendations of social network	1.209
26	If/how individuals with disabilities are represented	1.209
15	Rate of academic growth	1.205
27	Clarity of discipline policy	1.203
13	Class size	-1.205
10	Suspension and/or expulsion	-1.205
1	Teachers' experience	-1.205
39	Social emotional skills	-1.503
22	Foreign language program	-1.807
19	How a school is described	-2.109

Note. Statements are shortened for space-saving purposes.

Four statements distinguish the Factor D group from the other three. There are listed in Table 15. Social-emotional skills were not deemed a critical part of curriculum and in fact, were

considered largely unimportant (S39: -3). While recommendations from social networks were quite valuable, student input in this way is not (S19:-4). A participant explained that for her, "recommendations are important because it strengthens the decision process."

Table 15

Distinguishing Statements For Factor D (Significant at < 0.05)

#	Statements	Factors							
		D		A		B		F	
		Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank
19	How a school is described or discussed by the students who attend it	-2.109	-4	-0.226	-1	-0.933	-2	-0.99	-2
20	If/how Black people are represented in the curriculum	1.507	4	0.269	1	-1.073	-2	-1.123	-3
32	The recommendations of friends, family, or other members of one's social network	1.209	3	-0.049	0	-0.503	-1	-0.663	-1
39	Whether the academic program includes the teaching of social emotional skills	-1.503	-3	0.35	1	0.672	1	0.78	1

Note. Z score difference $\geq \pm 1$

After sorting, when asked if any statements were particularly hard to place, one participant remarked it was difficult to have to "pick between questions regarding disabilities and race." She shares:

> Before I found this school, I wanted [my daughter] to attend schools like [private schools] and other prestigious schools of those sorts. Unfortunately, when we had

assessments for those schools we were informed she lacked [sufficient] intelligence to be a "candidate" to participate. The school recommended me to lesser schools. The schools they insisted I look into were all black schools in destitute neighborhoods. They were short on teachers, curriculum was remedial, children with behavioral issues were not attended to, no teachers aid in classes to help teachers, child success rate below average.

The tension in choosing between dis/ability and race that the participant comments on can be observed in the group's model factor array. The other participant who is associated with Factor D handled such considerations differently and over time, but they still are apparent in his comments, as is the influence of school leaders, which this group ranked (+4).

He shared that initially, safety was the driving factor for enrolling his son in a private school as was "exposing [his] children to the same benefits" he experienced attending a private school. Once there, however, "the headmaster was very intrigued by [our child's] development. She kept in touch with us and let us know how he was improving and how he was being successful. She spent time with him."

This participant's son was doing well in all subjects except mathematics, but he kept experiencing an "internal struggle with being the only Black student in his class." "I need to get out of here," he would say. "God is preparing you for who you're going to be, where you're going to be, and the position you're going to hold," I'd respond, but it was "just too much." "We moved him to a public school, a Black, progressive school, and he felt more comfortable there. It gave him a boost of confidence that helped him to excel. Now, he's a Black director at a tech company, and everyone around him is White."

Previously mentioned were the rankings of S20 and S26, which involve the representation of Black people (+4) and representation of individuals with dis/abilities in

curriculum (+2) respectively. Statements regarding the attitudes of staff towards students with dis/abilities (S9:3) and protection from racist attitudes (S18:2) were also placed in positions of importance. Factor groups A, B, and F each identified some of these statements as priorities, but only Factor D ranked all four so highly.

Factor F: Serve and Support

Factor F accounts for 11.8% of the study variance, and six participants significantly loaded on this factor. Five of the six have students currently enrolled in charter schools. The sixth participant's child attends an assigned neighborhood public school. Of the four factor groups, Factor F most consistently placed statements associated with special education services and direct student supports in the most favorable positions. Access to school related services personnel (S38:4) and the use of co-taught classrooms (S34:4) were ranked as very important.

Deliberate structures for student support like a buddy program were also highly ranked (S37:3) as was a schools' approach to students with emotional and behavioral needs (S3:3) and the representation of individuals with dis/abilities in curriculum (S26:3). Prioritization of these matters continues on with consideration of a school's philosophy on inclusion (S2:2), amounts of individualized attention (S6:2), general education teacher attitudes regarding students with dis/abilities (S9:2), and the presence of a nurturing learning environment (S14:2) all in positions of relative importance.

Table 16

Extreme Ranking Statements for Factor F

#	Statement	Z-Score
38	Access to personnel	2.150
34	Use of co-teaching	1.581
37	Deliberate support structures	1.443
26	If/how individuals with disabilities are represented	1.415
3	Approach to emotional needs	1.295
6	Individualized attention	1.271
2	Philosophy on inclusion	1.178
30	Staff qualifications	1.177
35	Outreach and enrollment	-1.02
20	If/how Black people are represented	-1.123
22	Foreign language	-1.347
25	Proportion of same race	-1.595
31	Distance between home and school	-1.694
10	Suspension and/or expulsion	-1.750

The model array and extreme ranking statements for Factor F shown in Table 16 establish a firm viewpoint. Overwhelmingly, they are concerned with the intentional and varied supports for their child with dis/abilities. Supports come in the form of access to specialized and experienced people (S38) and student-centered special education programming as indicated by the extreme rankings of S34 and S6. Statements having to do with aspects that are not directly associated with special education or students with dis/abilities take up most of the space on the negative side of the array and in the extreme rankings. For instance, matters of discipline, class size, recommendations, and four of the five statements addressing race were all ranked negatively. In Table 17 there are two distinguishing statements that represent Factor F. They are S2 "a school's philosophy on inclusion" and S40 "the willingness of the school principal to talk with parents."

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Table 17

Distinguishing Statements For Factor F (Significant at < 0.05)

#	Statements	Factors							
		F		**A**		**B**		**D**	
		Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank
2	A school's philosophy on inclusion	1.178	2	-1.06	-2	-0.203	0	0.302	1
40	The willingness of the school principal to talk with parents	-0.176	0	1.421	3	-1.146	-2	1.805	4

Note: Z score difference $\geq \pm 1$

A mother states, "I want my children to have the best possible outcome in life and be able to function independently in society." For her and other members of this group, that means first and foremost seeking out an approach to special education implementation they feel addresses the unique needs of their children. This individual's school choice considerations started from witnessing what she did not want for her three children with dis/abilities at a school where she worked.

> There was a little girl. The little girl has Down Syndrome. No one would change her or clean her off. [The teachers] would basically have the 8th graders take care of her. And [the teachers] would talk about her so badly, so I pulled my son from that school and wasn't going to send my other child [with severe dis/abilities] there.... You have to have the passion, not just want the paycheck.

She continued to share her perspective and experience with inclusion. A school's philosophy on inclusion (S2) was a distinguishing statement for the Factor F group, and this participant ranked it with a (+3).

> [My son] is really high functioning, but previously, they would keep him in a classroom all day by himself. They'd bring in other students with special needs for about 30 minutes, but he could be in a regular classroom. Pulling kids out is embarrassing. People know it's a special education teacher, so when kids come back in, they're teased. Why can't an aid sit in the back of the classroom and offer support when needed?

> Similarly, another participant writes, "I placed these statements in the very important category because it was important to me to make sure my child had a special education teacher present in the classroom. They are more familiar with the challenges that face special education students."

While staffs' qualifications are important to Factor F, a third participant of the six who comprised this group shared that degrees or credentials do not always mean people are qualified to effectively teach and support students with dis/abilities.

> I look for experience working with students with special needs more than education. You can read a book, but a book is a book. You can look at a book and then go to a job site and not have any idea what's going on. Nothing compares to on-the-job experience.

She went on to comment on the importance of a nurturing learning environment, another important consideration for members of Serve and Support. "Schools are about getting things done. Students need to learn what they need to learn, but my children need that love and care as well."

Distance between participants' homes and prospective schools (S31:-4) was least important to the Factor F group, as were rates of suspension (S10:-4). Four statements were ranked lower by this group than by the others: teachers' level of experience working with students of similar need (S1:1), protecting their child from racist attitudes (S18:1), representation of Black people in curriculum (S20:-3), and the use of curricula that aligns with their child's interests (S23:-2).

Consensus Across Factors

Four statements were not ranked with a 0 or higher by any of the groups. They were as follows: (S11) suspension and/or expulsion rates, (S19) how a school is described by students who attend it, (S22) foreign language programming, and (S35) a school's outreach and enrollment process. Eleven statements were ranked with a 0 or higher by all groups (see Table 18). Five of the eleven pertain to staffing, three to curriculum and academic performance, two involve a school's approach to students, and the last remaining statement is the school's reputation.

Table 18

Statements Ranked 0 or Higher By All Groups

#	Statement
1	Teachers' level of experience working with students with needs similar to that of my child
3	A school's approach to students with emotional and/or behavioral needs
12	Staffs' approach to parent communication and informing parents of a students' progress
15	The rate of academic growth students at the school make from one year to the next
18	Protecting my child from the racist attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers
21	Whether the school uses a curriculum that will challenge my child
28	The school's reputation
29	Whether the school uses an instructional approach that encourages my child's curiosity
30	Staff qualifications
37	The school's deliberate structures for student support (e.g. advisory, buddy program, orientation)
38	Students' access to personnel such as a school psychologist, speech therapist, counselor, and/or nurse

Table 19 lists six statements that do not distinguish between any pair of factors. Meaning, differences in ranking were not statistically significant. Generally speaking, participants considered the ways and means of communication and how they would be informed of their child's progress. A hands-on curriculum was preferred, as was one that encouraged curiosity. The qualifications of staff and the school's culture were also viewed as important. Foreign language programs were not a priority in the school choice processes of study participants.

Table 19

Statements That Do Not Distinguish Between Any Pair of Factors (p > 0.01)

#	Statements	Factors							
		A		B		D		F	
		Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank
12	Staffs' approach to parent communication and informing parents of a students' progress	0.296	1	1.146	2	0.905	1	0.159	0
17	Whether the school's curriculum includes the use of a hands-on or discovery approach to learning	0.42	2	0.269	1	-0.002	0	0.469	1
22	It's important to consider a school's foreign language program.	-0.796	-1	-1.742	-3	-1.807	-4	-1.347	-3
29	Whether the school uses an instructional approach that encourages my child's curiosity	0.124	0	0.291	0	0.0	0	-0.252	0
30	Staff qualifications	0.393	1	1.148	3	-0.006	0	1.177	2
36	The school's culture	0.334	1	0.858	2	-0.596	-1	0.007	0

Summary

This study was carried out in order to explore the perspectives of Black parents of children with dis/abilities relevant to their school choice experiences. The Q Method was chosen in an effort to learn about the considerations of individuals and to identify points of agreement and disagreement amongst the participant group as a whole.

Twenty participants sorted 40 statements related to the academic aspects of schools, special education services, staff characteristics, family and personal values, and safety. Centroid factor extraction followed by varimax and manual rotations resulted in a four factor solution. Fourteen participants loaded significantly onto these four retained factors, two others loaded onto two unretained factors, and four participant's sorts were statistically non-significant.

Factor analysis results and written interview responses were used to identify themes in perspective for each of the four factors. To Factor A, matters of race and racial identity are prioritized in their school choice process. Factor B most strongly considers academic aspects of school and student performance. Factor D values quality interactions between students and staff and representation of identity in curriculum. Special education services were most important to Factor F. One participant suggested a statement should be added to the Q set: "the amount of experience the staff has for teaching Black students."

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to elevate the perspectives of Black parents of children with dis/abilities. Specifically, it was conducted to explore the question, what factors are important to Black parents of students with dis/abilities when choosing a school for their child? The need for such a study exists because students of color, students with dis/abilities, and their families have a history of disservice within the education system. Additionally, their voices are underrepresented in school choice research (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011; Mawene & Bal, 2018). Choosing a school has been simplified by some to economic principles of competition and consumer satisfaction, however, the act of choosing can be rife with complexity. This chapter includes a summary of the study, discussion of major findings, study limitations and challenges, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Study Summary

Twenty Black parents or guardians – 17 mothers, 2 fathers, and 1 grandmother - of children with dis/abilities participated in this study. Of those twenty, 13 received email invitations to participate from the researcher, 5 participant emails were recruited through word-of-mouth, and 2 participants indicated interest through a form linked on social media and shared with various organizations.

To participate, each individual expressed their viewpoint on the topic of school choice through the completion of a Q sort using a web-based computer program called Q-Assessor. Participants were also given the opportunity to respond in writing to four post-sort questions prior to submission of their Q Sort, and some were contacted for brief follow-up interviews. Participants demonstrated their opinion by rank-ordering 40 statements about various aspects of

schools. These statements were initially generated through a review of school choice literature and other sources of commentary. They were finalized with the feedback of a six-member expert panel. All Q sorts underwent factor analysis, centroid factor extraction, and varimax rotation in order to identify patterns of thought. The racial diversity of the student body, protection from racist attitudes and/or behaviors of staff, academic growth rates, use of challenging curriculum, the willingness of the principal to talk to parents, if/how Black people are represented in curriculum, access to specialized personnel like counselors and school psychologists, and the use of co-taught classrooms were the most important considerations of study participants.

Discussion of Findings

A gap in research exists when it comes to the school choice considerations of Black parents of students with dis/abilities. This study was conducted to begin to address this gap and to provide an opportunity for parents to express their viewpoints on the topic through the Q sorting process. By-person factor analysis and varimax rotation were used to extract four factors. These factors are representative of four overarching patterns of opinion which have been named according to the emergent themes observed. The four factor groups are named Race Forward (Factor A), Challenge (Factor B), Represent (Factor D), and Serve and Support (Factor F). The Q sorts of fourteen of the twenty participants are associated with these opinion types. Of the fourteen, 6 sorts or 43% are associated with the group Serve and Support. Three sorts, or roughly 22% each, are associated with the Race Forward and Challenge groups. Two sorts, or 14%, are associated with the group Represent.

Participants and their sorts are associated with particular factors, but factor groups should not be thought of as mutually exclusive or discrete categories. Q analysis considers points of disagreement *and* consensus. Model factor arrays, important Q analytical tools, serve as visual

exemplars of what is most typical of a factor group and should be considered as generalizations of viewpoints (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Therefore, participants will differ in the degree to which they do or do not exemplify a given factor.

Previous Research

One of the few studies conducted with the explicit intent to hear from parents of color who have children with dis/abilities, Waitoller and Lubienski (2019), identified five factors impacting the choice sets of these parents: (1) educational placement decisions, (2) quality and implementation of special education services, (3) school and neighborhood safety, (4) steering away practices of staff, and (5) geographical location. More broadly in the research literature on school choice, academic quality (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016), the influence of social networks (Altenhofen et al., 2016), location (Andre-Bechley, 2007), and the racial composition of schools were also found to be common considerations (Weiher & Tedin, 2002). The results of this study are in many ways aligned with previous research, but there are observed differences.

Areas of Alignment

Special Education Services. The Factor F group, which accounted for the greatest amount of study variance, was named Serve and Support. Their model factor array in Appendix H demonstrated a consistent prioritization of special education services in their school selection process. Beyond the ranking of statements at the two poles of the array, a holistic evaluation of responses can reveal points of interconnectedness among statement positions and provide additional information important for synthesis. For instance, the Serve and Support group was curious about how schools approached students with behavioral needs (S3) and ranked access to student services personnel like school counselors (S38) in the "very important" position. These statements considered together, along with their positions, highlights the desire for school

personnel to understand students' social and emotional health, which is especially important for individuals with dis/abilities with behavior-based characteristics. Trained staff are viewed as resources, perhaps even proactive supports.

It is also valuable to note the Serve and Support group did not rank the two statements dealing with discipline highly. The clarity and application of a school's discipline policy (S27: -1) and a school's suspension and/or expulsion rates (S10: -4) were not important considerations. This could be an indication that punitive or exclusionary approaches to behavior are undesirable. Exclusionary responses to discipline such as suspension are associated with negative student outcomes like reduced feelings of school connectedness and increased rates of school truancy. Furthermore, suspension is not effective in teaching alternative positive behaviors (Sharkey & Fenning, 2011). Effective discipline approaches would include educational and social and emotional supports (Flannery et al., 2014).

Members of the Factor F group also prioritized the in-class instructional supports of individualized attention (S6) and co-taught classrooms (S34). Their preference for co-taught classrooms and interest in schools' philosophies on inclusion (S2:2) may also speak to their opinions on educational placement decisions. In a review of all of these elements, it appears that the participants who are a part of this factor group place a high value on inclusive educational practices and a whole-child approach. Inclusive practices work in service of the full participation of students with dis/abilities within the general education curriculum. Plans to deliver and tailor supports on an individual basis and team collaboration within the general education setting in the form of co-teaching are both considered best practices and are valued by the Factor F group (Jorgensen et al., 2012).

Academic Quality. As in previous research, academic quality was of concern to participants in this study (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016; Prieto et al., 2019). This viewpoint was most prominent in the Challenge group which demonstrated investment in aspects of school infrastructure, like curriculum, academic growth data, and staff qualifications. Specifically, they looked for a curriculum to challenge their children (S21). This type of curriculum may be viewed as necessary for the attainment of desired educational and life outcomes (S7:2), which they also indicated was an important consideration in their school choice process. Further investigation is needed to understand how participants define and describe a curriculum that is "challenging."

The factor scores of the other three groups show they have all placed statement 21 in the 0 or neutral position. This signals just how important an element this is to parents in the Factor B group, but it should not necessarily be taken as an implication that a challenging course of study is unimportant to the other participants. Table 17 lists the 11 statements ranked with a 0 or higher by all groups. Among those statements is (S21) a curriculum that will challenge one's child, (S15) rates of academic growth, and (S29) the use of a curriculum that encourages curiosity. These statements are mostly ranked in the neutral position, but a consistent desire for academic engagement and achievement is observed.

Racial Composition of Schools. School choice advocates cite the potential for a separation of neighborhood racial segregation from school segregation, but that vision has not yet materialized in most places. In some areas of the country, school choice is said to have exacerbated the issue (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). Though most pronounced in the school choice selections of White parents, Black and Latinx parents also tend to choose schools in which their race is the majority (Henig, 1990, 1996; Weiher & Tedin, 2002).

Three of the four factor arrays have the racial diversity of the student body (S16) positioned on the negative side of the array. In Factor B's array, this statement is in the (-1) position. Factors D and F both ranked it (-2). The racial diversity of staff was more preferred. An individual whose sort was not associated with Factor A, B, D, or F and who did not choose a school where the majority of students were of the same race as her child shared that "the racial diversity of the staff provides [her] child with a feeling of inclusion." In a country where the vast majority of teachers are White — nearly 80% of public school teachers in America in the 2017-2018 school year according to the U.S. Department of Education (2020) — opportunities for students of color to be taught by teachers of color are rare. With this knowledge, the racial homogeneity of students could be preferred by participants also as a means of establishing feelings of racial or ethnic inclusion.

Lastly, anomalies in sorting were observed in regard to the racial composition of schools. Of the three groups that did not strongly consider the racial diversity of students in their school choice process, they prioritized (S25) the proportion of students of the same race as their children even less so. What is unknown is if this reflects an actual conflict in thought or if it is occurring due to different interpretations of the statement. Due to the need to place statements in a single spot, which causes a participant to reprioritize the positioning of other statements, it is possible that participants determined other statements, even if marginally related, belonged in higher ranking positions. Regardless, these inconsistencies are revealing of the complex constructs that make up human subjectivity (Previte et al., 2007).

This anomaly was not observed in the Race Forward group (Factor A). As they considered the racial composition of schools, most/all statements referring to race were prioritized. Statements exploring racial diversity, such as that of the student body (S16), and

protection from racist attitudes of staff (S18) were in the two (+4) positions on the model factor array. One participant strongly associated with the Factor A group expressed that she feels students "learn better when there's diversity."

Areas of Contrast

Safety. Waitoller and Lubienski's (2019) study identified school and neighborhood safety as a key factor for consideration, but it did not appear to be so to participants in this study. Safety concerns were only minimally represented in the Q set. A statement about neighborhood safety was included in the concourse presented to panel members but did not qualify to be included in the Q set. Bullying prevention (S8) appears in the Q set with rankings of (-4) by the Factor A group, (-2) by the Factor B group, (0) by the Factor D group, and (+1) by the Factor F group.

Location. Similarly, proximity to one's home was not found to be important to participants as it routinely has been in previous research (Burdick-Will, 2017; Kleitz et al., 2000; Pattilo, 2015). Two individuals who did not significantly load onto any one factor commented on this point specifically. One stated she would travel "any distance for the right educational opportunity" and the other said she would "send [her] kids across town to go to a good school that offers a better environment."

Participants' residential locations could help explain this deviation from previous studies. Waitoller and Super (2017), Burdick-Will (2017) and Pattilo (2015) studies were all conducted in the city of Chicago, one of the largest cities and school districts in the country. Places and spaces are unique in their geographic formation, demographics, forms of transportation, and so on. In this study, sixteen of the twenty participants reside in or very near a city much smaller than Chicago with varying school choice options including private, charter, cyber, neighborhood,

and magnet schools. The risk of excessively long or potentially dangerous commutes for students is likely reduced and so may not be as pressing of a concern.

School Leaders. Lastly, the role of building principals in the school choice process unexpectedly emerged as a consideration for three of the groups. Factors A, D, and F placed the willingness of the school principal to talk with parents in the +3, +4, and 0 positions respectively, although it is difficult to explain why this would be considered so highly. One mother in the Factor A group who commented on the importance of a relationship with the school principal provides a starting place for understanding. "I'll go to teachers first in order to follow the chain of command. But if teachers are unresponsive or I need more clarity, it's good to be able to go to the principal. I respect their position and decision." Here, she introduces the concept of power. To her, the principal is viewed as one that can make final decisions and provide clarity in the event that it is perceived to be lacking. The participant also seems to value knowing there is someone else to turn to in the event that other staff members are uncommunicative.

Theoretical Considerations

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory approaches school choice from an economic standpoint positioning parents as rational consumers. For the purposes of illustration, one can picture parents at a kitchen table with two lists, one entitled "Things We Want in a School" and the other entitled "Available Schools." Applying Rational Choice Theory, these parents would collect relevant information, review the two lists, and choose the school that best matches their stated preferences. Ideally, one's preferences can be satisfactorily met by the schools that are available and accessible. The tenets of DisCrit theory, however, draw our attention to what could be a third

list of significant considerations: the social constructions of race and dis/ability, ideas of normalcy, and intersections of identity.

Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit)

"Race, racism, dis/ability and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education, which affect students of color with dis/abilities qualitatively differently than white students with dis/abilities" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 7). Mawene et al.'s (2018) review found parents of students with dis/abilities may concede their desire to enroll their child in a school focused on academic performance if it means attaining more appropriate special education services elsewhere. That is, parents of students with dis/abilities separating in their choice process the academic achievement of their children from the suitable implementation of a special education program is not uncommon.

That very notion is in itself highly problematic and demonstrative of Waitoller and Super's (2017) "politics of desperation." A similar tension appears to exist to some degree in this study, too, as these priorities – academic achievement and special education services - are identified as major themes for two different factor groups. Adding to the complexity and presenting additional competing factors are matters of race.

It is understood that race and class impact the ways in which a set of school choice factors is considered (Ellison & Aloe, 2019; Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016;). A participant in the Represent group (Factor D) bravely shared some of her story and expresses this plainly. "As a black woman who has a child with a disability I feel as though that's [three] strikes against me right there. I am a woman, I am black, and my child, who is also a black female, has a disability." She feels at a disadvantage as a Black female navigating the school choice landscape, and concern for the success of her Black daughter with a dis/ability is

palpable. At times, she has had to choose between a school environment in which her daughter's identities are affirmed and one is which she is academically prepared. In her interview, she did not express difficulty choosing between statements associated with discipline or staff characteristics, for instance. Opinions on these matters are arguably simpler to define, but perhaps it could also be said that the school choice process more often puts Black parents of students with dis/abilities in a position where one must choose between matters of race and ability. Whatever the case, this mother is clearly cognizant of the multiple facets of identity in her school choice process. Also notable is the fact that she has had to research, engage, and reengage in the school selection process. "I researched schools for years. [My daughter] either did not meet standards, or it wasn't diverse enough, their disability program was nonexistent, or the school was full to capacity. It was stressful."

Statement 18, "protecting my child from the racist attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers" was among the statements ranked as important across all groups. This is true even in the Serve and Support group (S18:1), a group that rather strongly deemphasized all other statements referring to race and demonstrated little to no deviation from special education in their sorting. Race Forward placed statement 18 in the (+4) position. Challenge ranked it (+3). Represent ranked it (+2). Even when participants were most interested in finding a school with a strong academic program or key services, responses indicate they must also concern themselves with shielding their children from experiencing racism at school.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Implications for School Leaders

The National Teacher and Principal Survey collects a host of descriptive data on K-12 education (NCES, 2015). In the 2015-2016 questionnaires, traditional and charter school

principals were asked about the amount of time per school year spent on particular types of tasks. On average, about 30% of their time was spent on internal administrative tasks, 30% on curriculum and teacher-related tasks, about 23% was spent on student interactions, and just 14% on parent interactions. This data communicates interactions between the average school leader and parents are relatively minimal.

In this study, participants generally valued the willingness of school principals to talk with parents. It is possible that just knowing the principal is open to and available for communication is a positive indicator of parent engagement to Black parents. Given the demands of a single school leader trying to individualize parent engagement for hundreds of families, it may be a useful exercise for school administrators at various levels to evaluate the type, quality, and quantity of interactions they have with parents and take steps to determine if their current practice is meeting the needs of the families they serve, specifically Black parents of students with dis/abilities.

Secondly, school leaders may consider investing time and resources in a comprehensive and recurring audit of curriculum and professional development specifically as it relates to students of color and students with dis/abilities. The factor group arrays suggest questions for consideration could include: Is the curriculum challenging and for whom? Are students' identities accurately represented? Does the curriculum work to perpetuate racism or ableism? Are staff provided with meaningful opportunities to reflect upon their own biases and how they show up in their practice? An audit of this kind may first require the development or adaptation of a tool. Once created, Peoples et al. (2021) recommend selecting a diverse team of at least three stakeholders to carry out the audit. Team members should be diverse in their identities (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity) and in their roles (e.g. parent, teacher, board member, student).

Finally, access to student services team members such as school counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists was important to participants. Advocating for the hiring of such team members if a school is not already adequately staffed could benefit this target demographic and students as a whole. If these personnel are on staff, it is recommended that school leaders and heads of pupil services consider the training and retention of qualified team members as they work to support students.

Implications for Other School Personnel

Most simply put, Black parents of students with dis/abilities are invested in the academic and personal success of their children. This study indicates they are active in the school choice process and seeking schools that deliver quality special education services *and* facilitate the academic growth and preparedness of their children. Historically, parental engagement literature has supported stereotypical messaging related to parents of color and their involvement in schools. School personnel (e.g., classroom teachers, related services professionals, etc.) must work to evaluate, identify, and take the steps necessary to recalibrate the ways they engage with Black parents of students with dis/abilities.

Implications for Parents

In follow-up interviews, two individuals spoke at length about the role of parents as advocates and some of the barriers that can make fulfilling that role difficult, especially for parents of color. These barriers included negative perceptions of school staff. "[Black males] are not identified as geniuses. They're identified as trouble," one said. Lack of access to information about special education services and the educational rights of children posed another barrier.

"I realize that I'm part of a very elite group" another mother, who is also a lawyer, said. This group knows how to navigate the system, how to sue if necessary, and is predominantly

White. She shared parents may not always know the "city and state are obligated to provide a free and appropriate educational plan" to their children. They may not know to "ask for an IEP" or "if services or plans aren't followed, that there are other schools." This parent also recalled a conversation had with another mother. "I had no idea this existed," she said to me. "No one once mentioned to her, 'hey, I don't think the [Department of Education] can give your child what he needs.' That was hidden from her."

These comments suggest that while resources may be available to assist children with special needs and their families, access to those resources is disparate. Ultimately, and unfairly, this may require parents with lesser amounts of social and/or economic privilege to invest more time and effort to seek out useful information. As a place to start or turn to, "other parents in the special needs community are so welcoming and will give you that information and share," this same participant continues. Participants mentioned that non-profit organizations can be valuable community resources as well.

Study Limitations

While the generalizability of findings was not a priority in this study or of Q studies typically, it is worth noting the size and composition of the P Sample. A goal of thirty participants was originally set, but only twenty participants completed the Q sort over a period of three months; eighteen participants were female, and two were male. This could be due to unique circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and this study occurring approximately 10 – 12 months into the pandemic. Participants represented three states in the Northeast region of the country, however, nine of the twenty have at least one child enrolled in a single K-12 charter school organization.

A second limitation is statistical in nature. Fourteen of the twenty completed sorts were able to be included in data analysis, and eigenvalues for three of the four retained factors were only slightly greater than 1, or slightly above average. Also, the four factor groups accounted for less than the recommended threshold of 35% of total study variance. Despite this limitation, it remains true that a primary aim of the researcher was centering the perspectives of participants to the fullest extent possible; Q methodology was chosen for this very purpose, for its ability to bring quantitative and qualitative aspects of research together in order to gain an understanding of opinion. Critique of the explained variance in this study and its implications is fair, however the researcher urges that one of the implications that should be considered is the idea that the quantitative data are reflective of the unique complexities faced by Black parents of children with dis/abilities when choosing a school.

Ellison and Aloe (2019) put forth that school choice decisions are complicated decisions in which race, ability, and class are influences. The comments and sorts of the individuals who participated in this study support this claim. How might factors become more clearly defined in a study where participants' identities are more consistent with the dominant group? If White parents of children with dis/abilities completed this sort, how might factor loadings change?

Finally, while great care was taken to develop an unbiased Q set representative of the full spectrum of opinions on the research topic and participants commented on the thoroughness of statements, one could argue the Q set used did not allow for all perspectives or subtleties in perspective to be communicated.

Acknowledgement of Participants

The sorts of fourteen participants significantly loaded onto the four retained factors however, the contributions of all twenty individuals who graciously shared their time,

experience, and perspectives are valuable. Brief comments from three individuals who were not associated with the retained factors are included in previous sections of this chapter. Post-sort responses from others in this category touch on inclusion and representation. One shared, "I believe it is very important for students with disabilities to have their voices heard and this can be done through inclusion." Another writes, "If/how individuals with disabilities are represented [in curriculum] was hard to place because of my son and the positive treatment he received. I wanted to rank it higher." Two of the six sorts from this group of individuals loaded significantly onto two factors that were not retained; the remaining four sorts were not associated with any of the extracted factors. The children of three of these participants were enrolled in charter schools in the 2020-2021 school year, a fourth participant has a child enrolled in an approved private school, and two have adult children.

Challenges Encountered

Recruitment is believed to have been difficult due to the use of rather narrow inclusion criteria, the time required to complete the Q Sort, and the topic of study. Nearly all of the individuals who agreed to participate were willing to do so because they were directly asked by someone with whom they had a relationship. An interesting phenomenon that developed during recruitment was the hesitancy of some to share study information with their social networks despite being aware of individuals who would meet the inclusion criteria for fear of offending them. This may be the result of the stigma of dis/ability in which parents may not be willing to reveal their child has a disability or may be wary of assuming that an acquaintance has a child with a disability.

Secondly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, meeting with participants in person to complete the sorts by hand was not possible. Q-Assessor offers a level of convenience that would

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not be able to be achieved otherwise in that it carries out statistical calculations and provides a single platform where all relevant participant information and results are housed. It also allows participants to complete sorts at a time of their choosing and researchers to be able to administer larger numbers of sorts at once. Online interactions, however, are qualitatively different from time in person. The interview portion of Q is critically important for understanding viewpoints as completely as possible. The remote use of Q-Assessor for this part of the process yielded qualitative responses for analysis that likely would have been more expansive if questions had been posed in person. Consequently, follow-up interviews were a necessary step in several cases. Future research on this topic and with this method would likely benefit from traditional in-person sorting.

Recommendations for Future Research

As is traditionally used in Q research, a fixed distribution template was used to organize Q set statements. The matrix was identified as constraining by some participants. Future research on the topic could proceed with a flatter fixed matrix, as opposed to one resembling a bell-curve, allowing for more items to be placed at the extremes. Consideration could also be given to the use of a free distribution template. A comparative study carrying out an exploration of this or a similar research topic with the use of a free distribution template could provide further insight into the school choice considerations of Black parents of children with dis/abilities. It would make allowances for participants to skew the array in the ways they see fit in order to achieve the most accurate depiction of their perspective.

Researchers interested in exploring this topic might consider making an adjustment to participant selection to include participants who recently engaged in the school choice process. A drawback to this approach is most certainly the narrowing of criteria for participation even

further, but this could help participants in the sorting process. Participants who struggled to sort statements did so because they felt the majority of items were important. On one hand, that bolsters confidence in the process used to create the concourse and Q set. On the other hand, it potentially highlights participants' difficulty in the accurate recollection of their decision-making process. If participants engaged in the school selection process within the last school year, for example, recollection and subsequent sorting may be more straightforward.

Finally, participants were not asked to share under which category their student qualified for special education services. A research question that remains largely unanswered is how do choice sets of parents change according to dis/ability type or severity of dis/ability? Waitoller and Super (2017) address the "steering away" practices of some charter schools resulting in lower enrollment of students with dis/abilities in charter schools generally or lower enrollment of students with more moderate to severe dis/abilities. Future research is needed to understand how parents navigate the school choice landscape and ultimately make decisions for children who experience significant physical or intellectual challenges.

Summary

This study explored the considerations of Black parents of students with dis/abilities in the school choice process. Through Q methodology, quantitative and qualitative data were collected and interpreted with the primary aim of understanding and elevating their perspectives. Four themes in perspective were identified, although participants varied in the degree in which they were associated with any one factor. Results indicate racial diversity, special education services, academic achievement, and the recognition and affirmation of identities are leading factors in the choice sets of these parents. Further research is needed to investigate how choice sets of parents may change according to dis/ability type or severity of dis/ability.

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APPENDIX A

Q Methodology Terms

Term	Definition
Q Method	A research approach used to study human subjectivity
Concourse	Full disclosure of opinions on a topic; can be derived from a wide variety of sources
Q Set	Developed from the concourse, the Q set is intended to represent the diversity of perspectives on a phenomenon
P Set	Participants in a Q study
Q Sort	The primary technique in a Q study; participants sort and rank order the Q set according to a given set of instructions
Q Sort Matrix	A grid or template used to guide the Q sorting process
Q Factor	After by-person analysis, Q factors, or themes in the data are revealed; participants with similar viewpoints will load onto the same factor

APPENDIX B

Concourse Statements

1. A curriculum that will challenge one's child
2. A school's approach to grading
3. A school's performance on state assessments
4. Class size
5. The selectivity of a school, or how carefully a school selects its students
6. The requirement of an exam or audition as part of the application process
7. A specialized curriculum focus (e.g. language, math, or entrepreneurship)
8. Foreign language offerings and/or exposure
9. Whether a school has co-taught classrooms where a general education teacher and special education teacher teach together
10. Whether students who attend the school do well in the next phase of their education (e.g. high school performance, college acceptance rates, job placement)
11. The use of a hands-on or a discovery approach to learning
12. A nurturing learning environment
13. Whether the curriculum or program offerings align with my child's interests
14. A school's approach to homework
15. A curriculum that considers study habits, critical thinking, and communication skills in addition to academics
16. Whether the academic program includes the teaching of social emotional skills
17. The rate of academic growth students at the school make from one year to the next
18. An instructional approach that encourages a child's curiosity
19. How well the method of teaching aligns to my child's style of learning
20. The amount of individualized attention students receive
21. The availability of after-school programming
22. Students' access to the latest technologies
23. The school's hours of operation
24. Access to extracurricular activities such as art and music
25. Sports program offerings
26. The cleanliness of the building and school grounds
27. Access to a school library
28. The presence of a gym and/or outdoor play area for physical activities
29. Students' access to the latest technologies
30. The amount of time it takes to get to and from school each day
31. An effective and engaging website design
32. The wishes or school preference of one's child
33. Alignment of a school's curriculum to one's personal values and beliefs (e.g. religion and morals)
34. Providing one's child with a school experience similar to one's own
35. The cost of attendance
36. If/how Black people are represented in the curriculum

37. The clarity of the application process
38. The opportunities for parent involvement
39. A school's religious affiliation
40. If/how individuals with disabilities are represented in the curriculum
41. The proportion of students of the same race as one's child
42. The racial diversity of the student body
43. The distance between a child's school and their home
44. Doing one's part to maintain public school funding by considering one's assigned school district
45. The level of satisfaction one has or has had with their child's school
46. How welcoming the school environment appears to be
47. How a school is described or discussed by the students who attend it
48. How a school is rated or reviewed online by other parents
49. The school principal's reputation
50. The recommendations of friends and family
51. The school's reputation
52. Teachers' school recommendations
53. The safety of the neighborhood surrounding the school
54. One's level of agreement with the school's discipline policy
55. The school's approach to students with emotional and/or behavioral needs
56. The school's suspension and/or expulsion rates
57. Whether or not a school actively works to prevent and deal with bullying
58. Protecting one's children from the racist attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers
59. The clarity and consistent application of a school's discipline policy
60. The school's philosophy on inclusion
61. The continuum of service available at the school
62. Access to related services like specialized transportation and on-site physical therapy
63. Access to a school psychologist, speech therapist, nurse, and/or case worker…
64. The willingness of the school principal to talk with parents
65. The willingness of staff to form relationships with students and families
66. The qualifications of the teaching staff
67. Teachers' level of experience working with students with needs similar to that of my child
68. Staffs' approach to parent communication and informing parents of a student's progress
69. General education teachers' attitudes about students with disabilities
70. Staff turnover rate
71. Student-teacher ratio
72. The racial diversity of the staff

APPENDIX C

Thank you for participating. As a member of the pilot study group, you will provide feedback on a selection of statements on the topic of school choice. The aim of the pilot group is to assist in narrowing down this selection to the 40 considerations you believe are most relevant to Black parents of students with disabilities when choosing a school for their child.

Drawing upon your expertise and experience, rank each statement on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "not at all important" and 5 being "very important" by moving it to the appropriately numbered box. If you think a statement should be edited or revised in any way, please add a suggestion by right-clicking on the sticky note requiring attention and selecting "add comment." If you're on a mobile device, long press the sticky note and then select "add comment" from the menu.

Finally, if you feel a statement or idea has not been included here but should be, please add sticky note anywhere under the heading "What's Missing?" by clicking the second icon from the top located on the menu bar on the lefthand side of your screen.

Thanks again for your help!

APPENDIX D

Q Set Statements

1. Teachers' level of experience working with students with needs similar to that of my child
2. A school's philosophy on inclusion
3. A school's approach to students with emotional and/or behavioral needs
4. How welcoming the school environment appears to be
5. The willingness of school staff to form relationships with students and families
6. The amount of individualized attention students receive
7. Whether students who attend the school do well in the next phase of their education or life (e.g. high school performance, college acceptance rates, job placement)
8. A school's approach to prevent and deal with bullying
9. General education teachers' attitudes about students with disabilities
10. The school's suspension and/or expulsion rates
11. The cleanliness of the school building and grounds
12. Staffs' approach to parent communication and informing parents of a students' progress
13. Class size
14. Whether the school appears to have a nurturing learning environment
15. The rate of academic growth students at the school make from one year to the next
16. The racial diversity of the student body
17. Whether the school's curriculum includes the use of a hands-on or discovery approach to learning
18. Protecting my child from the racist attitudes and/or behaviors of teachers
19. How a school is described or discussed by the students who attend it
20. If/how Black people are represented in the curriculum
21. Whether the school uses a curriculum that will challenge my child
22. It's important to consider a school's foreign language program.
23. Whether the curriculum or program offerings align with my child's interests
24. A school's student-teacher ratio
25. The proportion of students of the same race as my child
26. If/how individuals with disabilities are represented in the curriculum
27. The clarity and application of a school's discipline policy
28. The school's reputation
29. Whether the school uses an instructional approach that encourages my child's curiosity
30. Staff qualifications
31. The distance between our home and my child's school
32. The recommendations of friends, family, or other members of one's social network
33. The racial diversity of the staff
34. The school's use of co-taught classrooms where a general education teacher and special education teacher teach together
35. A school's outreach and enrollment process
36. The school's culture
37. The school's deliberate structures for student support (e.g. advisory, buddy program, orientation)
38. Students' access to personnel such as a school psychologist, speech therapist, counselor, and/or nurse
39. Whether the academic program includes the teaching of social emotional skills
40. The willingness of the school principal to talk with parents

APPENDIX E

Invitations **Subject:** Here's your link to complete the Q Sort

Hello!

I'm glad you're here! You can access the Q Sort activity using the link below. Once the sort begins, you will be presented with 40 statements. Reflecting upon your personal experience choosing a school for your student with disabilities, please sort the statements according to the factors you felt were most important to consider (+4) to least important to consider (-4). It's likely that you will feel all or nearly all of the statements are important. However, please keep in mind that this exercise is meant to explore your personal considerations and opinions in the school selection process.

With thanks,

Jaleah Robinson
robinsonj2@duq.edu
412.626.7674
Duquesne University, School of Education
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education

To participate in this study, please click on this link:

Yes, I want to participate in this study.

Your browser should open to the study's start page. If for some reason it doesn't, simply copy and paste this entire link into your browser's location bar:

http://q-assessor.com/studies/1131/responses/new?code=XXXX

We hope that you want to participate, but if you do not, click on this link:

No, I do not want to participate in this study.

Your browser should open to the study's page to refuse this invitation. If for some reason it doesn't, simply copy and paste this entire link into your browser's location bar:

http://q-assessor.com/studies/1131/responses/refuse?code=XXXX

Reminders **Subject:** Research Study Reminder

Hello!

I hope you're well. Thank you for agreeing to participate in a research study exploring the considerations of Black parents of students with disabilities when choosing a school for their child. You can access the Q Sort activity using the link below.

With thanks,

Jaleah Robinson
robinsonj2@duq.edu
412.626.7674
Duquesne University, School of Education
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education

To participate in this study, please click on this link:

Yes, I want to participate in this study.

Your browser should open to the study's start page. If for some reason it doesn't, simply copy and paste this entire link into your browser's location bar:

http://q-assessor.com/studies/1131/responses/new?code=XXXX

We hope that you want to participate, but if you do not, click on this link:

No, I do not want to participate in this study.

Your browser should open to the study's page to refuse this invitation. If for some reason it doesn't, simply copy and paste this entire link into your browser's location bar:

http://q-assessor.com/studies/1131/responses/refuse?code=XXXX

Thanks **Subject:** Thank you for your participation

Hello!

A sincere thanks for taking time to share your perspective. It is greatly appreciated. If you know of others who may be interested in participating, please share with them my contact information listed below. You may also contact me to request a summary of the study results.

Best,

Jaleah

robinsonj2@duq.edu
412.626.7674

APPENDIX F

APPENDIX G

Screenshot 1

Welcome! Thanks for taking time to share your opinion. Reflecting upon your own experience choosing a school for your student with disabilities, please sort the statements according to the factors you felt were most important to consider (+4) to least important to consider (−4). It's likely that you will feel all or nearly all of the statements are important. However, please keep in mind that this exercise is meant to explore your personal considerations and opinions in the school selection process.

Levels of importance are indicated by the number of plus or minus signs assigned to each section. For example, a statement placed in the section labeled with (3) plus signs would indicate that you feel the statement was more important to consider in the school selection process for your student than a statement placed in the section labeled with (2) plus signs.

Let's Get Started!

Screenshot 2

Evaluate this statement:

Statement 1

My view of this statement is:
Very Important
Neutral
Least Important

Number of statements left to sort: 10

Very Important

Neutral

Least Important

Screenshot 3

: First click a "Select" button on the right and then a "Move Here" button on the left to assign the statement that you think most matches "Very important".

Very important
Move Here
+
neutral
−
Not important

Very Important
Select   Statement 10
Select   Statement 2

Neutral
Select   Statement 9
Select   Statement 8
Select   Statement 7
Select   Statement 6
Select   Statement 1

Least Important
Select   Statement 5
Select   Statement 4
Select   Statement 3

APPENDIX H

Model Array for Factor A

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
4	5	2	10	13	12	3	1	18
35	7	6	19	15	20	28	40	16
	14	8	22	21	23	33	34	
		9	24	25	36	38		
		11	26	29	30	17		
			31	37	39			
				27				
				32				

Model Array for Factor B

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
8	10	19	9	2	4	1	3	15
25	22	20	16	5	23	6	18	21
	26	27	17	11	31	7	30	
		34	24	13	33	12		
		40	32	14	38	36		
			35	28	39			
				29				
				37				

Model Array for Factor D

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
19	1	13	4	7	2	15	9	20
22	11	16	11	8	3	18	32	40
	39	25	23	14	5	26	38	
		31	33	17	6	27		
		35	34	21	12	28		
			36	29	24			
				30				
				37				

Model Array for Factor F

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
10	20	4	5	11	1	2	3	34
31	22	16	7	12	8	6	26	38
	25	19	13	15	17	9	37	
		23	27	21	18	14		
		35	32	28	24	30		
			33	29	39			
				36				
				40				